Greetings to the CMES community

I hope everyone had a good summer and a productive fall. We have an unprecedented five FLTAs with us for 2015-16, teaching four languages. They are: Yigit Savuran and Selin Durer (Turkish), Farnoush Saneei (Persian), Dinara Kaipova (Kazakh), and Amani Abdulwahed (Arabic). These courses continue to be taught under the aegis of Religious Studies. Religious Studies is now the home department for MES 45: Introduction to the Middle East. Sherene Seikaly replaces Paul Amar as the Chair of the Middle East Studies major. We owe Dr. Amar a debt of gratitude for his work in reorganizing the major and look forward to Dr. Seikaly’s leadership in reinvigorating MES at the undergraduate level.

We are pleased to welcome two new faculty members, Leila Shereen Sakr (Film and Media Studies) and Heather Badamo (Art History). Dr. Shereen Sakr received her Ph. D. in Media Arts + Practice from USC and is best known as the founder of R-Shief, a system for analyzing social network sites related to the Middle East. Dr. Badamo received her Ph. D. from the University of Michigan and studies warrior saints in the Eastern Mediterranean during the Middle Ages. We also joined by Elliot Wolfson (Religious Studies), an eminent authority on the Kabbala, who holds the Marshall and Jay Glazer Endowed Chair in Jewish Studies.

Three conferences or workshops are or will be held on campus this year. Adam Sabra organized a workshop on Political Theologies of Early Modern Islam, which was held on October 30 and 31 (for more details, see below). Paul Amar organized a workshop entitled Contemporary Iraq: Walls and Circuits, which was held on November 12 (see below). Finally, Paul Amar, Laila Shereen Sakr, and Sherene Seikaly are organizing a conference called After Tahrir: Egyptian Revolutionary Experiences and Future Visions to be held on January 22-26, 2016. It promises to be a very exciting event.

The R. Stephen Humphreys Distinguished Visiting Professor this year will be Michael Cook, Class of 1943 University Professor of Near Eastern Studies at Princeton University. Professor Cook is a leading expert on the formative period of Islam and has authored numerous books and articles on Islamic history, including most recently, Ancient Religions, Modern Politics: The Islamic Case in Comparative Perspective. He is the winner of the 2014 Holberg Prize, awarded to “a scholar who has made outstanding contributions to research in the arts and humanities, social science, law or theology, either within one of these fields or through interdisciplinary work.” He will deliver a public lecture on May 2, 2016 entitled, “Was the Rise of Islam a Black Swan Event?” Mark your calendars for what promises to be an engaging and enlightening talk.

All in all, this promises to be a very exciting year for CMES!

-Adam Sabra, Director, Center for Middle Eastern Studies
Kathleen Moore’s “Rethinking Shari’a: Voices of Islam in California”

Kathleen Moore’s fieldwork over the past two years has focused on what shari’a means for Muslims in California. The project is just beginning to yield conference papers, research publications and a public-facing media event. “Rethinking Shari’a: Voices of Islam in California,” appears in the December issue of BOOM Magazine, co-authored by Moore and her co-principal investigator, Associate Professor Mark Massoud of UC Santa Cruz. The article reveals new thinking about the meaning of shari’a in the everyday lives of Muslims in California. Proposals to ban shari’a, adopted in several other states across the nation, beg the question, “what is shari’a?” Varied responses to that question appear in this article, based on more than 100 semi-structured interviews. Themes of daily guidance, family, social justice, equality and inequality, Islamic living, excessively legalistic codes, and more emerge from the narratives of identity and learning religious values while unlearning media-driven stereotypes.

On October 24, 2015, at the Downtown Independent Theater in Los Angeles, Kathleen organized a public event that launched a new video and web site for this project. Produced by Emmy award winning director-producer Justin Mashouf, the video is HBO Def poet Mark Gonzales’ spoken word continued on p. 5

Professor Dwight Reynolds Across the Pond

Dwight Reynolds attended the Mamluk Studies conference in Liège, Belgium, in June, then flew to Granada, Spain, where he gave a presentation at the NEH Summer Institute The Alhambra and Spain’s Islamic Past, and then traveled on to Barcelona where he spent a fascinating month as a participant in the NEH Summer Institute Negotiating Identities: Expression and Representation in the Medieval Christian-Jewish-Muslim Mediterranean. While in Barcelona he met several times with Linda Jones (alumna of UCSB) and had a wonderful few days with her and her husband, Alvaro, traveling through the small medieval hilltop fortress towns such as Albarracín as well as Teruel, the jewel of mudéjar architecture. His research time in Barcelona was spent in archives looking through records of ‘Moorish’ and Jewish musicians and dancers performed in Aragon and Catalunya in the 13th to 15th centuries. Since his return to Santa Barbara, he has split his time between working on a book manuscript The Musical Heritage of al-Andalus and puttering away in his garden of drought-resistant, indigenous California plants that features a number of rare species native only to the Channel Islands. continued on p. 5
Contemporary Iraq: Walls and Circuits

This fall the Center for Middle East Studies hosted an exciting, interdisciplinary event on transnational and urban geographies of identity, militarization, and faith in contemporary Iraq.

This event, co-sponsored by UCSB’s Global Studies, Religious Studies and the Global Security Hub, addressed the urgent legacies and intriguing issues facing the people of Iraq since the withdrawal of US military forces and in the context of shifting cultural, geopolitical, and socio-economic challenges. Guests were enthralled by presentations that offered fresh grassroots perspectives on this country where scholarly fieldwork today is particularly challenging. Prof. Paul Amar, of the Global Studies Department and the Middle East Studies Executive Committee, organized and chaired the event.

