

From the Editor

In This Issue

The present volume of *RoMES* begins with the text of immediate past President Fred M. Donner's address, delivered to MESA members at the annual meeting in Denver, Colorado, November 18, 2012. In his essay titled "MESA and the American University," Donner describes the importance of Middle East studies—in comparison a small program of studies within the complex of schools, departments and programs in some, but not all, American universities—an area of academic research and teaching that has nonetheless grown dramatically during the past half century. This has occurred partly in response to events in the Middle East and to American foreign policy. Yet Middle East studies centers and curriculums have had to face their share of the economic austerity that confronts institutions of higher education as a whole. And we are seeing a general shift in national educational policy away from the humanities and social sciences—the disciplinary homes of most scholars and students in Middle East studies—to the physical sciences, technology, as well as away from classroom teaching to virtual classrooms online. Donner concludes his engaging but troubling analysis of higher education today, and the fate that Middle East studies inevitably shares with it, by suggesting steps that we as faculty, students, policy makers and concerned citizens can and ought to be taking in response.

As the articles and reviews appearing in this issue of *RoMES* were being prepared for publication, demonstrations to preserve a park just off Taksim Square in Istanbul were beginning—leading in a few days to a standoff between the growing demands of demonstrators and a hardening of police responses ordered by Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan. We asked associate editor Sultan Tepe, a political scientist from the University of Illinois at Chicago, who was preparing to leave for Istanbul to conduct previously planned research,

to send us her observations and comments on how the standoff and violence in Taksim were being interpreted on the ground in Turkey. Tepe is from Istanbul and did her undergraduate education there, and has many personal and professional contacts at various universities, institutes, and in the public sector. She invited one of her contacts, Fatma Bostan-Ünsal, a founding member of the ruling AK party and a graduate student in Islamic Studies, to write a short article on the events in Taksim Square and their significance at the time she wrote in mid-June, 2013. Bostan-Ünsal's and Tepe's comments on Taksim appear in a special section in this issue called "Interim Reports from the Field."

The past six months have kept especially busy and concerned those who live, work in, study from afar, write scholarly works on, blog about, urge actionable legislation on—or not, and above all who care about the history, cultures, traditions, and societies in the Middle East. The so-called "Arab Spring" that began in Tunisia and Egypt is now two years old, and like most two-year-olds, appears to easily get into trouble. The initial grievances filed against the Bashar Assad regime in Syria, in peaceful demonstrations that began in March of 2011, soon turned violent and have transformed into something uglier, with little hope of finding peaceful resolution as this issue goes to press. These are only a few of the instances of confrontation between citizens—largely young people—and their governments in the Middle East.

In response to this gloomy and dark assessment of current affairs in many lands of North Africa and West Asia, we thought we should look for other aspects, perhaps even some hopeful elements, in the evolving twists and turns of the "Arab Spring"—responses to events that challenge our prevailing professional discourses about political change. To this end, late in the fall of 2012 several associate editors—comprising the editorial board of *RoMES*—concluded that the journal should publish a special section on the Arab Spring. Recognizing that there had already been much ink spilled on the causes, political ramifications, and prognostications about their meaning, we decided to ask a few colleagues to write about various topics they are researching as sites of cultural production. We easily found some—graduate students and faculty—who were doing research in, and writing about, such genres as revolutionary theatre, music, poetry, cartoons and graffiti. We would especially like to thank miriam cooke for helping us to conceptualize the special section of short essays on "Cultural Production in the Arab Revolution" that appear in this volume, and in a second part in volume 47 (2).

In the previous volume, *RoMES* was constrained by the number and size of essays to limit the number of book reviews we had room to publish to a fraction of what we had on hand. As a result, space has been made in this issue to include the remainder of the previously unpublished reviews as well

as many new ones received during the past six months. Leading this section is a review article on Bernard Lewis's memoir, *Notes on a Century: Reflections on a Middle Eastern Historian*—written by another noted senior historian of the Middle East, Richard W. Bulliet.

A Note about Writing for RoMES

With the recent transformation of the *MESA Newsletter* into the more readable, eye-catching on-line format of *Issues in Middle East Studies (IMES)*, members wishing to review books for RoMES will no longer find a list of “books received” from publishers. Instead, books received will now be listed on the RoMES page of the MESA website (<http://www.mesa.arizona.edu/publications/review/index.html>) and updated a few times each year.

On the same site are guidelines for submitting articles to, and preparing book reviews for, RoMES. Articles are reviewed by the editor and one or more of the associate editors, listed on the inside front cover of each issue of RoMES. At the discretion of the editor, essays may also be sent out for peer review, especially those written by graduate students and newer faculty requiring credentials for promotion. The stylized “R” symbol at the bottom of this article appears in each issue at the head of those articles and essays that have been peer reviewed.

Books are normally reviewed at the invitation of an associate editor, who is the contact person for reviewers, providing information on preparing reviews in the proper format and within the 800-word limit. If you would like to review a book listed on the RoMES page of the MESA website, contact the editor, Richard C. Martin, at the RoMES editorial office, Virginia Tech (romes.vt@gmail.com). One of the associate editors will follow up if the book has not already been assigned. RoMES editors also welcome recommendations for appropriate books not appearing on the “books received” list. “Appropriate” books are generally understood to be scholarly works on aspects of the religions, history, literature, societies, cultures and institutions of the Middle East. General surveys and works of a more popular nature are not usually reviewed in these pages. And please note: RoMES *does not accept reviews from authors who have written, or been asked to write, a review of the same book for another periodical.*

We hope you enjoy reading the rest of the volume. ✧

Richard C. Martin
Editor

