Message from the Chairman

Our department offers a unique opportunity to explore the cultural elements that are shared by the people of the Middle East. I wish to see us function as a community of scholars who not only have expertise in the areas of our specialization: language, literature and culture of a particular region, e.g. Egypt, Israel, Iran, Turkey, but also express interest in the interplay of these cultures. I would like to see us acquaint ourselves with the exceedingly rich tapestry which comprises the region, focusing on the elements in common which help define the nature of Middle Eastern Culture.

Growing awareness of cultural and linguistic interconnections, political problems of the area aside, will help us to define the region, and also enrich us as researchers, scholars and teachers. It is time that we cease to view each of our areas of study in splendid isolation, and begin to examine the shared aspects of the language, literature and culture; the process of cultural transmission; the role of religion and politics in such transmission; the political and religious forces that tend to put a strain on these interconnections: the very process of push and pull.

To begin this new era of interest in one another’s work and to provide the opportunity for such intellectual sharing I have proposed a monthly brown bag lunch for faculty and graduate students the first which is planned for October 21st and a symposium on the material culture of the Middle East which is scheduled for March 3, 1999. I hope that we all avail ourselves the opportunity for such renewed intellectual sharing, with the hope of fostering an invigorating and exciting climate of intellectual exchange.

In this connection, I am pleased that we share an excellent, mutual, beneficial working relationship with the Center for Middle Eastern Studies under the able directorship of Professor Abraham Marcus and his dedicated staff, which provides additional opportunities to faculty and students.

I also wish to acknowledge our own highly professional, efficient and pleasant administrative staff: Cathy Kimbrough, Trudie Redding and our three work studies, Leslie Garner, Kamilah Kelly and Van Pham who keep our office running smoothly.

I am proud of our department and its individual members, and trust that in the coming year it will achieve the level of prominence, that it deserves for the vital role it plays in the university community, the community at large and on national and international levels.

Harold Liebowitz
Chairman
Special Events & Upcoming Talks

Several members of the department will be traveling to give talks and presentations in the near future. Dr. Moh Ghanoonparvar, who is currently on research leave for the Fall 1998 semester, will be traveling to Chicago to participate in the 1998 Annual Meeting of Middle Eastern Studies on December 2-6.

Also in December, Dr. Akel Kahera will be traveling to Cairo, Egypt to present a paper at the International Association for Study of Traditional Environments (IASTE) conference. The topic of Dr. Kahera’s paper will be Building, Technology and Tradition. Accompanying him will be Bob Mugerauer who is from the University’s Department of Architecture and Philosophy.

Kamran Aghaie will be presenting a paper at the Annual Conference for the Middle Eastern Studies Association of North America, which is being held in Chicago December 3-6. The topic of Kamran’s paper is “Gender Roles as Expressed through Public Performances of Muharram Rituals in Post-Revolutionary Iran.”

What’s New in the MELC Office?

There have been several new additions to the department office. To brighten up your day, there is fresh coffee available every morning to help get your day started. The coffee pot can be found behind the front desk, and cream and sugar are also available. When you fix yourself a hot cup in the mornings you can note the new bulletin board above the coffee pot to check out any upcoming events that are happening in MELC. There you will find a calendar of events and also special postings. After you have fixed yourself a nice hot cup of coffee, you will notice that there have been new mail boxes that are located inside of the office itself for faculty members. This is where the bulk of your mail will be put. There are also little binder clips attached for messages. The mail boxes out in the hall are primarily to be used by students leaving notes for the professors.

MELC’s New Tajiki Program

In the Spring 1998 Semester, MELC offered the first Tajiki language program taught at a North American university. Five students participated in Dr. Michael Hillmann’s “Basic Tajiki” course last spring, while four students are participating in this fall’s intermediate “Tajiki Texts” course. One participant, Geography Ph.D. candidate William Rowe received a grant to study Tajiki during the summer at University of Washington and plans to conduct dissertation research in Central Asia beginning in January. Course instructor Michael Hillmann has just signed a publisher’s contract for Tajiki Basics, the first textbook for the language written for American students.
There are several new people who have been hired by MELC. Two of them are faculty members, Kamran Scott Aghaie and Monica Yaniv. Kamran Aghaie came from University of California at Los Angeles. He has taken over teaching some of Dr. Abou El Fadl’s courses, who is currently on leave. Kamran brings the theories and methodologies of History and Religious studies to bare upon Islamic Studies. His main area of specialization is the historical development of Shi‘i symbols and rituals. Broader areas of interest include Islamic history, gender studies, history of religions and economic history. Kamran is currently working on his Ph.D in Middle Eastern History.

