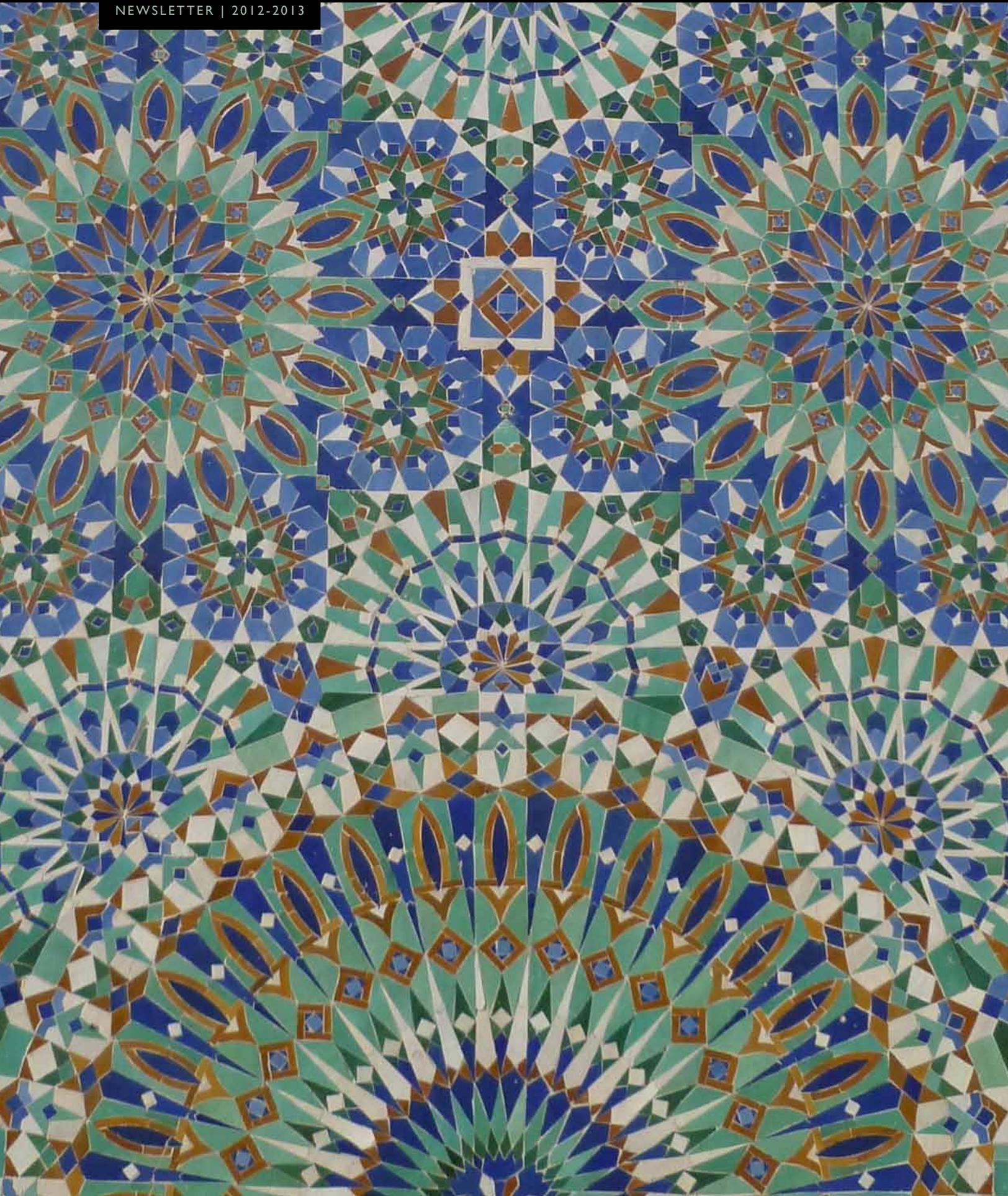


MIDDLE EASTERN STUDIES

THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT AUSTIN

NEWSLETTER | 2012-2013





PROFESSOR M. R. GHANOONPARVAR RETIRES

"The image of 'a bridge over troubled water,' when used in our academic context, may well represent Moh's ability to diminish gaps—generational and temperamental as well as training related—and facilitate progress. I have always looked up to him as an elder statesman whose wisdom, calm demeanor, undiminished enthusiasm for scholarship and teaching, and broad professional experience combined to move the department forward in difficult times and times of great success alike. We will miss him greatly, but in all likelihood will keep him busy with requests for advice and support as we move ahead with our quest for excellence in education and address the need to constantly reinvent ourselves as we meet the challenges of higher education in the twenty-first century." **Esther Raizen (Associate Dean for Research, College of Liberal Arts, The University of Texas at Austin)**

"Not every distinguished specialist steps confidently into a comparative environment, or crosses disciplinary boundaries with such grace. For more than twenty years, Dr. Ghanoonparvar has inspired and mentored not only our students who include Persian in their research, but also all those who care about poetry and translation. His career epitomizes the best of comparative work and the ideal balance of a scholar-teacher." **Elizabeth Richmond-Garza (Director, Program in Comparative Literature, The University of Texas at Austin)**

After more than forty years of teaching, M.R. Ghanoonparvar, Professor of Persian and Comparative Literature, will retire at the end of the spring 2013 semester. The drive and dedication that Moh, as he is known to many of us, has brought to Middle Eastern Studies will be sorely missed. Fortunately, though, Moh will continue his amazing outpouring of scholarship.

One of the first things on Moh's agenda upon retirement is the completion of a manuscript he has tentatively titled "Iranian Film and Persian Fiction," where he determines how the two have influenced each other over the past few decades. Another manuscript he has in the works seeks to examine the metaphorical purpose of various maladies found in modern Persian fiction.



