

Winners 2017 SSA article and book prizes

Article:

Benjamin Thomas White, "Refugees and the Definition of Syria, 1920-1939"

Published in *Past and Present*, March 2017.

Examining the influx of refugees into the Syrian Mandate during the interwar period, Benjamin Thomas White convincingly argues that modern state formation in Syria was largely shaped by its response to the presence of these refugees and the attendant controversies over their place in the nascent Syria. Combining Arabic newspapers with French colonial archival documents, White demonstrates that the flow of refugees brought state authority into many rural areas for the first time, while intensifying it in the cities. Refugee flows also brought geographical borders into sharper definition and profoundly influenced the crafting of nationality laws. White's innovative and informative article sheds light on the complex interactions among various Syrian and foreign actors in shaping a national and territorial Syria. This article greatly contributes not only to our knowledge of Syrian history but also to the present crisis in Syria and its repercussions in Europe and the Mediterranean.

Book:

Mattia Guidetti, *In the Shadow of the Church: the Building of Mosques in Early Medieval Syria* (Brill: Leiden, 2016).

Mattia Guidetti's *In the Shadow of the Church: the Building of Mosques in Early Medieval Syria* is an extremely important contribution to the history of medieval Syria and addresses a key, long-recognized lacuna in Islamic art history: the integration of the narrative of Islamic art with that of the art of Late Antiquity. It argues against a paradigm of "rupture" with the coming of Islam by successfully demonstrating that Early Syrian mosques were deeply influenced by Late Antique Church forms, and that the development of the mosque should thus be viewed as arising out of Church development in the period immediately prior to the rise of Islam. While a handful of historians have successfully integrated the history of early Islam into the world of Late Antiquity of which it was clearly a part, this is one of the first, and to date the most sustained, attempts to do so within the field of Art History. The committee was particularly impressed by Guidetti's exploration of the premodern mechanisms of coexistence among religious communities in medieval Syria. Likewise, Guidetti's contribution to the study of cultural transference of ideas and objects via his examination of *spolia*—architectural elements reused from earlier Roman and Christian-era monuments—was outstanding. Guidetti's rich and deeply researched book opens a new chapter in the field of the Art History of Syria and promises to remain influential for years.