

From the Editor

The Once and Future *Bulletin*

The Oxford English Dictionary tells us that the word “bulletin” entered the English language in the seventeenth century from Italian, and originally meant a short note or an official certificate. By the late eighteenth century it had come to denote an authority’s account of public news or events (hence Thomas Carlyle’s recounting the phrase “false as a bulletin” as a common proverb during the Napoleonic era). Whatever their truth value, if bulletins are primarily official notes on public events, the *Middle East Studies Association Bulletin* has not been quite itself since 1979, when the *MESA Newsletter* was born.

From its inception in 1967, the *Bulletin* had performed much of the work now done by the *Newsletter*, carrying minutes of the MESA business meetings and committee reports, announcements of conferences and summer programs, news of grants, film directories, placement ads, recent Ph.D.s and obituaries, calls for papers, and the preliminary programs for the annual meeting. In addition, special issues were devoted each year to the meeting’s paper abstracts or to a guide to graduate programs in Middle East studies. Parts of what is now the *Bulletin*’s front matter: “state of the craft” reports on Turkish or Persian language instruction, notes on research facilities in Tunisia, Iran, and Turkey (examples from volume 6 of 1972), and the annual Presidential address, survive from that original form. Book reviews – now the *Bulletin*’s most prominent feature – did not begin to appear until the second issue of volume 9, in May 1975, at the request of MESA members. Dale Eickelman, Farhad Kazemi, Robert McChesney, and Mona Mikhail were the original review editors for the four fields structuring that first twenty-page review section: sociology and anthropology, history, political science, and literature. The first book reviewed in the *Bulletin* was Suzanne Paine’s *Exporting Workers: The Turkish Case*, published by Cambridge in 1974 and reviewed by Alan Dubetsky of NYU. Given the field’s current interest in labor migration and globalization, the book was a prescient choice.

Comparing that optimistic and purely disciplinary division of labor to the editorial structure of today’s *Bulletin*, which names editors for over a dozen categories of diverse taxonomic status (Religion and Islamic Law; Israel; Music; Films; Anthropology & Women’s Studies; Turkey & Central Asia; Literature) speaks in part to the scholarly strengths and positions of particular Associate Editors, and to the preponderance in Middle East studies of history and political science as disciplines, for which the country and subregional headings are largely a substitute. But it also speaks to the growing volume of scholarship, the continuing development of new interdisciplinaries (women’s studies and international relations, along with communication studies and diaspora studies) beginning to join “traditional” area studies, and the long-term erosion of certainty about what disciplines themselves, or in fact any other manner of organizing the scholarly enterprise, can accomplish. In a practical sense, it demonstrates that there are a dozen plausible ways to categorize scholarship in the field, and no really good way to do so.

Introducing the *Review of Middle East Studies*

Recent changes to the *International Journal of Middle East Studies* by its current editor, Judith Tucker, demonstrate MESA's healthy willingness to experiment with different forms of scholarship and commentary. Over the next five years we hope to extend such experiment and help open the *MESA Bulletin* to new readers by freeing it of part of its past. This will be accomplished not merely by adjusting its contents, but by changing its name to match its current form and mission.

Beginning with issue 43(1) in Summer 2009, the *Middle East Studies Association Bulletin* will disappear, and this journal will bear the new title *Review of Middle East Studies*. In order to ensure continuity for institutional subscriptions and to keep it linked to its heritage, the *Review of Middle East Studies* will maintain continuous volume numbering and retain the ISSN of the *MESA Bulletin*.

Changing the journal's title will benefit a number of current and potential constituencies. It will sharpen the identities of MESA's three major publications, marking the *Bulletin/Review* more clearly as a venue for displaying, reviewing and revising the state of the field both for specialists and for nonspecialists, including journalists, scholars outside Middle East studies, and others. It should increase the journal's potential audience by making it more visible in on-line searches. This is particularly significant for non-members of MESA, to whom the opaque title "*Middle East Studies Association Bulletin*" implies the special range of the *Bulletin's* founding mission as a venue for current news of the discipline useful by and large to specialists. The new title evokes, although does not necessarily attempt to revive, the visionary but intermittently published periodical of that name founded in the mid-1970s by Talal Asad, Roger Owen, and other British scholars critiquing the Middle East scholarship of the time (see Timothy Mitchell's historical review of the field in "The Middle East in the Past and Future of Social Science," available at <http://repositories.cdlib.org/uciaspubs/editedvolumes/3/3/>).

Working with Cambridge University Press over the next several years to place more of the journal's contents online will be another part of this strategy of expansion. It will also be a way of including in an online version of the journal very specialized material that would not fit in the limited pages of the print version, thus freeing space for other content. Several other scholarly journals currently feature supplementary and specialized material in their online versions. Since scholarly communities of all sorts are growing increasingly used to new technologies of practical information sharing through blogs, listservs, websites, and other means, some of the *Bulletin's* traditional types of front matter might better be distributed and linked in electronic form.