"Moh Ghanoonparvar has been a remarkable colleague, providing professional and personal guidance to me, my students, and other scholars in our field. Watching him over the years, I have learned how to be a better mentor to my own students and how to foster a stronger sense of community for today and tomorrow." **Nasrin Rahimieh (Professor of Comparative Literature, UC, Irvine)**

"During my time as a graduate student at UT, I was most impressed by Dr. Ghanoonparvar's kindness, his encouragement and support. He gave me room to grow intellectually, believed in my work, and pushed me to be better." **Blake Atwood (Lecturer, University of Pennsylvania)**

"I met Professor Ghanoonparvar for the first time when I was a graduate student at the University of Texas. As is usually the case, one cannot fully comprehend the significance of events while they are taking place. Today, more than two decades later, and thinking about so many joint projects and shared experiences, as well as the impact he has had on my work and career, I have a much better appreciation of that initial meeting. Yet the ultimate reason for which I consider that moment an extremely fortunate one is that it led to a friendship which I will cherish for the rest of my life." **M. M. Khorrami (Clinical Professor of Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies, NYU)**

Fans of Moh's cookbooks need not despair that retirement will put an end to his publications in that genre. He's already at work on a cookbook that features recipes from the medieval court of the Safavids (which will include modern adaptations should "two sheep" not be easy to come by).

Not all of Moh's postretirement pursuits will involve writing. After traveling all over the globe for research and conferences in recent years, Moh and his wife, Diane, are going to give their wings a rest for a bit and focus on road trips and camping.

Thank you for your tremendous dedication and service over the years. We wish you all the best in the years to come!

LETTER FROM THE CHAIR

Kristen Brustad
Chair, Department of
Middle Eastern Studies



It has been another exciting if challenging year for Middle Eastern Studies (MES) at The University of Texas at Austin. The challenges continue to be financial ones, as budgets have not yet regained the losses of the past few years. But despite these financial constraints, we have succeeded in adding academic and professional value to our degrees, in bringing together more students and faculty across the university, and in sharing new knowledge that we have acquired with the public in an array of venues.

This fall we are happy to welcome Jonathan Kaplan to our faculty; with a background in Hebrew Bible and Ancient Judaism, he adds several important dimensions to our Hebrew Bible/Ancient Near East program, which continues to attract top recruits from around the world to Texas. Dr. Kaplan will also teach courses on Jerusalem and the Dead Sea Scrolls. We are particularly pleased that the Dean of Liberal Arts chose to invest a tenure-track position in this program. We are also happy to announce a tenure-track Persian studies position that we plan to fill in the fall of 2013.

And yet, while we are excited at the prospect of welcoming a new member to the team, the excitement is tempered by sorrow, as M. R. Ghanoonparvar, our well-respected and beloved colleague, has announced his retirement effective at the end of the Spring 2013 semester. Moh, as he is affectionately known around MES, set the standard worldwide for Persian literary translation in his long and distinguished career. His contributions to MES, always made with energy and enthusiasm, will be sorely missed by his colleagues and students.

This year, our staff and faculty created several new professional and academic opportunities for our students. In the spring, MES worked with the UT International Office, the Department of Chemical Engineering, and the Center for International Business Education

and Research to sponsor the Global Professional Leadership Training program. This two-day event provided students with some of the skills necessary to conduct business successfully in the Middle East. During the summer, Turkish lecturer Jeanette Okur took a group of students on a faculty-led study abroad program at TOBB University of Economics and Technology in Ankara, which is an exciting new partnership for students who want to pursue advanced and immersion instruction in Turkish language and cultural studies. Over the past year, some of our students also had the opportunity to take their expertise outside the classroom and participate in a workshop run in part by MES's outreach program that trains soldiers for deployment in the Middle East. Student volunteers acted in simulations designed to prepare soldiers for situations where they would be unfamiliar with the language and customs. These workshops provided us with a welcome opportunity to put our skills in the service of others.

We are immensely proud of the accomplishments of our students after they leave UT as well. All of our doctoral students who have graduated since 2009 have academic positions, and both Department and Center masters students are teaching, studying, working, and making their mark on the world. Several of the articles that follow highlight the achievements of our alumni from years past. Peter Glanville holds a tenure-track position at the University of Maryland and is Acting Director of their Arabic Flagship Program. Sahar Aziz is an associate professor at Texas Wesleyan School of Law, and Anita Husen is the translator of the forthcoming English-Arabic edition of Walid Taher's *A Bit of Air*.

The commitment of MES's faculty and staff, that of the College of Liberal Arts, and the support of The University of Texas at Austin for our programs inspire us all to keep reaching for the stars. 🌟

LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

The Middle Eastern Studies programs at The University of Texas at Austin continue to move forward in new and innovative ways. Here are just a few of the projects under development:

INSTITUTE FOR COMMUNICATION ON MEDIA IN THE MIDDLE EAST

A partnership between the Center for Middle Eastern Studies (CMES) and UT's College of Communication, the Institute for Communication on Media in the Middle East (ICOMME) works to improve communication and media on the Middle East through educating and training students, supporting significant scholarship, promoting outreach, and facilitating vital dialogue with media industry professionals. Following a successful series of roundtables and lectures, ICOMME continues to expand its activities and seek new partnerships to provide a public forum for discussion of mass media and its coverage in and of the region.

ARABIC SCHOLAR-IN-RESIDENCE PROGRAM

We are very excited to launch our annual Arabic scholar-in-residence program, made possible by a generous donation from Dr. Aziz Shaibani and Arwa Shaibani of Houston, Texas. Widely acclaimed Lebanese author Hoda Barakat, whose novels have been translated into many languages, will be our first scholar-in-residence for Fall 2013. In addition to teaching a course during her residency, Barakat will also be speaking at other universities in Texas and the southern U.S.



