

IMES ALUMNI NEWSLETTER

Issue 8, Winter 2016



Souk at Fez, Morocco
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From the Head of IMES

Dr Andrew Marsham



Welcome to the Winter 2016 IMES Alumni Newsletter, in which we congratulate the postgraduate Masters and PhD graduates who qualified this year. There is more from graduation day on pages 3-5. We wish all our graduates the very best for the future.

We bid farewell to Dr Richard Todd, who has taught at IMES since 2006. Richard was a key colleague in the MA Arabic degree, and has contributed to countless other aspects of IMES life. We wish him the very best for his new post at the University of Birmingham. Memories of Richard at IMES can be found on page 17.

Elsewhere, there are the regular features about IMES events, as well as articles on NGO work in Beirut, on the SkatePal charity, poems to Syria, on recent workshops on masculinities and on Arab Jews, and memories of Arabic at Edinburgh in the late 1960s and early 1970s from Professor Miriam Cooke (MA Arabic 1971).

Very many thanks to Katy Gregory, Assistant Editor, and thanks to all our contributors. As ever, we all look forward to hearing news from former students and colleagues—please do get in touch at imes@ed.ac.uk



Atlas Mountains near Marrakesh
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Issue no. 8

Editor

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With thanks to all our contributors

The IMES Alumni Newsletter welcomes submissions, including news, comments, updates and articles. Submissions may be edited for space and clarity. Please email imes@ed.ac.uk

The views expressed in the newsletter are the authors' own and do not necessarily reflect that of IMES.

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Congratulations!

IMES Graduates November 2016

(With thanks to Vivien Macnish-Porter and Iain Sutherland)

The following were awarded their postgraduate degrees at the graduations held in November 2016. We wish you all the best for your future.

Arab World Studies MSc

Matej Kovarik
Sybilla Kitsios
Andrea Valentino
Ryan Swan
Andrew Upton

IMES MSc

Hester Wyatt Gartrell
Barbara Jung
Helal Mohammed Khan

Persian Civilisation MSc

Seán Whitford Pieper
Marlene Julia Elisabeth Dirven

IMES PhD Programme

Tobias Andersson - 'Early Sunnī Historiography: a Study of the Tārīkh of Khalīfa b. Khayyāt'

Georgios Rigas - ' Hamas-Egypt Relations, Tactical Cooperation in the Margin of Strategic Differences due to Regime Survival Concerns'

I-Wen Su - 'The Shi'ī Past in Abū al-Faraj al-Isfahānī's Kitāb al-Aghānī: A Literary and Historical Analysis'



IMES staff, Arab World Studies MSc graduates and supporters at graduation

LATEST IMES GRADUATIONS



Hester Gartrell (MSc IMES), Barbara Jung (MSc IMES), Marlene Dirven (MSc Persian Civilisation) and Seán Pieper (MSc Persian Civilisation)



Andrew Marsham and I-Wen Su (PhD, IMES)

LATEST IMES GRADUATIONS



Postgraduate hand-in drinks: Jonathan Featherstone, Nacim Pak-Shiraz, Hester Gartrell (MSc IMES), Barbara Jung (MSc IMES), Marlene Dirven (MSc Persian Civilisation) and Seán Pieper (MSc Persian Civilisation)



I-Wen Su (PhD, IMES), Andrew Upton (Arab World Studies), Jonathan Featherstone, Sybilla Kitsios (Arab World Studies) and Abla Oudeh

STAFF NEWS

Appointments, Promotions and Prizes



We are very pleased indeed to welcome Dr Giulia Liberatore as the Lecturer on Muslims in Europe, a new joint appointment with Sociology in the School of Social and Political Science, funded by the Alwaleed Centre for the Study of Contemporary Islam. Giulia was awarded her PhD in Anthropology by LSE, and comes to Edinburgh from the Centre of Migration, Policy and Society (COMPAS) at the University of Oxford. Giulia will continue her Leverhulme funded postdoctoral research on female Islamic scholarship and guidance in the UK before moving to the full-time lectureship on completion of this postdoctoral fellowship. Her first monograph, 'Somali, Muslim, British: Striving in Securitised Britain', will be published by Bloomsbury in 2017.