Continuity and Change

One of the best features of the *MESA Bulletin* has always been the variety of its front matter. Conference reports, methodological notes, publication histories, reflections on the geographical definition of the area and the scholarly outlines of the field, occasional interviews, and other material of varying lengths have made the *Bulletin* a venue for useful work not readily found elsewhere. What these genres have in common is that they are all forms of metascholarship: descriptions, analyses, and commentaries on the nature of the field of study.

As we finish the distinguished run of the *Bulletin* and introduce the *Review of Middle East Studies*, we will retain this variety of genres and approaches, while also developing a new feature to appear in the winter issue each year, opposite the summer issue's Presidential Address. This will be a review

of current literature in a particular field – economics or gender studies, for example – on the model of articles appearing in the *Annual Review of Anthropology* or the *Annual Review of Sociology* series. We are particularly interested in review articles on topics that do not ordinarily receive as much attention as they may deserve, such as natural resources or folklore. Unlike current review articles of books in the *Bulletin* or *IJMES*, these will include the periodical literature, meaning that they can more comprehensively address the character and development of current work, unrestricted by a particular group of current book titles. This does not signal the end of multiple-book review articles, but does mean that each Winter you will be seeing a more thorough analysis of a particular field or topic.

Finally, we would like to see the *Bulletin/Review* serve increasingly as an archive of the personal and historical dimension of Middle East studies, including on a much more regular basis both practitioner histories – short memoirs by or interviews with senior scholars – and high quality historical research on the institutional and intellectual development of the field, in the form of studies of particular university training and research programs, foundation funding initiatives, or examinations of informal scholarly networks, correspondences, projects, controversies, and dead ends. Historians of science currently fill several different journal titles with examinations of the development of disparate scientific and technical fields. Contemporary Middle East studies, even if conceived in its current form as an offspring of the Cold War, is rapidly developing a body of scholarship on the multiple histories of the field that go well beyond Said's monumental *Orientalism* and its monumental list of successors and critiques.

Reviewing the Review

The apparatus of scholarly publishing is intended primarily to disseminate new knowledge. But of course it has social functions as well. Since many, if not most Middle East scholars in academe work in disciplinary rather than area-based departments, the change of title to the *Review of Middle East Studies* should benefit the authors of articles, books, and reviews by featuring their work in a journal whose content and mission is clearer to the departmental colleagues and university administrators outside the field who are responsible for their personnel reviews. As another part of the effort further to enhance both the quality and impact of scholarly publishing in the *Bulletin* and the *Review*, we have begun the practice of submitting selected articles in our front section to peer review. In the current issue, both Saddik Gohar's article on postcolonial Arabic literature and Cem Emrence's article on Ottoman historiography have been reviewed by outside scholars and revised on the basis of their comments. While not all articles, research reports, or other content are appropriate for the peer review process, many submissions to the *Bulletin* are. Peer reviewed articles will be noted in this and in future issues of the journal with the "R" icon on their title page.

With Thanks

The transition of the *Bulletin* to North Carolina has been greatly facilitated by the invaluable labor, experience, and advice of many people, particularly its former editor, John VanderLippe, now Associate Dean of the New School for Social Research, and his Assistant Editor Adam Carey. At UNC Charlotte, the new Editorial Office is indebted to the Chair of the Department of Anthropology, Janet E. Levy, to Anthropology's department administrator Dodie Hart, and to the Dean of the College of Liberal Arts

& Sciences, Nancy Gutierrez, and her staff. At the MESA Secretariat, I would like to thank Amy Newhall, Nadia Hlibka, Mark Lowder, and Sara Palmer for their good-natured patience with my neophyte efforts as editor. The broader membership of professional organizations seldom realize the scope, intensity, and impact of the work performed by the professional staff, particularly a staff as skilled and dedicated as those we have in Tucson. I am grateful to the *Bulletin's* extraordinary Associate Editors, past and present, and to our invaluable new Assistant Editor, Jessica Jones. Finally, I would also like to thank the MESA Publications Committee, the MESA Board of Directors and its past President, Zachary Lockman, for their role in the many transitions now underway at the *MESA Bulletin*.

In This Issue

In this first of the three final issues of the *MESA Bulletin*, we look to the past. Saddik Gohar's analysis of Iraqi poet Abdul-Wahhab Al-Bayati reminds us of the complicated intersections between global intellectual influence and political history in the region, particularly when compared to other bodies of postcolonial literature. Cem Emrence reviews the changes in Ottoman historiography during the latter half of the twentieth century, showing how theoretical perspectives from the broader universe of the social sciences influenced interpretations of the internal organization of the Ottoman Empire. Mustafa Dehqan and Akbar Irani introduce us to new archival resources in Iran. And our book reviewers and correspondents alert us, as always, to current state of the art in Middle East studies.

In upcoming issues, we will have special sections devoted to the visual arts, popular culture, and numerous other topics. So look to the future and participate in the creation of new traditions as the *MESA Bulletin* is reborn as the *Review of Middle East Studies*. Send new articles, research reports, interviews, memoirs, and photographs to mesabulletin@uncc.edu.

Gregory Starrett
Editor