Hoda Barakat (left)
with faculty members
Laila Familiar and
Tarek El-Ariss.

ISLAMIC STUDIES GRADUATE PORTFOLIO

First proposed nearly a decade ago, we expect the Islamic Studies Graduate Portfolio to be approved in the near future, allowing us to begin advanced training of graduate students from related fields in Islamic studies.

OFFERING ONLINE TRAINING FOR LESS COMMONLY TAUGHT LANGUAGES

We debuted an advanced Persian course online in Fall 2012, with credit offered through University Extension. This innovative class, which is now being supported by the University administration, could serve as a model for offering advanced training in Less Commonly Taught Languages beyond the University campus, allowing us to meet minimum enrollment requirements by serving students at other universities.

INTRODUCTION OF COURSES IN KURDISH AND BERBER LANGUAGES

Our first course in Sorani Kurdish, with instructional materials developed by MES graduate student Mardin Aminpour, will be offered in Spring 2013. We also hope to introduce instruction in a Tamazight (indigenous North African) language in the next two years.

ENHANCEMENT OF LANGUAGE PROGRAMS

Now in our third year of intensive language instruction at the first-year level, and with continued excellent results, we have begun to revise the third-year language courses into content-framed courses that combine advanced language training with a focus on area content matter such as popular culture, peoples and cultures, and media.

EXPANSION OF TURKISH STUDIES

We continue to seek funding and support for Turkish studies to carry forward the exciting curriculum developments of the past three years, which include a new intensive curriculum, a new study abroad program combining language and culture, and new courses on Turkish society through literature and film. We are trying to raise permanent funding for two faculty lines that will allow us to expand historical and cultural offerings and attract more students to the program. 🌟

If you would like to support any of these initiatives, please contact Denise Beachum at 512-471-6132 or denise.beachum@austin.utexas.edu.



ARAB UPRISING

A VISIT FROM UCLA PROFESSOR JAMES GELVIN
EDUCATES STUDENTS, STAFF, AND THE GREATER AUSTIN COMMUNITY

PROFESSIONAL LEADERSHIP TRAINING

MES has a successful track record of preparing students to become academics, and we also support those who are pursuing careers outside of academia. Recently, we provided a training session for students interested in business and other professions, the Global Professional Leadership Training: Focus on the Middle East, held in Austin on March 23–24, 2012. The event was sponsored by the UT International Office, the Center for Middle Eastern Studies, the Department of Chemical Engineering, and the Center for International Business Education and Research.

The workshop began with a keynote presentation by Michael Zeglin, Executive President of Saudi Polymers Company. Mr. Zeglin shared candid stories that highlighted how little he knew about Middle Eastern business culture before moving there. A key point he had for the students was, “They [Middle Easterners] don’t care how much you know, until they know how much you care.” He quickly realized that an American approach to managing people would not be successful in the Middle East. He had to figure out what

mattered to people in order to help motivate them toward achieving the larger goals of the company. He needed to listen and observe in order to become a steward-leader who showed that he cared about them first as people and second as business partners.

Other topics covered throughout the training ranged from philosophical discussions about how we perceive culture to practical examples of living and working in the Middle East. Highlights of the sessions include a discussion on Islamophobia, led by Samer Ali, Associate Professor of Middle Eastern Studies, which explored ways Muslims are negatively portrayed in the media and misunderstood by many Americans. Smita Ruzicka, Associate Director of the First Year Achievement Initiative, provided a session on cross-cultural ethics and leadership that led students through a series of exercises to help determine their individual leadership style. Deirdre Mendez, Director of the Center for International Business Education and Research, shared with students some useful techniques for approaching a new

cultural experience. A panel entitled “Living and Working in the Middle East” was very popular among the students. This four-person panel answered students’ questions and offered insights from their personal experiences in the Middle East.

This very successful program was delivered to fifty students from a variety of disciplines and backgrounds. The retreat-like setting created an ideal atmosphere for them to begin to build an understanding of the Middle East and imagine how their future careers might exist within it. The workshop sessions encouraged them to dig deeper into what it means to be a leader, to achieve successful cross-cultural communication, and to become more knowledgeable about international relations in the Middle East.

With such a positive response to the program, we look forward to cosponsoring this event again on April 6–7, 2013. 🌟

MIDDLE EASTERN STUDIES is committed to bringing cutting-edge research on current Middle Eastern political, cultural, and literary topics to our students and the Austin community. This spring was no exception, as our 2012 lecture series began with a compelling talk in late January by UCLA professor James Gelvin, author of *The Arab Uprisings: What Everyone Needs to Know* (Oxford University Press, 2012).

Educated at Columbia and Harvard Universities, James Gelvin taught at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Boston College, and Harvard University before joining the faculty at UCLA. His ground-breaking research on nationalism and the social and cultural history of the modern Middle East has earned him international respect, so we were pleased to have him participate in our History Lecture Series.

Discussing the cause of the uprisings in the Arab world in 2011, Gelvin drew from his latest research, which bridges the gap between historical and modern issues in the Middle East. He answered questions such as *Where did the phrase “Arab Spring” come from?*, *Where did the demands for democracy and human rights come from?*, and *What are the ten biggest myths about the Egyptian uprising?* He discussed youth, labor, and religious groups in Tunisia and Egypt, and why the military became allies with the people in those countries.