We also welcome Dr Mériam Cheikh (currently an IMES Visiting Scholar) in her new post as a Marie-Skłodowska Curie Fellow. Mériam will work on her two-year research project 'Gender, Youth and Underclass Subcultures: social transformations in Morocco in the lens of masculinities'. She examines the construction of the masculinities of disadvantaged young men in order to understand how gender, class, space and ethnicity intersect in juvenile moral and cultural formations in today's Morocco. Very many congratulations, Mériam, on your achievement in winning this prestigious research funding.

In other research funding news, Dr Ebtihal Mahadeen has recently been awarded a British Academy Small Grant to support interviews in Jordan this summer and have them transcribed, as part of the material required for her forthcoming monograph.

On the Arabic programmes, Ms Abla Oudeh has taken up a temporary full-time Teaching Fellowship, teaching Arabic to first year and fourth year Undergraduate students, as well as continuing with some teaching on the Postgraduate Arabic programme.



Dr Farah Aboubakr has returned on a part-time basis from her maternity leave, and Mr Jona Frasn continues to teach on the Postgraduate Programme this semester as a part-time Teaching Fellow. Dr Nacim Pak-Shiraz and Dr Anthony Gorman are both on research leave in semester two of 2016-17, working on Iranian Cinema and Middle Eastern prisons, respectively.

Obituary: Abdallah Salih Al-'Uthaymin (PhD IMES, 1972)

By Dr Anthony Gorman



Professor 'Abdallah Salih Al-'Uthaymin was an Edinburgh PhD student who went on to have a distinguished academic and public career in Saudi Arabia. Born in 'Unayza, Qassim he completed his school education in 1950 and graduated from the History Department at King Sa'ud University in Riyadh in 1962. At the end of the decade he came to the University of Edinburgh to begin a PhD and in 1972 completed his dissertation under the supervision of Mr John Walsh and Professor Montgomery Watt.

On his return to Saudi Arabia, Al-'Uthaymin took up a position in the History Department at King Sa'ud where he would enjoy a long and eminent university career. During this period he also served in a number of other important posts including Secretary-General of the King Faisal International Prize (1987-2015) and as a member of the Majlis al-Shura (1999-2009), in addition to sitting on a number of national and international academic committees. He died on 19 April 2016.

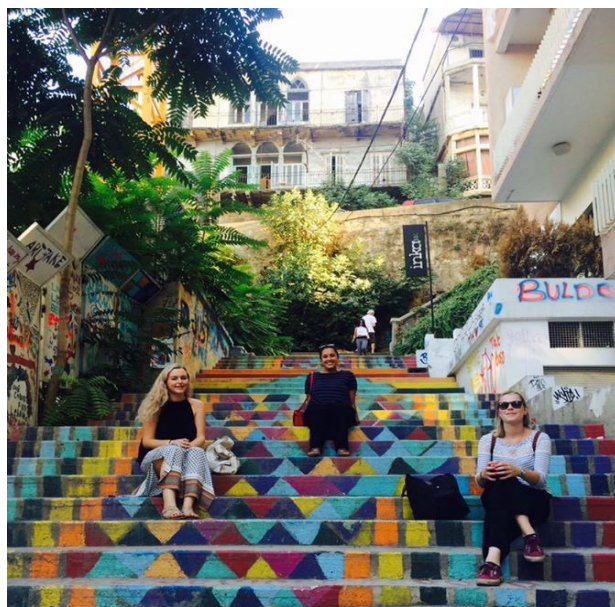
Al-'Uthaymin was a prolific scholar. He authored a large number of historical studies, particularly on Saudi Arabia, as well as volumes of poetry and a series of school textbooks. He also translated a number of works into Arabic including J.L. Burckhardt's *Notes on the Bedouins and Wahabys* (originally published in 1830) and the work of St. John Philby. For English readers, his most accessible and significant work remains the doctoral research he did during his time at Edinburgh which was published 37 years later as 'Muhammad Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab: the Man and His Works' (IB Tauris, 2009) and so finally made this study of a seminal figure in Arabian history available to a wider audience.

Student Experience: NGO Work in Beirut

By Katy Walsh (MA Arabic and Spanish, 2016)

Upon telling my friends and family that I was moving to Lebanon, the most common response I encountered was, “Is it safe?”. When consulting the FCO travel advice, or browsing recent media reports, one would understand the reasons behind such an inquiry. The small Mediterranean state is currently home to more than an estimated one million refugees, a staggering number for a country with a population of only four and a half million. Additionally, the Parliament has been unable to elect a President for over two years.

