

Annual Report 2007
Middle East Section
American Anthropological Association

1. Status, Activities and Accomplishments.

The assets of the Middle East Section are generally healthy. The assets decreased slightly this year. However, this is good news, since the section has long been seeking ways to spend its budget in meaningful ways. The Section's assets totaled \$ \$15,308.77 in December, 2007 (according to unofficial figures from AAA Central Office's Suzanne Mattingly provided in March, 2008).

One of the primary reasons for the organization's healthy finances is that its membership increased this year to a total of 366 (as of December, 2007). Revenues from membership totaled \$3,370 for 2007.

The Section spent \$500 this year on our annual senior scholar prize, for the first time in a number of years, and hosted a reception for the honoree. The Section also allocated \$300 for conference travel expenses to our Student Representative, Dr. Emilio Spadola, \$365 to the company that hosts our website, and \$300 to our web-master Dr. Andrew Gardner (down from \$500 in previous years, as negotiated with Dr. Gardner.)

Election of our new President-Elect was organized by the nominations committee under the direction of chair Dr. Swartz Dodd. Our new President Elect is Dr. Gregory Starrett of the University of North Carolina, Charlotte, whom we welcome enthusiastically to the board.

At the 2007 Annual Meeting the Section awarded Dr. Lila Abu Lughod our Distinguished Senior Scholar Award. We presented Dr. Abu Lughod with a memorial Moroccan carpet. She delivered a distinguished lecture to a large gathering of the membership and guests entitled: "Worldly Anthropology—No Escape." A reception followed organized by our awards chair, Dr. Anne Meneley with assistance from our Treasurer, Dr. Flagg Miller.

We also presented our annual student paper prize to Mr. Ali Scotten for his paper, "Magic and Inter-Communal Relations in Sasanian Iraq: The Case of the Incantation Bowls." and acknowledged an honorable mention, Ms. Berna Yazici. An excerpt of Mr. Scotten's paper was published in the November, 2007 issue of Anthropology News under the title: "Incantation Bowls and Ritual Community in Sasanian Iraq. The full paper will be anthologized in a forthcoming book on Sassanian Iran.

The Middle East Section sponsored the following panels and events at the 2007 National Meeting under the direction of our annual program committee:

Dr. Jessica Winegar, Chair (Temple University)

Dr. Yorke Rowan (Notre Dame)

Dr. Paul Silverstein (Reed College)

Invited Sessions:

Addressing (In)justice at the Margins: Transnational Perspectives on the Destruction, Reconstruction and Re-Destruction of Lebanon

Organizer(s): Mara A Leichtman, Lucia Volk Chair(s)/Introduction: Augustus R Norton

Participant(s): Lucia Volk, Nadia Latif, Mara A Leichtman, Najib B Hourani

Discussant(s): Lara Deeb

Below the Radar of State Politics and Mainstream Media: Israeli and Palestinian Initiatives for Peace With Justice |

Organizer(s)/Chair(s): Gelya Frank, Steven Rousso-Schindler Participant(s): Haim Beliak, Amahl A Bishara, Avram S Bornstein, Jasmin Habib, Deborah Heifetz-Yahav, Jeff Halper, Laurie E King-Irani, Isis Nusair, Julie Peteet, Dan L Rabinowitz, Aseel Sawalha, Kenda Stewart

Discussant(s): Ted Swedenburg, Virginia R Dominguez

Workshops:

Developing Skills for Speaking to Journalists About the Middle East And Islam

Amahl A Bishara, Rochelle A Davis

Society for Practicing Anthropology with the Middle East Section

Practicing Peace and Justice: Engaged Anthropology, Activism and New Initiatives in Palestine/Israel

Jeff Halper, Haim Beliak, Kenda Stewart, Steven Rousso-Schindler |

Additionally, our program chair, Dr. Jessica Winegar and her program committee reviewed and accepted the following additional panels

Hierarchies of Difference: Historical Perspectives on Local, National, and Transnational Identity Formation and Inequalities in the Middle East.

Organized by Najwa Adra and Laurie King-Irani. Presenters: Najwa Adra, Fida Adely, Christa Salamandra, Delores Walters, Becky Schulthies

The Seen and the Unseen in the Egyptian Imagination.