Gelvin impressed upon the audience that, because these are extraordinary incidents, it is difficult to know if the long-term result from the unrest will be positive or negative for the region. He cautioned that, while they effected immediate change, the events in Tunisia, Egypt, and Syria are not



new to the Middle East. “People are looking at this as if it’s something new. This has been going on for some time, and only an historical perspective can offer an evolution of these events,” Gelvin said. His prediction was that the uprisings would not reflect well on Middle Eastern politics over the long run.



The talk culminated with Gelvin expressing that social media has played an important role in the unrest, and that the impact of the uprisings could greatly affect American-Iranian and Israeli-Palestinian politics—and al-Qaeda. “The future in these countries will be different. Whether it’s good or bad, whether it looks like what we envision to be democracy or something else, it’s

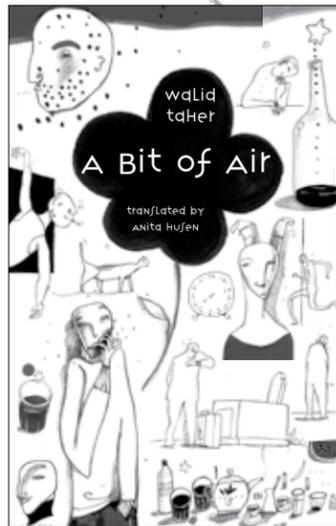
unimaginable to think that, after what’s happened, things will go back to the way they were before the first protests happened in Tunisia in December 2010,” said Gelvin.

James Gelvin’s visit to UT drew attention from across the campus and the greater Austin community, and the discussion portion of the lecture produced fascinating discourse between Gelvin and the audience. Following his talk, Gelvin remained for over an hour, sharing his perceptions of the Middle East with individual students. 🌟

To listen to Dr. Gelvin’s lecture online, visit <http://www.utexas.edu/cola/depts/mes/events/Audio-Recordings.php>.

Photography top to bottom: James Gelvin discusses the uprisings in the Middle East with attendees; Assistant Professor Tarek El-Ariss and Outreach Director Christopher Rose during the discussion following the lecture.

PUBLICATIONS



A Bit of Air
ISBN: 978-0-292-74238-3
\$16.00, paperback
147 pages

THE CENTER FOR MIDDLE EASTERN STUDIES PUBLICATIONS PROGRAM started off the year with some excellent news: thanks in part to *I Want to Get Married!*, we had record-breaking sales in 2010–2011. *I Want to Get Married!* is the inaugural volume in the Emerging Voices from the Middle East series, one of the goals of which is to publish in English translation up-and-coming writers in the Middle East. The series is certainly off to a good start!

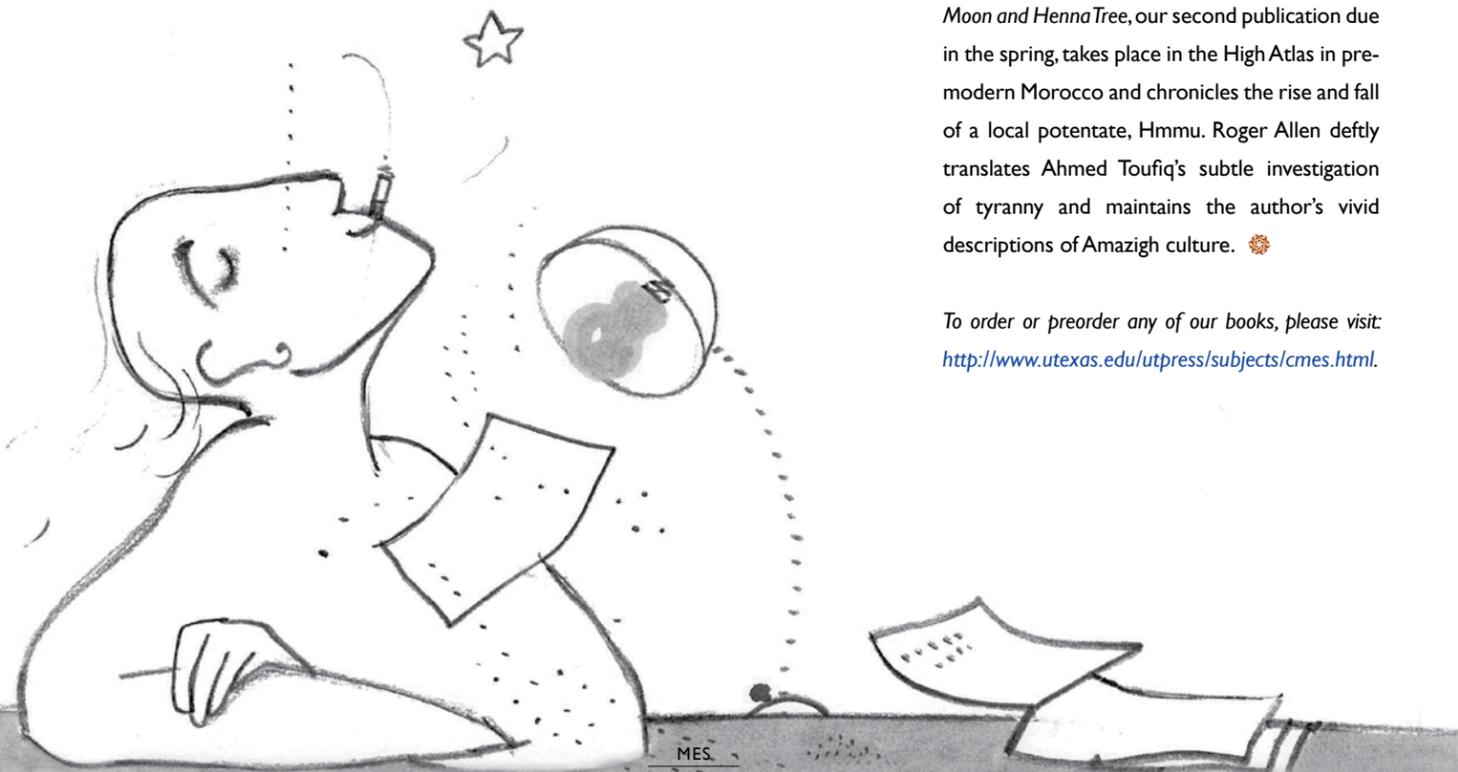
Our most recent publication, *A Bit of Air*, written and illustrated by Walid Taher, and translated by Anita Husen, marks the second volume to appear in the Emerging Voices series. Released in November, *A Bit of Air* combines whimsical illustrations with darkly humorous poetry. Walid Taher is an award-winning Egyptian children's author and illustrator, as well as a political cartoonist. This bilingual edition of *A Bit of Air* provides a fascinating glimpse of the