However, the media fails to portray the bigger picture. Lebanon is still in the process of recovering from its own civil war, yet the country remains resilient. Beirut is where former bomb shelters are now night clubs; where five star hotels face the bullet-ridden shells of buildings leftover from the war; where you can get a shisha pipe delivered to your door. The glittering streets of downtown Beirut resemble the boulevards of central Paris, yet the designer shops that line them do not escape the transitory plunge into darkness during the daily three-hour power cut. But to answer the question, I have never felt unsafe.



I am currently interning as a Campaign and Research Assistant for an NGO called Crisis Action, which seeks to protect civilians suffering in areas of armed conflict. Crisis Action's Beirut office focusses on the Syrian civil war, and most of my work involves monitoring the local media, researching recent developments, contacting other organisations, and translation. Work can often feel overshadowed given the breakdown of recent ceasefires and continuing indiscriminate attacks, but recent developments such as Russia's elimination from the Human Rights Council are small, yet promising steps.



In spite of all the country's problems, including the unavoidable effects of the neighbouring Syrian civil war, those resident in Lebanon remain unfazed, and their hospitality is second to none. Our landlord bought us mugs covered in pictures of London 'to make us feel at home' (I'm from Manchester but the sentiment is still there); a woman of Armenian heritage I met at a vineyard invited me on her family holiday; and a man I asked for directions gave me free manakeesh before closing his café solely to show me where to go. And there is light at the end of the political tunnel: this week proposes a discernible move to an end in the Presidential vacuum, with only marginal protest (by Lebanese standards).

Sometimes it takes ten minutes to send an email, sometimes the power cuts for more than three hours, and sometimes tomatoes aren't tomatoes (see: persimmon). But despite the internet never being strong enough to stream *The Great British Bake Off*, the lack of falafel, and the taxi drivers' reluctance to play anything but Fairuz, I've never felt more welcome or safe in the Middle East. And the power cuts help keep our electricity bill down.

Memories of Arabic at Edinburgh

By Miriam Cooke (MA Arabic, 1971)

I came to Edinburgh in August 1967, two months after the disastrous war in the Middle East and two short years after Professor Montgomery Watt opened the Arabic Department. I had planned to major in Chinese and was dismayed to learn that the first two years were being taught in a cycle and my first year was second year Chinese. So much for Chinese!

I had to decide on an alternative quickly. Arabic seemed a good-enough choice, especially in view of the political urgency of understanding the Arab world. In fact, more than good-enough, Arabic became a passion. I bought my first Arabic book: *Ziadeh and Winder*. OK, maybe not Arabic, but it contained many Arabic passages that I loved to look at and hoped some day to be able to read. My first class was with Pierre Cachia and so was my last. And it was only after four years of studying Arabic full-time that I dared to admit my frustration that I was still using a dictionary. “Miss Cooke,” he smiled, “So do I.” The first and last vulnerability that he ever exposed, but it relieved me to know that I was not alone in finding the language hard to master.

If I remember well, there were only three students of Arabic throughout my four years of the MA Honors track. Professor Watt taught us *Muhammad in Mecca* and *Muhammad in Medina* from a yellowing note pad. I was intrigued that he did not look at us while he read from his notes nor did he acknowledge us when passing in the corridor, as though we were part of a class so huge he obviously could not recall who we were. Professor Macdonald was a kind instructor who took us through hundreds of pages of Baydawi’s *Tafsir* (or so it seemed). The only course that did not make Arabic feel like Latin, i.e. dead, was Cachia’s Modern Arabic Literature in translation. Although he emphasized Taha Hussein and did not express appreciation for any other writer, he had sparked an interest that turned into a life-long pursuit.



After five years of trekking around Asia and Central America, with an Arabic novel always in my backpack, I returned to serious study of modern Arabic literature. I went to Oxford where I studied under Mustafa Badawi and earned my D.Phil. in 1980. Four years later I published my dissertation on Yahya Haqqi with the title ‘The Anatomy of an Egyptian Intellectual Yahya Haqqi.’

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The rest is history: 36 years at Duke University in North Carolina; several monographs about Arab women writers and Islamic feminism and Arab cultures; some edited volumes and a novel. Best of all, I have spent these years with my partner Bruce B. Lawrence.

