

## From the Editor

### Transitions

This issue of *Review of Middle East Studies (RoMES)* marks a transition for the journal and is associated with other changes as well. The current issue comes just a few months after Gregory Starrett handed off the editorship of *RoMES*, a process that Gregg and his able assistant, Phyllis Griffin, made seem much less daunting to me than it probably was for them. Like relay runners we ran side by side as often as I could in the months leading up to the handoff, which occurred about the time of my retirement (another transition) from Emory University last summer. Not long after I turned in the keys to my office at Emory I was issued new keys to a room in Lane Hall at Virginia Tech, where the books, files and flash drives Gregg and Phyllis so carefully inventoried and packed were moved in late July. Aside from these specific moments of transition for the journal, I found myself thinking, and even worrying about another much larger set of transitions affecting the journal—the accelerated changes going on in scholarship and publishing brought on by the juggernaut of the Digital Age. As I was downsizing my office library collected over forty some years, graduate students and colleagues were grabbing most books as fast as I could put them in a box outside my office. Several shelves of the journals I subscribed to over the years were another matter. There were few takers. My entire collection of journals had already been digitized, and I had been reading journals online for several years. I nonetheless kept a few to grace my home library. I like to work in a room with books—if possible, books I have read, or eventually want to read, before shelving.

One of the many valuable things Gregory Starrett did to make my life easier was to assemble drafts of much of the material—the essays and many of the book reviews—that appear in this issue, as well as some of the content for

the next issue. This issue would not have appeared for several more months otherwise. Of course, it is normal, and indeed necessary, for editors to plan and work ahead a few issues. Nonetheless, people holding such offices as president, department chair, or editor, in the final stage of their term often become 'lame duck' presidents, chairs, or editors—doing the minimal in anticipation of being relieved of relentless deadlines and responsibilities. Not so, Gregory Starrett. Under his leadership the *Middle East Studies Association Bulletin* had evolved into its present form as a quality journal reflecting the work of the members of MESA and Middle East studies more generally. He was as intent on achieving the best result in the final months as he was in the beginning of his term. During the past year, Gregg tolerated my countless emails and phone calls with his well-known style that puts those who need his help at ease and glad they asked. I made a couple of trips to the University of North Carolina Charlotte from my home in Western North Carolina to learn how he and his assistant organized their shop. In the course of the transition, I realized that Gregg had not been just a yeoman editor who competently plied his trade; he was a visionary who transformed the *MESA Bulletin* into an academic journal of high quality. Although he has set the bar exceedingly high, my aspiration is to maintain what he has achieved and to further pursue his mission to improve the value of the journal for its readers. In that endeavor, I welcome readers' and contributors' ideas and suggestions.

When I applied to the MESA Secretariat for the *RoMES* editorship in the fall of 2011, I had a glaring lacuna in my résumé: upon retirement, I would no longer have a dean or chair I could ask to support a journal in the ways universities usually do. How was I to come by a room with a computer, internet connection, shelves for several hundred books, file cabinets, etc., not to mention operating expenses for the journal? The only asset I could contribute as a retiree was time off from professional obligations—plenty of it! I was like a vagabond proposing to start up a new company with my hand out holding a cup for potential assets. Readers and members of MESA who have served as journal editors will know just how crucial institutional support, material and financial—including office space—is to such operations. Fortunately, the dean of the College of Liberal Arts and Human Sciences at Virginia Tech and the chair of the Department of Religion and Culture were willing to draw up a contract with MESA to provide an office and limited operating expenses for the journal. I was granted a non-salaried appointment as Visiting Scholar. That gave me access to Virginia Tech's very fine Newman University Library, highly developed digital and Internet resources, and to a small but growing cohort of faculty in Middle East studies and other fields with which I remain

engaged. The other part of the contract—MESA’s underwriting the remaining costs of the journal—made it materially possible to edit a journal at a university of which the editor is not actually a faculty member in any real sense of the term. Nadia Hlibka and Mark Lowder have helped in numerous ways to make the transition and ongoing operation successful, and Amy Newhall’s efficient but always cheerful advice and interventions have made the rough spots almost seem like fun. That’s how a conventional academic project—running a journal—came about in an unconventional way, and so far it’s working. Stay tuned....

*RoMES* has operated for years with a staff of one-and-a-quarter persons. The ‘quarter’ person is an editorial assistant who manages the journal’s database and much of the correspondence with publishers, associate editors, reviewers of books and media, the shipping of books to reviewers, and countless other tasks. (Sounds like a full-time job, doesn’t it?) Most academic journals could not operate without such a highly skilled (and usually underpaid) assistant. How to find such a person? Graduate assistants and work/study student employees normally do not have the necessary computer and editing skills to handle the job. And turnover among student help is notoriously frequent. Fortunately, the Department of English at Virginia Tech has a doctoral program in Rhetoric and Writing to which I was able to turn. The director of that program produced four very well-qualified applicants for the *RoMES* assistant editor position, the most qualified of whom was Amanda Wright Cron. It is a four-year program of which Amanda is now in her first. Many members of MESA and the publishers who have done business with *RoMES* over the past half year have gotten to know ‘Mandy’ by correspondence through the journal’s email ([romes.vt@gmail.com](mailto:romes.vt@gmail.com)). Some had the chance to meet her in person at the MESA annual meeting in Denver last fall. After the super-sized MLA congestions our colleagues in English are used to, what’s not to like about MESA’s annual meeting in a single hotel, including a night of dancing?

Regular readers of *RoMES* are aware that the journal is served by a dozen or so scholars who comprise a class of specialists called ‘associate editors.’ They are colleagues who work with the editor in various subfields within Middle East studies for three-year terms. The AEs, as they are known in *RoMES* office shorthand, help the editor and his assistant decide on books that should be reviewed, match up appropriate reviewers with books, send gentle reminders to reviewers when necessary, do the first round of editing, and help the editor evaluate longer submissions. Their names, fields, and institutions appear on the inside front cover of each issue of *RoMES*. This past year, Michael Beard—Literature (University of North Dakota); Erika H. Gilson—Language (Princeton

University); and Nadia Hlibka—Film (MESA Filmfest Coordinator) ended their terms; MESA and RoMES owe them a debt of gratitude for their service. Five colleagues have come on board as new associate editors. They are: Saleem H. Ali—Science, Technology, Environment (University of Vermont); John Eisele—Language (College of William and Mary); Juliane Hammer—Gender, Family and Sexuality (University of North Carolina); Thomas B. Stevenson—Film (Ohio University, emeritus); and Mary Ann Tetreault—Economics, Politics, Gulf (Trinity University, emerita).

The third, less easily defined and understood, transition alluded to above are the transformations large and small of Middle Eastern political economies, social movements, and the ways we do scholarship in Middle East studies, under the evolving impact of the internet and digital technologies. These transitions will surely generate a growing number of essays and reviews of books within these pages in coming issues. My hope and aspiration is that the *Review of Middle East Studies*, through its contributors and readers, will continue to be an important voice in conversations going on in cultural and political spaces where Middle East studies are taken seriously, or at least ought to be. ✧

Richard C. Martin  
*Editor*