Egyptian psyche leading up to the events that unfolded in Tahrir Square in January 2011, and one of the book's poems and accompanying illustration have since been made famous in the song "The Wall," by Yousra El-Hawary.

In the spring, look for the latest publications in our Modern Middle East Literatures in Translation Series: *The Neighbors* and *Moon and Henna Tree*. Ahmad Mahmoud's *The Neighbors*, translated from the Persian by Nastaran Kherad, unfolds against the backdrop of the oil nationalization crisis that gripped Iran in the early 1950s. This coming-of-age novel centers on Khaled, a young man from a rundown neighborhood in Ahvaz, a city in southern Iran. As he becomes involved in the political struggle to wrest Iran's oil industry from the British, he comes to realize that there is more to life than the drudgery and poverty his parents and neighbors have experienced.

Moon and Henna Tree, our second publication due in the spring, takes place in the High Atlas in pre-modern Morocco and chronicles the rise and fall of a local potentate, Hmmu. Roger Allen deftly translates Ahmed Toufiq's subtle investigation of tyranny and maintains the author's vivid descriptions of Amazigh culture. 🌸

To order or preorder any of our books, please visit: <http://www.utexas.edu/utpress/subjects/cmes.html>.



NEW FACULTY

JONATHAN KAPLAN



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THE DEPARTMENT OF MIDDLE EASTERN STUDIES (DMES) is delighted to welcome a new faculty member: Assistant Professor Jonathan Kaplan. With a background in Hebrew Bible and Ancient Judaism, his arrival adds breadth and depth to our popular Hebrew Bible/Ancient Near East doctoral program. He will also help attract undergraduates to the study of the Near East through exciting undergraduate offerings, such as his new course, "Jerusalem."

Kaplan's interests initially focused on the New World, rather than the ancient Mediterranean. While an undergraduate at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, he studied how the Puritans interpreted scripture to shape their communal lives. In time, his interests shifted further back in history and to a different geographical location. As a graduate student at Harvard University, he studied biblical literature and its reception in Ancient Judaism (sixth century BCE to sixth century CE). With his PhD completed in 2010, Kaplan went on to Yale University for two years as a Jacob and Hilda Blaustein Postdoctoral Associate in Judaic Studies, which provided him with valuable teaching experience and gave him time to develop his research.

As Kaplan settles in at The University of Texas at Austin (a place not unfamiliar to his family, as his grandfather received his undergraduate and master's degrees in physics here in the early 1950s), he is nearing completion of his first book, tentatively titled "My Perfect One: Subversive Typology and Early Rabbinic Reading of the Song of Songs." In it, he examines how Rabbinic literature of the first and second centuries CE interpreted the Song of Songs, a book in the Bible that, at first glance, reads like a book of erotic poetry. In Judaism, the book is interpreted as describing the love between God and his beloved community—the Jewish people. As one crisis after another descended upon the Jewish community in this period, rabbis responded to the resulting sense of dislocation by turning to the Song of Songs to develop a religious response that reminded the Jewish people of their unique status in the eyes of God and focused on idealized periods in Israel's history that would help shape a brighter, more stable future.

Professor Jo Ann Hackett sums up nicely our feelings at having Kaplan on our faculty: "Jonathan's broad background and excellence in so many areas serve a number of constituencies on campus, but we are delighted that we get to claim him as our colleague in DMES." 🌸

Learn more about Jonathan's interests and background in an online Faculty Spotlight video at <http://www.utexas.edu/cola/depts/mes/faculty/spotlight.php>.



A Year in Cairo

by Michal Raizen

They say that once you drink from the Nile you are destined to return. From the beginning of my Arabic studies in 2007, I dreamt of sending myself to the chaos and beauty that is Cairo, and I finally realized this dream during my fellowship year with the Center for Arabic Study Abroad (CASA). Now I have experienced firsthand what it means to “drink from the Nile,” and indeed I am dreaming of my next venture to the place that has left an indelible mark on my life and work.

I arrived in Cairo in the summer of 2011 as part of an unusually large cohort of fellows, many of whom were originally bound for CASA’s program in Damascus. Though our group was unprecedented in size, we quickly formed a deep and enduring support network as we struggled together to process the turbulent events following the January 25th revolution. When clashes erupted downtown in November, our classes were moved from the American University in Cairo’s campus in Tahrir to the quiet residential neighborhood of Zamalek. The CASA administration encouraged us to go about our studies as usual, but the

volatile situation made it exceedingly difficult to concentrate. And so a different kind of learning set in, one based on hours of conversation with our teachers, who shared with us their most painful thoughts and experiences as well as their hopes for a brighter future. I am deeply humbled by their dedication and passion in the face of adversity, and I am grateful to them for engaging us in candid conversation. Though the CASA curriculum admittedly suffered some setbacks this year, the learning that took place was nonetheless tremendous.