POEMS TO SYRIA

By Ula Zeir (PhD IMES)

An Apology to a House in Hims

With tears I'm writing it down to you
Please accept my apology
I didn't mean it to keep you without walls
They were enemies, and enemies don't come
through doors
No one knocked on me
Oh, they didn't knock
They smashed your walls and entered
The jasmine flowers fall in horror
And I saw them scattering on the face of the water
fountain
Your old lady covered her face and cried: why my
sons?
Why?
This is your house, this is your city, this is your
country
But they were deaf...
Oh yes they were...
And they destroyed and destroyed and destroyed...
Everything, but me
And here I'm standing alone
All alone
I will keep standing so when she comes back she can
recognize you
She will see her handwriting on me
I love you... a word she once wrote with her tiny
hand in 1939
A word that she was slapped on her face for
Then was kissed on her face for
"I love our house" She told her daddy back then

A Letter to My Fellow Syrian Butcher

Hey my fellow Syrian butcher
Tell me when you are satisfied, I'll tell you when I am
Hence, we will go on...
Our love to mother Syria will go on
You go on with smashing our history and I will go on
with mine
The harder we smash the prouder our land of us to be
Don't tell me this cultural destruction is not organized
Oh dear, it is so much organized
You've organized yours and I've organized mine
Hence, we will go on...

My fellow Syrian butcher
You took my smile away; the way I took yours
Give it back to me
Give me back my smile
Give me back my calm nights
Give me back my dreams
And I will give you yours
May the Almighty have no mercy on me, no mercy on
you;
But all mercy on Beloved Syria
What a Beloved and what cruel lovers

IMES Research Seminar Autumn 2016-17

Dr Andrew Marsham

The IMES Research Seminar this Autumn ranged from medieval Arabic philosophy and analyses of Islamic law, through Arabic literary criticism at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries, to contemporary events and culture, including childrens' media and economics in the Arab world.

The first three weeks covered philosophy, literary criticism and legal thought. A former Edinburgh colleague Dr Ayman Shihadeh (SOAS) spoke on conceptions of body and spirit in medieval Islamic thought.

Professor Haifa Alfaisal, an IMES' Visiting Scholar from KSU, Saudi Arabia, presented her work on the literary critic Ruhi al-Khalidi (1864–1913). Professor Jonathan Brown, Director of the Alwaleed Centre at Georgetown, gave a talk on ideas about torture in the Islamic legal tradition, based on a close reading of some hadith.

In the middle of the semester, a series of five talks examined contemporary politics and society in the Arab world: Professor Naomi Sakr (Westminster) examined childrens' media; Dr Ewan Stein (SPS, Edinburgh) analysed contemporary social movements; Dr Steffen Hertog (LSE) discussed what was distinctive about capitalism in the modern Arab world; and two current IMES PhD students, Neil Russell and Ben Robin, examined attempts to control religious charities in Sisi's Egypt and co-operation between secularists and Sadrists in contemporary Iraq, respectively.

The series concluded with four talks on interfaith discourse, film studies, contemporary sociology and linguistics. Divinity's Dr Joshua Ralston presented a discussion of Islamic criticisms of Christianity and secularism. Dr Nacim Pak-Shiraz (IMES) gave an assessment of a recent epic film about King Solomon from Iran.

Another IMES Visiting Scholar, Dr Mériam Cheikh, spoke on her research into the lives of young working class women in Tangier, and Dr Rasha Soliman (Leeds) presented some thought provoking observations on cross-dialectical conversation and Arabic language teaching.



Professor Haifa Alfaisal



Dr Rasha Soliman

IMES Research Seminar Spring 2017
“Early Islam and its Late Antique Context”
5.15pm Mondays, Room G2, 19 George Square