Organized by Nicholas Hopkins and Reem Saad. Presenters: El-Sayed El-Aswad, Hania Sholkamy, Reem Saad, Elizabeth Coker, Hager El Hadidi, Nicholas Hopkins

Religion of Power, Power of Religion: The Case of Islam.

Organized by Farha Ghannam and Soraya Altorki. Presenters: Lara Deeb, Sherine Hafez, Emilio Spadola, Farha Ghannam, Petra Kuppinger, Lisa Wynn

The Language of the Public Sphere: Discrimination, Justice and the Negotiation of State Ideology in Turkish Cinema.

Organized by F. Gizem Zencirci. Participants: Alev Cinar, Seckin Ozdamar, Hakki Tas, F. Gizem Zencirci, Ipek Tureli

Dr. Winegar also constructed 2 panels of individually submitted papers and gave titles uniting them:

The Politics of Public Space in the Middle East.

Presenters: Jairan Sadeghi, Leslie Lewis, Barbara Michael, Hadas Yaron

Violence, Cultural Identity, and Fieldwork.

Presenters: David McDonald, Robert Brenneman, Diane King, Sami Hermez

Four of our members won scholarly book prizes this year, and many of our members continue to write actively for the popular press and appear on broadcast media to inform the general public about the relationship between Middle East culture and current events.

2. Future plans or activities

World events have brought some attention to the Section, and we have had incrementally increasing membership for some years. However, the Section hopes especially to increase its student membership, which seems to be an important area for growth. Interest in our Student Paper Prize has increased every year, and served as an important tool for recruiting student members.

The electronic peer-reviewed journal, *Cyber Orient*, edited by former Middle East Section President, Dr. Daniel Verisco, continues to be published on a regular basis with high-quality articles. The Section also has special arrangements with the journal *Anthropology of the Middle East*, published by Berghahn Press, with special discounts for Middle East Section members.

The Section continues to have close ties with the Middle East Studies Association of North America (MESA). Because MESA and the AAA meet back-to-back in the Fall of the year, it has been possible to sponsor joint panels in the past when the meetings were in close proximity, and it is hoped that this will continue in the future.

For now, the Middle East Section plans to continue with *Cyber Orient* as its principal journal. We have suggested to the AAA that the journal should be included in AnthroSource as soon as such a possibility is feasible. We believe that this may be an important method for peer-reviewed publishing for many smaller sections.

Our Section is already fairly inclusive, but we are continually reaching out to minority scholars and scholars from abroad.

Our student representative, Dr. Emilio Spadola, having happily received his Ph.D. and obtained a job is no longer eligible to serve in his student representative capacity, so an election will be held for a new student representative this summer. Dr. Spadola will

continue on the board in his second capacity as editor of the Section's *Anthropology Newsletter* column.

We will be replacing Dr. Andrew Gardner, our long-time webmaster, at his request this year. We thank him for his long-term service, which has provided us with a fine-looking web page and a great deal of organizational effort. Dr. Laurie King-Irani will also be stepping down as secretary to become Managing Editor of the *Journal of Palestine Studies*. We thank her for her years of service, and will be looking for another MES member to assume her post.

Dr. Lara Deeb of the University of California at Irvine has kindly agreed to be Program Chair for the 2008 Annual Meeting. We thank her in advance for the efforts of her and her committee.

3. Other Items.

As mentioned above, we would like to suggest that peer-reviewed electronic journals such as ours be included in AnthroSource. The electronic format is ideal for us at present. It is not only cost-effective, but it allows for the inclusion of images, sound files and even film. Moreover, it allows for the easy use of diacritics and foreign characters in publishing, which is desirable for a Middle East publication.

We find that the cost of food and drink in convention hotels is usurious. We would appreciate it if the AAA could, in negotiating hotel space, also negotiate prices for food and drink for official functions. We would prefer not to be tempted to sneak food and drink into the hotel. When a single cheese puff costs \$4.25, as in the Wardman Park Hotel, such temptations are great.

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Submitted: William O. Beeman, President 3/15/08