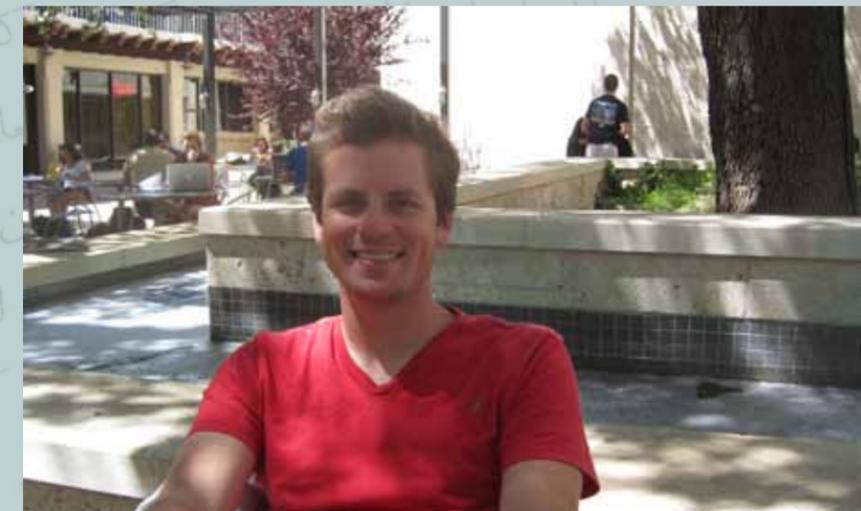
As a doctoral candidate in comparative literature, I found the CASA experience particularly enriching in terms of taking my dissertation project to the next level. The intensive training in Modern Standard Arabic, media Arabic, and colloquial Egyptian Arabic has given me the tools and the confidence with which to conduct original research using primary and secondary sources in Arabic. In the spring semester we were given the option of participating in a research seminar with a heavy emphasis on social and intellectual networking within Egyptian society. My project

on the translation of Hebrew literature in Cairo afforded me a fascinating glimpse into the avant-garde literary scene in Cairo and the politics of translation. The Egyptian authors and translators with whom I spent countless hours engaged in conversation, usually immersed in a cloud of smoke with repeat servings of Turkish coffee sweetened “just right,” have broadened my intellectual, linguistic, and emotional horizons. I consider them lifelong friends, and I am profoundly indebted to the CASA program for providing me with the framework and impetus for cultivating such ties.

It has been a long journey from my initial tentative steps as a first-year Arabic student at The University of Texas at Austin in 2007 to the completion of my fellowship year in Cairo. I thought that I would need a much longer breather—literally an escape from the smog, smoke, and sandstorms—but I find myself already missing the hazy Cairene skyline as I realize that my journey with the Arabic language and its rich cultural moorings has only just begun. 🌸

PRESENTING AT MESA FOR THE FIRST TIME

BY DREW PAUL



As a PhD candidate with a specialty in modern Arabic and Hebrew literatures, it was such a pleasure to present for the first time at the annual meeting of the Middle East Studies Association (MESA) last December. MESA is the main academic and professional association for my field, and the annual conference is an excellent opportunity for budding scholars to present their work and receive valuable feedback, learn about the latest scholarship, and network with the top experts in the field. A travel grant from the Department of Middle Eastern Studies made this opportunity possible, one that has continued to reap dividends for my research and professional development.

At MESA, I participated in a panel called “Intersecting Identities: Arab, Jewish, Muslim,” where I presented a paper entitled “Crossing Over: Return as Displacement in Palestinian Narratives of Exile.” This presentation examined two Palestinian narratives of return from exile, which remains a central concern in Palestinian political and cultural discourse to this day. In the texts I deal with, the border functions as a space that reshapes and disrupts the experiences of the returning exile in a way that forces us to rethink how we understand the notion of “return” itself.

This topic is part of my larger dissertation project, “At the Border: The Aesthetics of Space in Palestine and Israel,” which examines portrayals of borders, checkpoints, walls, and other spaces in Palestine and Israel. My MESA experience has proven valuable in helping me develop my ideas and

shape the parameters of my project. In fact, I am currently in the process of writing a chapter based on the paper I presented.

In addition to my own panel, MESA featured hundreds of other panels that dealt with nearly every Middle East-related topic imaginable. I attended a number of intellectually stimulating presentations that sparked new ideas in my own work. For example, a panel on maps and borders in the Arab-Israeli conflict pointed me to some new theoretical approaches to discussing borders and spaces that have proven useful in my dissertation. I also attended a panel on Middle Eastern cinema that supplied some ideas for incorporating film into my project.

MESA allowed me to make contact with important scholars and fellow graduate students who work on similar topics. I was honored that one of the most influential scholars in my field attended our panel, and I was able to meet her after the presentation. MESA and related events—such as the reception MES often hosts—also provide an atmosphere conducive to informal conversations and encounters that allow scholars, both established and aspiring, to have fruitful exchanges of ideas.

All in all, the MESA experience is a vital one for the professional development of the department’s graduate students, and the support from the department that allows us to attend this conference (and others) is invaluable. 🌸

ALUMNI INTERVIEW



Sahar Aziz

Associate Professor of Law
Texas Wesleyan School of Law

How has your career unfolded since graduating from the Center for Middle Eastern Studies at The University of Texas at Austin?

The high-quality education I received as part of UT's JD/MA in Middle Eastern Studies program opened doors to exciting professional opportunities at the national level. After clerking for Judge Andre M. Davis during his tenure on the federal district court in Maryland, I became an associate at the nationally renowned law firm of WilmerHale in Washington, DC. I applied my degree in Middle Eastern studies, as well as my fluency in Arabic, in international white-collar crime cases and an independent investigation into child camel jockeys in the Persian Gulf.