- 16 January** Prof. Jaakko Hämeen-Anttila (Edinburgh), Alexander the Great in Early Persian and Arabic Historiography (Co-sponsored with the Iran Heritage Foundation)
- 23 January** Dr Nicolai Sinai (Oxford), From Dietary Antinomianism to Dietary Prohibitions: A Chronological Reconstruction of the Emergence of the Qur’anic Food Taboos
- 30 January** Dr Alain George (Edinburgh), The Great Mosque of Damascus in Umayyad Times: Towards a Reconstruction
- 6 February** Dr Richard McClary (Edinburgh), Mosaics from the late Byzantine to Early Islamic Period
- 13 February** Simon Loynes (Edinburgh), Did Zechariah ‘Signal’ to His People? The Case of the Term Wahy in Q 19:11
Mathew Barber (Edinburgh), Fatimid Relations with the Yemeni Sulayhids: Examining the Egyptian Perspective
- 20 February** Dr Emanuele Intagliata (Edinburgh), Society and Housing in Late Antique and Early Islamic Palmyra (4th–mid-8th c.)
- 27 February** Dr Kirill Dmitriev (St. Andrews), ‘Adi ibn Zayd al-‘Ibadi and the Origin of the Arabic Wine Song
- 6 March** Prof. Kecia Ali (Boston), Captivity, Concubinage, and Consent: Sex and Slavery in Early Islamic Law
- 13 March** Dr Harry Munt (York), Holy Cities and Regime Change in the 8th-Century Islamic world
- 20 March** Prof. Julia Bray (Oxford), Motifs in the Legends of the Pre-Islamic Kings and Tribes
- 27 March** Prof. Ayşe Çalık Ross (Kocaeli), An 8th-Century Turkic Rebel Against Islamic Proselytising: Gülnar Hatun
- 3 April** Prof. Andrew Newman (Edinburgh), Early Iranian and Arab Shi`i Discussions of Leadership Between Late Antiquity and Early Islam (Co-sponsored with the Iran Heritage Foundation)

Constructing Masculinities in the Middle East Symposium, July 2016

By Dr Ines Aščerić-Todd

The Centre for the Advanced Study of the Arab World's research network on Male Bodies and Masculinities in the Middle East organised a three-day symposium in Edinburgh in July 2016 entitled 'Constructing Masculinities in the Middle East'.

The symposium, hosted by IMES's Dr Pak-Shiraz and Dr Ines Aščerić-Todd, brought together researchers from a variety of disciplines and a number of different countries, including Ireland, Germany and Italy. Over the course of three days, and within four panels, a range of topics were presented relating to masculinities in the Middle East, as well as the wider Islamic world.

Early-career scholars were well represented by the panels with a high number of PhD candidates. The topics presented included depictions of masculinity in early and modern Arabic prose, masculinity in classical Persian literature, and representations of masculinity in Iranian cinema. Additionally, two films related to the main themes of the symposium were screened and each was followed by a presentation and discussion.

The symposium ended with an open conversation on the different disciplines involved in and approaches to the study of the constructions of masculinities in an Islamic and Middle Eastern context. Avenues for further cooperation and exchange of ideas were explored and it is hoped that this symposium will be the first step in the development of the Male Bodies and Masculinities in the Middle East research network.



Arab Jews: Definitions, Histories, Concepts

By Sarah Irving (MSc Arab World Studies 2013 and PhD IMES)

In July 2016, IMES hosted a workshop entitled Arab Jews: Definitions, Histories, Concepts. Organised by PhD student Sarah Irving, with sessions led by Dr Aline Schlaepfer (American University of Beirut), Dr Sae-ko Yazaki (IMES and now at the University of Glasgow), and with additional help from Sasha Goldstein-Sabbah (PhD IMES, 2010) of Leiden University and Dr Joshua Sabih of Copenhagen University, the workshop attracted established academics and non-academics, early career researchers and postgraduate students from Europe, the USA and around Britain.

Dr Schlaepfer presented several fascinating sessions based on her wide experience of researching and teaching the history of Jewish communities in the Middle East, particularly the pre-WWII Jews of Baghdad. Dr Yazaki drew on her current research on the life and works of A.S. Yahuda, complicating and interrogating common notions of Arab-Jewish relations in the context of early political Zionism and the British Mandate in Palestine. And Sasha Goldstein-Sabbah contributed insights from her wide-ranging knowledge of daily religious practices and rituals amongst different Middle Eastern Jewish communities.

Common to many of the speakers and participants in the workshop was a scepticism about the term 'Arab Jews' and its use. To what extent, we asked, does this term reflect the lived experiences of Jewish people from different parts of the Islamicate and Arabic-speaking world? Is it primarily a political term? Does it illuminate or obscure the realities of social, religious and cultural relations in the various communities to which it has been applied?



Jews in Palestine in the 1890s



Chanan Avital and the Jerusalem Boys Choir performing in Djerba, Tunisia, in 2007. Image by Chesdovi.