The first presentation was entitled “Baghdad’s Deep Dilemma: Urban Segregation Under Occupation,” presented by Mona Damluji. Dr. Damluji’s presented a vividly illustrated lecture and a wealth of data that argued that the sectarian-based segregation that has shaped urbanism in Baghdad in the past decade is a direct outcome of the 2003 U.S.-led invasion and occupation of Iraq. She described today’s Baghdad as characterized by the normalization of concrete “security” blast-walls that choke urban circulation and sever communities. The notorious blast walls -- or “Bremer Walls” -- perpetuate and intensify conditions of urban segregation. As the summer’s surge of anti-government protests in Baghdad demonstrate. The short-sighted nature of this militarized solution to sectarian-based violence has proven to be a superficial and unsustainable fix to the deep dilemma of sectarian segregation codified in Iraq’s political system. Her presentation began and ended by examining the summer 2015 mass protests in the streets of Baghdad, which demanded improved public services and the dismantlement of the sectarian walls, through the story of the capital city’s fragmentation between 2006 and 2007.

The second presentation was entitled “Remaking Transnational Shiism in Contemporary Iraq: Economic and Religious Geographies on the Pilgrim’s Road to Karbala,” presented by Brazilian scholar Paulo Hili Pinto. Dr. Pinto’s presentation traced the new routes, economies, and modes of expressive embodiment of Shi’a religious pilgrims travelling from within Iraq as well as from Iran, Bahrain, India, Syria and across the world to the holy city of Karbala. Demonstrating the value of immersive ethnographic methods, Dr. Pinto evaluated the shifting representations, architectures and ritual expressions of pilgrim circuits. His lavish photography and fascinating fieldwork narratives revealed the internal complexities and varieties of Shi’a expressive practices, which he argued produce a sense of Shi’a community in a time of persecution, while also marking sharp distinctions and forms of privilege internal to this Shi’a community.

continued on p. 5
Men of Capital: Scarcity and Economy in Mandate Palestine
A New Book by UCSB History’s Sherene Seikaly

Men of Capital examines British-ruled Palestine in the 1930s and 1940s through a focus on economy. In a departure from the expected histories of Palestine, this book illuminates dynamic class constructions that aimed to shape a pan-Arab utopia in terms of free trade, profit accumulation, and private property. And in so doing, it positions Palestine and Palestinians in the larger world of Arab thought and social life, moving attention away from the limiting debates of Zionist–Palestinian conflict.

Reading Palestinian business periodicals, records, and correspondence, Sherene Seikaly reveals how capital accumulation was central to the conception of the ideal “social man.” Here we meet a diverse set of characters—the man of capital, the frugal wife, the law-abiding Bedouin, the unemployed youth, and the abundant farmer—in new spaces like the black market, cafes and cinemas, and the idyllic Arab home. Seikaly also traces how British colonial institutions and policies regulated wartime austerity regimes, mapping the shortages of basic goods—such as the vegetable crisis of 1940—to the broader material disparities among Palestinians and European Jews. Ultimately, she shows that the economic is as central to social management as the political, and that an exclusive focus on national claims and conflicts hides the more complex changes of social life in Palestine.

- Sherene Seikaly, Department of History, UCSB

Political Theologies of Medieval and Early Modern Islam

This event, which was organized by Adam Sabra (History) and sponsored by CMES, the King Abdul Aziz Ibn Saud Chair in Islamic Studies, the Department of History, and the College of Letters & Science, was held in the McCune Conference Room on October 30 and 31, 2016. The workshop brought together eleven scholars to discuss the political role of Sufism in the thirteenth to sixteenth centuries, ranging from Islamic Spain and the Maghrib to the Ottoman Empire and Safavid Iran. The program highlighted recent developments in the field of pre-modern Middle Eastern history, which focus on the development of concepts in sacred kingship in early modern Muslim states.

The participants, who came from a variety of American universities, as well as the University of London and the American University of Beirut, addressed topics as diverse as courtly themes in Sufi poetry, mystical theology, the role of animals in constructing theories of human society, the political significance of occult sciences such as letrism and astrology, the construction of royal shrines on the model of Sufi shrines, and the use of Sufi forms of sociability to structure relations at court.

One persistent theme was theorization and expression of sovereignty. In particular, a number of participants addressed the consequences of the Mongol and Timurid invasions in creating a crisis in the traditional Islamic models of sovereignty. The many competing post-Mongol dynasties were obliged to invent new ways theorizing the role of the sovereign, a challenge the proved particularly fertile for political theory in this period.

- Adam Sabra, Department of History, UCSB
Moore  
continued from p. 2

performance of the data derived from the interviews, framed by the question, “How do you govern the sacred?” The event was preceded by a reception, at which art by Southern California artists who are Muslim was on display, inspired by the question, what does *shari’a* mean? Information about the research project, including the video, is accessible at www.shariarevoiced.org.

Kathleen presented a conference paper at the Society for the Scientific Study of Religion conference in Newport Beach that same day. The paper is entitled “The Lived Experience of *Shari’a* by California Muslims.”

- Kathleen Moore, Department of Religious Studies, UCSB

Reynolds  
continued from p. 2


- Dwight Reynolds, Department of Religious Studies, UCSB

Iraq  
continued from p. 3

These distinct forms of practice cluster around the spectacular sonic soundscapes of the Iranian groups, or the Ferrari-branded Kuwaiti youth pilgrims, or the more quietly devout Iraqis contemplating the ritual reenactments of Shi’a sacred histories. Dr. Pinto’s talk underlined that spatial and economic transformations tied to these booming pilgrimage formations are thoroughly remaking the shrines, neighborhoods and markets of southern Iraq. He highlighted the role played by new cell phone photography, video media and self-broadcasting practices, and the centrality of charismatic Muftis, martyrs, and Iraqi political leaders in new structures of iconic representation as well as innovative identity articulations between nation, sect, region, and globe.