After working with nationally recognized defense counsel and Supreme Court advocates, I transitioned to the plaintiffs bar, where I litigated class-action employment discrimination cases at the venerable Cohen Milstein Sellers and Toll in Washington, DC. I was fortunate to work on high-profile, high-stakes litigation in defense of worker rights. To fulfill my *pro bono* obligations, I represented a female Afghan activist who ran for political office and suffered persecution

by warlords as a consequence. I applied the knowledge I gained as a Middle Eastern studies graduate student toward providing a comprehensive factual context that ultimately led to her obtaining asylum in the United States. This case has by far been one of the most fulfilling experiences of my professional career.

My effective *pro bono* advocacy led the Office for Civil Rights and Civil Liberties at the U.S. Department of Homeland Security to recruit me as a Senior Policy Advisor working specifically on post-9/11 discrimination. Working on the inside, I was exposed to the complexities and challenges involved in reforming policies and practices at the federal level. My position gave me a window into the nuanced politics of the federal interagency process, and a newfound appreciation for the crucial role of watchdog groups, advocates, and attorneys working on the outside to effectuate change inside government.

After spending over eight years practicing law and policy at the national level, I pursued my long-term career objective of entering academia to become a legal scholar in national security and civil rights. As an associate professor at Texas Wesleyan School of Law, I use my practical experiences to inform my pedagogy, include experiential learning techniques in the classroom, and emphasize the importance of understanding our interconnected world for becoming an effective lawyer. My scholarship incorporates my expertise in Middle Eastern studies into my legal analysis of civil rights and national security laws that disparately impact Muslims, Arabs, and South Asians post-9/11.

What was your experience as a graduate student in the Center for Middle Eastern Studies?

CMES offered a solid interdisciplinary program with sufficient flexibility to allow students to hone in on a particular aspect of Middle Eastern studies of most interest to them. The rigorous

Arabic program provided a strong starting point for those interested in gaining the fluency necessary in a professional context. One of the most valuable educational components of the program was the speaker series wherein national and international experts presented their latest work on the Middle East. Exposure to the challenges faced by practitioners in the field offered students a unique perspective not found in academic readings. But by far the most fulfilling part of the program was the many friends I made among my colleagues, with whom I remain in touch and have worked with in government.

How has your degree in Middle Eastern studies influenced your career?

My degree in Middle Eastern studies equipped me with Arabic language skills that I used on various cases, including but not limited to, investigations of corruption in the Iraq Oil-for-Food Program; an investigation of child trafficking in the Persian Gulf; client intake and representation of an Iraqi asylum seeker; and communication with Arab and Muslim constituencies in government outreach meetings addressing post-9/11 civil rights violations. My graduate fieldwork in Egypt about its economic and legal development ultimately inspired me to join other Egyptian-American lawyers in forming the Egyptian American Rule of Law Association (www.earla.org) to assist indigenous legal reform efforts in post-revolution Egypt.

Obtaining a master's in Middle Eastern studies has proven to be an invaluable complement to my law degree. I encourage students interested in law and the Middle East, especially at this historic juncture in the region's political trajectory, to consider a joint degree in law and Middle Eastern studies. 🌟



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NOT ALL LANGUAGE TRAINING involves rules of grammar and memorizing new vocabulary—in fact, the most crucial language skills can involve no communication at all. That was one of many take-away lessons from a weekend workshop for twenty U.S. officers from the Texas Army National Guard preparing to deploy to Afghanistan conducted by a team of faculty and staff from UT's Middle Eastern Studies program, and the Middle East Studies Center (MESC) at Ohio State University.

The three-day training, held in November 2011 at Camp Mabry in Austin, focused on situational exercises and non-verbal communication skills, and was coordinated by Adi Raz, Clinical Assistant Professor in MES and the Texas Language Center. The program also included background presentations on topics ranging from Islamic belief (conducted by MES Outreach Director Christopher Rose) and Islamic law (from Assistant Professor Hina Azam) to the history of Afghanistan, including a short introduction to its two main languages, Dari and Pashto (conducted by Ohio State's MESC Director Alam Payind, a native of Afghanistan).

The trainings were intended to help the officers, who will be deployed largely in noncombat roles supporting Afghan police and the new national army, gain the cultural knowledge and sensitivity they need to navigate tricky situations. As Raz explained during her sessions, which dealt with "the pragmatics of staying alive," gestures and body language are even more important than verbal exchanges, especially in a part of the world where personal space is defined differently and social interactions depend on age, gender, and social status. Raz's lecture was reinforced by screening film clips in which the officers were asked to identify factors that could lead to trouble or misunderstandings.

A second session, held at Camp Bowie in Brownwood, Texas, took place in March 2012, and repeated many of the initial session's offerings and added an authentic tea ceremony, conducted by Kamran Aghaie, Director

HUMANITIES OUTSIDE THE CLASSROOM

of CMES, Faegheh Shirazi, Associate Professor of Middle Eastern Studies, and Hadi Hossaini, a native of Afghanistan and doctoral student in the Department of History at UT.

The culmination of both training sessions was a simulation on the final afternoon in which UT students took on the role of civilians and gave the soldiers a chance to use their new skills. Empty buildings were transformed into a typical Afghan living room, with the costumed volunteers speaking only in Arabic. Although Arabic is not an Afghan language, the purpose of the exercise was to force the soldiers, working in small groups, to communicate either nonverbally or through a translator who couldn't always be trusted. Afterwards, the soldiers and the student role-players were debriefed about the way the simulation had gone, offering feedback and constructive criticism.