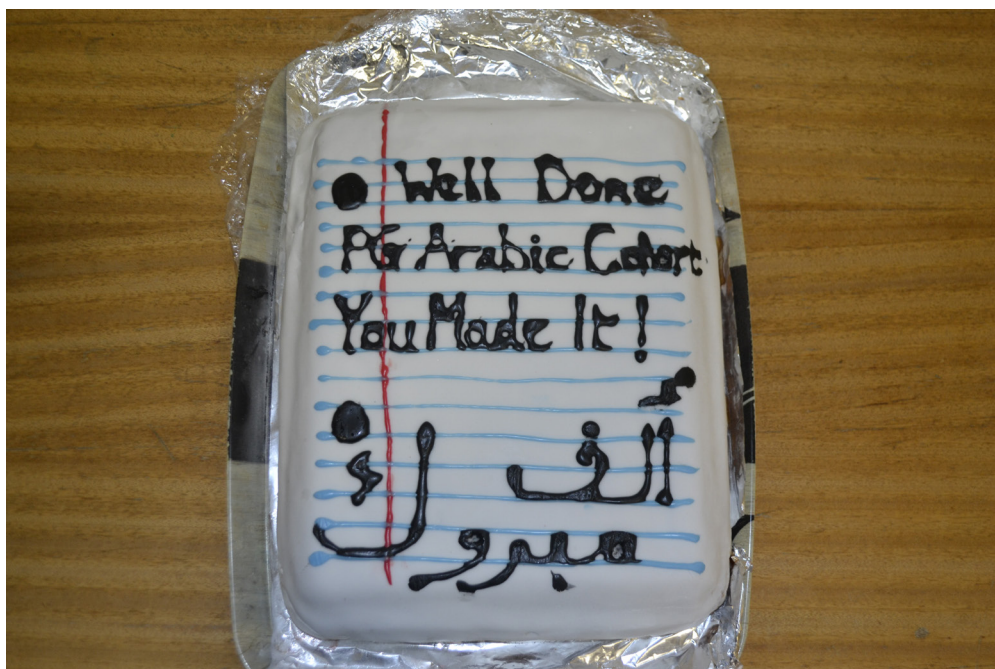
Especially interesting for many of those coming from an academic background was the presence of two participants who were themselves Jewish women of Middle Eastern origin: Andrée Ryan and Rina Rosselson. Rina was born in 1935 in Iskanderun to a well-known Aleppo family, has lived in France and Israel, and is now based in London. She argued that she very much sees herself as a Jew from the Middle East, remembers hearing Arabic around her as a child in Aleppo, and has been politically engaged on issues such as Israel/Palestine. But she also argued that the term Arab Jew means nothing to her. Andrée, however, born and raised in Beirut, and also with a globe-trotting life story, identifies deeply, both personally and politically, as an Arab Jew. Having an aunt and niece so deeply embedded in the issue, arguing with such affection and warmth (in both senses), and so generous with their experiences and ideas, was a great privilege for all involved.

Thanks must go to Drs Anthony Gorman and Andrew Marsham for enabling this workshop to be funded from the IMES endowment, under a grant made available for postgraduate events.

IMES UPDATES



Mourad Diouri and Postgraduate Arabic students enjoy a home-made treat to celebrate the end of last semester



Richard Todd

By Dr Anthony Gorman

In the summer of 2006 IMES made a number of new appointments. One was Dr Richard M W Todd who was hired as a Teaching Fellow to take on the all-important task of teaching Arabic at undergraduate level. The product of a Durham-Oxford education, Richard wasn't the first Richard to teach Arabic at Edinburgh - the celebrated Richard Bell had taught Arabic until after the war period - but over the last decade, with only the interruption of a year spent teaching at the University of Sharjah, he made a very significant contribution.

Richard has been responsible for inducting more than 500 students into the pleasures of Arabic and has been the chief Arabic instructor of final year Arabic for perhaps 200 Arabic undergraduates. First with Shahla Suleiman, then with Marwa Mouazen he was the backbone of the undergraduate Arabic programme. His ability to handle classes as large as 70 students and more in Arabic 1 was particularly notable. Richard also regularly taught Classical Arabic Literature, occasionally Elements of Islam, and Turkish when required.