Monica Yaniv graduated from Hebrew University in Jerusalem with a Bachelor’s Degree in Political Science, World History, Jewish History, and a Teacher’s Certificate. She has taught in Israel and the United States since 1971. In both countries she has taught the Hebrew language to all ages and she has a vast experience encouraging students to excel and enjoy speaking Hebrew. She was a coordinator for Hebrew Language Studies in several schools and she helped develop the curriculum for the Hebrew language. Monica Yaniv also taught Hebrew as a Second Language to new immigrants to Israel. Yaniv was also a coordinator for the Merkaz Program which uses games, movies, drama, and interactive activities to enhance learning. She is looking forward to working with the University community and with the community at large to promote and further develop the local Hebrew Studies Programs.

You may have also noticed three new faces sitting at the front desk in the office. These are the three work studies. On Monday and Friday mornings, Van Pham can be seen in the office. She is an undeclared liberal arts freshman major. She is from Rockport Texas and hopes to be successful and to lead a relatively quiet life. On Tuesdays and Thursdays you will see Kamilah Kelly. Kamilah is a junior majoring in sociology and minoring in business. On Monday, Wednesday and Friday afternoons you will see Leslie Garner in the office. She is also a junior majoring in government/pre-law and minoring in history. Leslie is Taylor, Texas.

Visiting Scholars to the University

Dr. Simin Karimi, Associate Professor of Linguistics at the University of Arizona, has been named Visiting Scholar in Persian Studies for 1998-1999. Professor Karimi plans to spend part of the fall semester in residence at UT Austin, meeting with Persian Studies graduate students and conducting research on Persian linguistics. She has a visiting scholar appointment at Massachusetts Institute of Technology in the spring.
Faculty Highlights

In each newsletter MELC wishes to highlight the activities and accomplishments of an individual faculty member. In this issue Yaron Shemer will be featured.

Yaron Shemer has been teaching language and film courses at UT Austin since 1991. He received his B.F.A. in Film and Television in 1983 from Tel Aviv University, Israel and received his M.A. in 1991 from the Department of Radio/Television/Film at the University of Texas at Austin.

Yaron Shemer is currently on the SAT II Committee for Modern Hebrew which develops testing materials for high-school students of Hebrew.

Shemer's interest lies in the production and development of educational audio-visual materials. His work experience, coupled with the films and educational programs he developed, have evolved from his ambition to enrich, supplement, and enhance the learning experience by non-traditional methods of instruction.

From 1983 to 1986 Professor Shemer was involved in various capacities in developing and producing TV programs for Israel Educational Television. Professor Shemer produced and developed video and film programs, both in the U.S. and in Israel, including "The Road to Peace: Israelis and Palestinians" (1994), "Prospects for Peace in the Middle East" (1992) (also with B.J. Fernea), "Pilgrimage of Remembrance: Jews in Poland" (1988), "Indebted Prisoner" (1986) and "Dancing Braille" (1983).

In the last few years, Shemer has organized several Israeli Film Festivals in Austin and Milwaukee. He is currently working on a collection of memoirs of the '67 War. Drawing upon interviews with ten Israeli and Arab Writers who experienced the war as either children or teenagers to write their war memoirs for this collection.

Esther Raizen Heads Research Team

Dr. Esther Raizen has been appointed coordinator of the Hebrew language program. She is also a research associate at the UT Linguistics Research Center, and the Undergraduate Advisor of the Center for Middle Eastern Studies. With $75,000 in start-up funds provided by the UT Vision Plan, she is now heading a research team which develops Internet-based tools to be used by students and scholars of Hebrew linguistics. A prototype of the tool set is scheduled to be posted for general use by the end of 1999. Among the tools are a bibliography compiler, interactive Hebrew texts, lexical generators, and video clips recording language use by native and non-native speakers of Hebrew.
Recent Lectures Given by Faculty Members

Congratulations to Dr. Zilla Goodman, Dr. Hillmann, Dr. Kahera and Dr. Raizen

Dr. Zilla Goodman was a panelist in a session entitled “Teaching Hebrew Literature in Translation,” and chaired a session on Contemporary Hebrew Literature at the National Association of Professors of Hebrew at the Jewish Theological Seminary in New York in June 1998. In January she was an invited participant in a colloquium on the same subject at University of Arizona.


Dr. Akel Kahera delivered a Melon Lecture entitled, “From Whence cometh the Fatwa” at Princeton University in the Spring of 1998. Professor Kahera also delivered a public lecture entitled “The Structure of Created Existence” at the University of Texas School of Architecture on the work of the late Egyptian architect, Hassan Fathy.

Dr. Esther Raizen along with Professor Yaron Shemer developed a Hebrew multi-media packet which includes a handbook and an interactive CD, is now being considered for publication by an academic press. Professor Raizen presented the Hebrew instruction materials developed at UT at a number of workshops in the course of 1998, among them a CARLA (Center for Advanced Research on Language Acquisition) workshop in Minnesota where she was an invited speaker.

