



2019 Syrian Studies Association Book & Article Prizes

By Paul Cobb

The Syrian Studies Association awarded its 2019 book and article prizes for the best works in Syrian studies during the annual Middle East Studies Association meeting, held in New Orleans in November. Awarded annually for over fifteen years, the awards recognize scholars whose recent work has made a particularly distinguished contribution to the field of Syrian studies. Recipients receive a financial prize and a mention in the Syrian Studies Association's biannual *Bulletin*.

Winner of the Book Prize: Stacy D. Fahrenthold, *Between the Ottomans and the Entente: The First World War in the Syrian and Lebanese Diaspora, 1908-1925* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019).

Stacy D. Fahrenthold's book is an important contribution to Ottoman and Middle Eastern history and global migration studies. The book tells the story of the Syrian and Lebanese diaspora in the United States, Brazil, and Argentina, or the *mahjar*, in the critical historical period between the Young Turk Revolution and the consolidation of mandatory rule in the Mashriq. This transnational history of migration and migration politics pushes the narrative of World War I in the Middle East into the Americas and, at the same time, challenges traditional territorial conceptions of Syria and Lebanon. By combining trans-Atlantic Arabic newspapers with US and French archival documents, Fahrenthold demonstrates that the *mahjar* exerted considerable influence on the Mashriq. Both the Ottomans and the French paid careful attention to the political mood and investment capital in the Levantine diaspora. The value of the work is self-evident to historians of the modern Bilad al-Sham; In the 1920s, the *mahjar* became a salient factor in determining where the new borders would lie and who would be included in the new nations in the Levant. Moreover, in *Between the Ottomans and the Entente*, historians of the United States will find a fascinating account on the making of early US foreign policy toward the post-Ottoman Arab world and US policies on migration from the Middle East. In an age of mass Syrian refugee migration, Fahrenthold's beautifully written book enriches our knowledge about the transnational Levantine diaspora.

Winner of the Article Prize: Reem Bailony, "From Mandate Borders to the Diaspora: Rashaya's Transnational Suffering and the Making of Lebanon in 1925," *Arab Studies Journal* XXVI: 2 (Fall 2018), 44-73.

Reem Bailony's article presents a transnational history of the Christians displaced by the 1925 Jabal al-Druze revolt that transforms how we understand not only this revolt, but also the formation of nation-states in Syria and Lebanon. Bailony focuses on the activities of displaced residents of the border town of Rashaya, located in the Ottoman vilayet of Syria but just inside the border of Lebanon, including their outreach to Christians living abroad. She reveals that the 1925 revolt not only resulted in cross-sectarian nationalism within Syria, but also increased the urgency of demands from Christians in the *mashriq* and



mahjar for a Lebanon that was separate from the rest of Syria and extended beyond the borders of Mount Lebanon. The committee was especially impressed by the way in which Bailony used a microhistory of a

borderlands community to shed new light on issues of relevance to a range of fields: Syrian and Lebanese history, transnational history, Middle Eastern studies, and *mahjar* studies. The article as a whole demonstrates the ways in which emigration extended colonial and postcolonial landscapes far beyond the colonized nation, enabling the *mahjar* and their contacts in the *mashriq* to have a disproportionate impact on colonial policies.

Honorable Mention: The SSA Prize Committee were unanimous in creating a special distinction of “honorable mention” and extending it to the beautiful and moving work *Nashid al-Tuyur* or *Birdsong*, published in Beirut in 2019 by the collective of young Syrian and Lebanese scholars, writers, and artists known as Sijil, among them Khaled Malas, Salim al-Kadi, Alfred Tarazi, Jana Traboulsi, and Aamer Ibraheem. A slim but powerful volume, the book brings together the artwork, poetry and diverse voices of the Bilad al-Sham, from the Bronze Age to the present, often in stunning juxtaposition. With wry wit, archival soundings, and true soul, Sijil dances from the sublime to the ridiculous, from the countryside to the cities, from the deeply painful to the soaringly joyous. The Committee could not imagine a more creative and humanistic response to our present, contested moment.

About the Syrian Studies Association

The Syrian Studies Association is an international association organized to encourage and promote research and scholarly understanding of Syria in all periods and in all academic disciplines. The SSA is a non-profit, non-political association affiliated with MESA (the Middle East Studies Association of North America). The SSA defines its area of interest as the lands included in historical Bilad al-Sham until the end of the First World War and the country of Syria after 1919. Professional and amateur scholars in all fields, from art history to anthropology to hydrology, are welcome to join. Learn more at: www.ou.edu/ssa.

Paul Cobb is a social and cultural historian of the pre-modern Islamic world at the University of Pennsylvania. He currently serves as the Chair of the Department of Near Eastern Languages and Civilizations. He is also the chair of the SSA prize committee.