In many ways, the activity was as valuable for the University students and faculty, who learned what was and was not acceptable from a military perspective and worked with the soldiers to bridge the gaps. For example, the removal of shoes—a cultural norm in the Middle East—is considered a security risk by the military. What if the soldiers are ambushed and have to run outside in bare feet? At the same time, wearing shoes inside is considered an insult and will offend their hosts. How to resolve this problem? The room went silent before someone suggested that surgical booties, acquired from a medical surplus store, could be placed over the boots upon entering the home and discarded on leaving. In this way, cultural sensitivities would still be respected while military protocol is followed.

This workshop served as the pilot version for what is hoped will become a semi-regular offering, allowing UT's language and humanities departments the opportunity to put their skills to use training the troops for real-world application. 🌟

ALUMNI INTERVIEW



Peter Glanville
Assistant Professor
University of Maryland

How has your career unfolded since graduating from the Department of Middle Eastern Studies at The University of Texas at Austin?

I left Texas before graduating because my wife was offered a job at the University of Maryland (UMD), and we thought that with all the work opportunities in and around DC it made sense for us to move. I taught at UMD while writing my dissertation, and then I was hired on a tenure line the following year. This year I am Acting Director of the Arabic Flagship Program at UMD, and I am really enjoying this experience.

What was your experience as a graduate student in the Department of Middle Eastern Studies?

I was accepted at UT as a doctoral student in linguistics, and in my first year I took third-year Arabic with Dr. Mohammad Mohammad. I had a great time in that class, and at the end of the year I transferred into Arabic Studies and never looked back. I loved my time in DMES and I learned a lot about Arabic and about teaching. My transfer from linguistics coincided with the arrival of Mahmoud Al-Batal and Kristen Brustad, and it was great to be in their classes and know that they really wanted me to succeed. Outside of class, the small nature of the program made for a nice atmosphere between the graduate students, and now I really look forward to seeing them all when we meet up at conferences.

How has having a degree in Middle Eastern Studies from The University of Texas at Austin influenced your career?

In terms of employment, having a degree from UT meant that I got called for interviews and campus visits at virtually all the jobs I applied for. In addition, when I was asked, "What can you bring to our department?" I was able to answer honestly and confidently that I could bring a solid pedagogical background and varied expertise that would allow me to teach a variety of courses. In terms of personal development, I can truthfully say that the doctoral program in Arabic Studies was both the toughest thing I have ever done and the most rewarding. 🌸

OUTREACH SPRING BREAK IN MOROCCO



In March 2012, fourteen people participated in the CMES outreach program's annual spring break trip to the Middle East for K-12 educators, which this year visited Morocco. The group comprised a wide spectrum of educators, including classroom teachers in public schools, a state-level educational official, and an educator from a Texas-based residential rehabilitation center for troubled youth from throughout North America.

Under the guidance of Outreach Director Christopher Rose, the group visited sites throughout the country of historical and cultural significance. Beginning in the capital city, Rabat, the group toured portions of the royal palace before continuing to the former imperial capital of Fes, where they not only explored the city's medina, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, but

also stayed within its walls in a restored *riad*—a traditional courtyard house.

One of the program's highlights was a sunset camel ride into the Erg Chebbi dunes on the edge of the Sahara, where Rose read Arabic praise poetry to the delight of participants and the amusement of their guides. The group also made a trip to Morocco's film studios in Ouarzazate, and spent two days in Marrakech, also known as the "Red City" thanks to the distinctive color of many of its buildings, visiting the infamous Djemaa El Fna square twice for the sunset *circus maximus*. Visits to the old Portuguese port of Essaouira and the country's commercial capital, Casablanca, rounded out the program.



Teachers' Spring Break has become a popular annual component of the CMES outreach program. It is designed to offer short-duration, affordable educational experiences in the Middle East for social studies teachers and is based on the philosophy that personal experiences boost enthusiasm for teaching and learning about a place and its culture. Participants in each program are accompanied by academic experts and experienced tour guides who help them interpret and process what they see and do in a meaningful way that will translate back to their classrooms. 🌸

PERSIAN OF IRAN TODAY

In the United States, those who teach Persian usually find themselves cobbling together a curriculum from the limited existing resources and what they've created themselves. Persian instructor Anousha Shahsavari found herself in just this position when she began teaching at The University of Texas at Austin. With the encouragement and fundraising skills of Esther Raizen, who was MES chair at the time, Shahsavari and Blake Atwood (then a graduate student in MES and now Lecturer in Persian at the University of Pennsylvania) decided to undertake the monumental task of creating *Persian of Iran Today*, an open-source, multimedia curriculum that eliminates the need for instructors to piece together materials in order to teach Persian.

As Shahsavari and Atwood began work on *Persian of Iran Today*, they also received guidance from current MES chair and Associate Professor of Arabic Kristen Brustad and took advantage of the lessons she learned in the development of the Arabic textbook *Al-Kitaab fii Ta'allum al-'Arabiyya*.

Shahsavari and Atwood have created an innovative and dynamic curriculum based on the philosophy stated in the book's introduction that "students learn Persian best when they are pushed to make inferences and connections on their own." *Persian of Iran Today* is unique because it provides thousands of audio-visual files and detailed inductive modules in order to facilitate the students' first encounter with new material. Because students take responsibility for learning new vocabulary and concepts on their own, the textbook provides designated in-class activities that allow students to use, activate, and master the material they learn at home."

Thus far the authors have created fifteen of the thirty anticipated units of *Persian of Iran Today*, as well as an accompanying narrative film called "Café Denj," all of which can be accessed at www.laits.utexas.edu/persian_teaching_resources. The text has proven exceedingly popular and is already in use at over a dozen universities, including Princeton University, the University of California, Berkeley, and San Francisco State University. 🌸

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