Student News

Ph.D. candidate Dylan Stricklin-Oehler, who has recently moved with her family to New Jersey, is writing her dissertation on Forugh Farrokhzad’s poetry. Stricklin-Oehler spent part of the fall of 1997 in Tehran conducting dissertation research Ph.D. student Parichehr Moin, who passed her qualifying examinations last spring and spent the summer in Tehran, will begin work on a dissertation on Nima Yushij in the spring of 1999. Ph.D.student Ramin Sarraf, who wrote his M.A. thesis in 1997-1998 on stress patterns in Persian, has been named Assistant Instructor in Persian for 1998-1999. M.A. student Chad Kia, who spent 1997-1998 as a fellowship student at the Center for the Study of Arabic Abroad in Cairo, is writing his M.A. thesis this fall on contemporary Persian Fiction. M.A. student Csaba Peter Keszthelyi, who is studying Turkish and Tajjiki as well as Persian, spent part of the summer conducting research in Central Asia. Ann Dehnisch passed her qualifying exams last December and is working on a Ph.D. dissertation on the Iron Age Pottery from Tel Yin’am, Israel.
More Faculty News

In the Spring of 1998 Akel Kahera received the 1998 Bayard Didge Dertation Award for best dissertation in Near Eastern Studies from Princeton University. He has also published an article “Damages in Islamic Law” in May 1998 for the Journal of Islamic Law and Society. Dr. Kahera also received a University Research Grant to document the work of Hassan Fathy at Abiqui, New Mexico in the Fall of 1998.

Michael Hillmann spent the Fall 1997 as a visiting scholar at the Center for Iranian Studies at University of Paris 3 (Sorbonne Nouvelle), where, with the support of a 1997-1998 Faculty Research Assignment, he finished researching a monograph called The Blind Owl as Narrative, which he hopes to publish by late 1999. During his tenure at University of Paris, Hillmann gave two lectures on literature and art.

Moh Ghanoonparvar is a Dean’s Fellow and is on research leave for Fall semester 1998. He is currently working on a book-length project dealing with literary theory and the process of translation. He is also editing several volumes of translations from modern Persian literature. His translation of Sadeq Hedayat’s satirical work, The Myth of Creation, is scheduled for publication in 1998. Dr. Moh’s book In a Persian Mirror has been recently translated into Persian and will be published in Iran. He is also continuing his work with Dr. Mohammad Mehdi Khorrami of New York University on a series of interactive computer-based programs for Persian language instruction. This fall, he has organized a concert and poetry reading by the Iranian-born Austin resident artist, Mohsen Jamal.

In 1998 Esther Raizen developed Let’s Talk, a conversational practice tool, with the support of a FASTTex award (UT, Apple and Compaq), is now posted on the Web. Dr. Raizen’s book Biblical Hebrew: An Analytical Introduction (written with W.P. Lehmann and H.J. Hewitt) will be published in the Spring of 1999 by Wings Press of San Antonio. Publication is supported by a University Cooperative Society Subvention grant, awarded to Raizen in 1998. Her translation of Haim Gouri’s “Prayer” was published in a special 1998 double issue of Modern Hebrew Literature, celebrating fifty years of Hebrew literature.

Harold Liebowitz who became the chairman of the department on September 1, 1998, directs the university's archaeological excavation in Israel. His book, Tel Yin’am I: The Late Bronze Age, will be published in the series Studies in Archaeology the Texas Archaeological Research Laboratory of the University of Texas. An article on a ceramic cat

Persian Period
Ceramic Cat
from Khirbet
Beth Gan
from Khirbet Beth Gan, Israel, co-authored with his graduate student Ann Dehnisch will be published in the forthcoming issue of *Israel Exploration Journal*. Objects from Professor Liebowitz's excavations at Tel Yin'am were on special exhibit at the Archaeology Fair at the Texas Archaeological Research Laboratory on the grounds at the J.J. Pickle Center, Austin.

**Advising News**

There have been new advisors added to both MELC's undergraduate and graduate divisions. Dr. Faegheh Shirazi-Mahajan will be the undergraduate advisor for the next four years replacing Dr. Aman Attieh. The new graduate advisor for 1998-1999 is Dr. Avraham Zilkha who replaced Dr. Michael Hillmann.

**Trudy Redding to Work Orange Halloween**

On October 25th Trudie Redding is going to work the annual Orange Halloween that is held at the Frank Erwin Center. This event is held especially for those children of University employees to enable them to enjoy a safe Halloween, and not have to go trick-or-treating in strange neighborhoods. Some local Austin schools are also invited to join in on the festivities. Volunteers from student organizations also participate in this event to help make Halloween more fun for the children. Interested parties contact http://dpweb1.dp.utexas.edu.html.