Richard inevitably made a strong impression on students. Most of all he impressed them with his learning and erudition; some might even have felt a little intimidated:

'Many language students draw analogies with a second language when learning a third. For instance, Arabic nouns have genders like in French. But Richard was the master of this. During one lecture in first year we were struggling with a rather sticky point of Arabic grammar. Richard pondered this for a second, then looked around the room and asked: does anyone here speak Serbo-Croat?'

'Professor Todd was my first Arabic teacher and therefore my first guide in a fascinating and tumultuous journey towards fluency in this language. In class Todd was passionate and patient, and I particularly enjoyed his frequent use of examples from other languages (French and Spanish particularly) to explain various linguistic twists. It was wonderful to be taught by a passionate linguist and someone who had also gone through the process of learning Arabic as a foreign language, so who knew how difficult it could seem at first. He inspired many of us to keep going and I'm very grateful to him for that.'

Despite this workload, Richard was still able to develop and publish his research. His 'The Sufi Doctrine of Man: Sadr al-Qunawi's Metaphysical Anthropology' was published by Brill in 2014, part of the erudition of which is evident in the twenty page glossary. Another monograph is currently in preparation.

Richard is leaving Edinburgh for a Research and Teaching Position as Lecturer in Islamic Studies at the University of Birmingham. We are very sorry to see him leave but all wish him very well in his new post.



Richard Todd's Leaving Dinner



(l-r) Andreas Görke, Meryem Demir, Vivien Macnish-Porter, Andrew Newman, Anthony Gorman, Andrew Marsham, Jaakko Hameen-Anttila, Carole Hillenbrand, Richard Todd, Jonathan Featherstone



(l-r) Jonathan Featherstone, Carole Hillenbrand, Richard Todd, Meryem Demir

History of IMES (Part 8)

IMES PhDs: The International Students

By Al-Mu'arrikh

In 1981, the departments of Arabic, Persian and Turkish were reconfigured into the single unit of Islamic and Middle Eastern Studies. PhD students continued to figure significantly among the student body but retirements of longstanding members of staff, Professor Montgomery Watt, Mr John Walsh and Dr Elwell-Sutton, over a relatively short period meant the supervisory expertise available in the department has changed substantially. Nevertheless, the tenure of Drs Ian Howard and Michael McDonald straddled the time of change and a newly-minted PhD, Dr Carole Hillenbrand, would carry much of the PhD duties in the following period.

Since its establishment IMES PhD students have been overwhelmingly international. In the first 20 years of its life, the department hosted just over 120 PhD candidates, almost 85% of these were from Muslim countries and about half from the Arab world. Some came to Edinburgh after completing a Masters in the US or

elsewhere in the UK but the great majority of them came directly from the region. Of the remaining 15%, roughly half were homegrown British students, others came from the United States, Spain, Taiwan, South Korea, and New Zealand.

The prominence of international students had been a feature of the pre-IMES period. Saudi, Pakistani and Egyptian students continued to come to Edinburgh in numbers but there were some shifts in the demographic profile. Despite the establishment of the Iraq Chair in 1981 the flow of Iraqi students that had started in the mid-1960s had effectively dried up by the mid-1980s. The greatest quantitative change were the PhD candidates from Malaysia; the first arrived in the mid-1980s with three, Fadzillah Bin Mohd Jamal, Muhammad Bin Arifin and Abdul Fatah Bin Haji Khalid, graduating in 1988. By 2001, 25 Malaysian students had been awarded doctorates at Edinburgh. Their presence was in part testimony to the supervisory skills that Professor Bill Roff (d. 2013, see IMES Newsletter no. 1 Summer 2013) had to offer in matters of Islam and Malaysia. He had arrived at IMES as an Honorary Professorial Fellow in 1992. A more recent development was the series of Omani PhD students at Edinburgh that began in 1999 and over the next decade accounted for more than ten doctorates.

After their studies many of these international PhD students returned to their home countries and have gone on to occupy significant academic and public positions as politicians, ambassadors and literary figures. We would welcome hearing from any of you and how you have fared since your studies at Edinburgh. [A list of IMES PhD students and their dissertation topics from the period 1981-2000 will be posted shortly on the IMES website].



Professor Carole Hillenbrand, Edinburgh PhD (1979) has supervised more than 50 IMES PhD students over the last 30 years

Alumna Wins Omani Literature Prize

On 16th November 2016, Jokha Alharthi (PhD IMES, 2010), who attained her PhD in Classical Arabic Literature from Edinburgh in 2010, won the Sultan Qaboos Award for Culture, Arts and Literature for her novel *Narinjah Bitter Orange*.

The novel, which was published in 2016 by Dar Al-Adab in Beirut, centers around the main character Zuhoor who recalls the dreams of her grandmother which never saw the light. There, she is destined to meet Suroor, her sister Kohl and her husband Omran, a runaway from Pakistan's fields. The eternal question: is there a way out of wretchedness?

Jokha currently works as an assistant professor at the College of Arts and Social Sciences at Sultan Qaboos University. Her short stories have been translated into English, Serbian, Korean, Italian and German. This is the fifth edition of the award which is granted every year to Omanis and other Arabs. Alharthi's other awards include the best Omani novel for *Sayyidat al-Qamar* 'Women of the Moon' in 2010 and the best Omani children's book for *Ush al-Asafir*, 'The Birds Nest' in the same year.



SkatePal in Palestine

More than half of all Palestinians living in the occupied territories are under 21 years old, yet there are relatively few opportunities for young people to participate in sport.

The nature of the Israeli occupation means that many children get caught up in the conflict, and often spend their teenage years behind bars. SkatePal offers a positive and creative outlet for young people. Working with established Palestinian organisations and local councils, SkatePal builds skateparks in Palestine, offers free skateboard classes and equipment, and fosters the growing scene throughout the country.

Skateboarding is one of the most inclusive sports in the world. It instantly dissolves barriers between class, race, age and gender. Skateboarding engages youth, relieves stress and helps to build confidence.

SkatePal founder, Charlie Davis (MA Arabic 2012), first went to Palestine as a voluntary English teacher in 2006. He saw first hand the extremely difficult conditions under which the Palestinians live, and the lack of sporting and cultural opportunities for young people.

SkatePal is currently planning its fifth building project. The most recent, in 2015, in the village of Asira Al-Shamaliya, Nablus, was a 700m² concrete skatepark which is used at capacity on a daily basis. It has a 30% female participation rate - one of the highest rates for female participation in sports in Palestine.

The continual motivation for SkatePal is seeing the happiness that skateboarding brings to young people all over the West Bank, and seeing how different communities have come together as a result. It is wonderful to hear from young people that they have never had so much fun as when they are skateboarding.

This enthusiasm is echoed by their parents, who are thankful for what skateboarding has given to their children who live in the context of continual military occupation.

For more information please visit our website and social media:

www.skatepal.co.uk

www.instagram.com/skate_pal

www.facebook.com/skatepalestine



Rohingya Muslims in Focus

By Helal Mohammed Khan (MSc IMES, 2016)

At the beginning of 2015, when I received an invitation from the ANU College of Asia and the Pacific to speak and present my paper entitled “2015 Myanmar/Burma Update”, Myanmar’s Rohingya people were very much in my heart. I was at Dhaka (Bangladesh), but I knew those people well. I spoke their language and had spent a portion of my life with them. As a young lieutenant in the Army I had served in Chittagong Hill Tracts, in areas close to where they usually found shelters flocking from Myanmar’s Rakhine province. Later, as operations officer in a border unit deployed along the Bangladesh-Myanmar border, I had opportunities to interact extensively with these hapless people whom The Economist dubbed “the most persecuted people on earth”.

But it was their exemplary resilience which captured my imagination. So in 2015 at ANU, I welcomed the opportunity to study this community of 5 to 6 million people, stateless and endangered in areas astride the River Naaf in between Bangladesh and Myanmar.

It was during my MSc at Edinburgh that *Conflict in Myanmar: War, Politics, Religion* (ISEAS Singapore) went to press. Nick Cheesman and Nicholas Farrelly, two ANU scholars on Myanmar who also convened the *Update*, edited the volume. While Farrelly’s 2015 conference laid out the dynamics of the events in Myanmar, Cheesman contextualized them. A total of sixteen contributors, both academics and practitioners, wrote for the volume – on issues that ranged from ethnicity to elections, politics to policymaking.

In my chapter, I reconstructed and re-conceptualized threats as they are usually perceived by the opposing border forces of Myanmar and Bangladesh. Citing examples from past conflicts I argued that it was the imperceptible elements of “fear” – ethno-religious identities of the bordering people, for instance – and not always tangible perceptions of threat, that were the main reasons for confrontations between the two neighbours.



