



From the Editor

It is my pleasure to introduce Heather Ferguson, associate professor of history at Claremont McKenna College, the new editor of *RoMES*. Dr. Ferguson will begin officially on 1 July 2017. In the meantime, Ashleigh Breske, the current managing editor, and I will be working with Heather to insure a smooth transition. For those readers who have not had the chance to meet Heather or become acquainted with her work, I will say more below about her impressive credentials. But first, I want to glance back briefly on my term as editor.

When Gregory Starrett handed off *RoMES* to me in the summer of 2012, I had just retired from Emory University. Friends and colleagues who learned that within a month of retirement I had become a journal editor concluded that I hadn't retired after all, just as they suspected. And truly, that was probably inevitable on my part. The Arab Spring was beginning to flower and spread—or so it seemed. The *RoMES* office at UNC Charlotte under Gregg's able leadership was brimming with books published each year on all aspects of Middle East studies. Dozens of new books on the Middle East from all disciplines and genres were received there each month, processed, and sent on to reviewers selected by associate editors. What does a retiree want to do but read books—and maybe a little gardening? I saw it as a veritable feast of information and scholarship on the Middle East in a room to which I would soon have the key.

Thus, in 2012, *RoMES* production moved from UNCC to Virginia Tech, where I was able to arrange for a small office, a third-floor walkup, and a generous commitment of office supplies and operating expenses met by the Department of Religion and Culture. Then, as in previous decades, *RoMES* was produced by a minimal staff: a faculty editor who might have a reduced teaching load as compensation and a part time assistant. Typesetting until recently was hired out to Nadia Hlibka, an employee at the MESA office in

Tucson who did beautiful work using InDesign software. The first two years she and I proofed copy over the phone, line of text by line. For the summer issues, the typesetter, who spent time away from home at a summer camp with no electricity, read PDF proofs with me at one end of the line in a parking lot with her computer plugged into the cigarette lighter, car motor running. It was hectic but not devoid of humor and fun. Somehow we got it done.

Those first two years I was assisted by Amanda Wright Cron, a graduate student in English at Virginia Tech. *RoMES*'s fortune changed in 2014 when MESA negotiated a new contract with Cambridge University Press. Production, including copy editing, typesetting, and sending proofs to authors, was handled by CUP in New York. Now a digital only publication, *RoMES* required a managing editor with modern publishing savvy and experience working with both authors and publishers. Christine Calorusso had such experience and office management skills. She was eventually replaced by an equally skilled and experienced graduate student with academic journal editing experience, Ashleigh Breske. Ashleigh is an amazing managing editor. She has reorganized the digital files and procedures for work with the Production Department at CUP. I am deeply indebted to all three student editors, especially Ashleigh, for helping me to give the impression that I know something about journal editing. I would also like to thank the many associate editors, too numerous to thank individually, who took on the otherwise thankless task of providing constructive comment on the reviews and articles *RoMES* publishes in so many fields and disciplines.

As I was setting up shop and staffing an office at Virginia Tech, *RoMES* was fortunate to attract several articles, reports, and reviews of books and films on politics and the arts and other humanistic responses generated by the revolution that was going on in the Arab world and beyond. But the "spring" never happened in some states such as Syria or quickly disintegrated in others such as Egypt. Scholarly, and especially media interest, swerved toward postmortem themes and explanations: the outside looking in. But there was also an inside looking out, expressing cultural commentary coming out of the Middle East on what was happening, for example, by means of popular media such as graffiti, theatre, music, and poetry. During the half decade of my tenure as editor, Middle East studies has also been challenged and constricted increasingly by a rising tide of nationalism and nativism, and rampant Islamophobia in politics and populist movements. The new editor will take over *RoMES* in a much different, and in some ways darker, Middle East and Western attitudes toward the Middle East than was the case in 2012.

Heather Ferguson began her academic career at La Sierra University in Riverside, California, with a major in Religion and Literature. The Middle East became her focus at the University of Texas at Austin where she wrote a thesis on cultural construction in Jordan, a social history of craft workers. She earned a PhD at the University of California, Berkeley under the direction of Beshara Doumani. Her book, *The Proper Order of Things: Language, Power and Law in Ottoman Administrative Discourses* is under contract with Stanford University Press. Her numerous journal articles, chapters in books, and book reviews focus on the Ottoman Empire and early modern Turkey. Her research and editing tool kit includes Ottoman and modern Turkish, Arabic, Persian, and Hebrew.

Heather brings to RoMES five years of experience as Associate Editor of *The International Journal of Islamic Architecture*, as well as briefer roles as Associate Editor of the *International Journal of the Humanities* and Book Review Editor for the *Middle East Cultural and Social History Association*. In our conversations about editing RoMES and working with authors and how to develop a special niche for a journal in a swelling sea of online publications, we discovered a professional kinship. Her vision for RoMES is articulated in a larger reflection on MESA's existing publication "pathways," now and in the past, including the *International Journal of Middle East Studies (IJMES)* and the newsletter, now in greatly expanded form, *Issues in Middle East Studies (IMES)*. RoMES's pathway forward within this larger vision is to build on the more interactive kinds of articles, such as short papers on common problems from different disciplinary perspectives, and workshops, especially pedagogical discussions on teaching about the Middle East in the digital age. One of her many ideas about future pathways for RoMES is expressed in an unpublished communication: "From artists to activists, film makers to film subjects, hip hop to taggers, sermons to poetry slams, prayer to dance—the cultural productions of the MENA, EuroAsian, and diasporic communities serve as a counterpoint to an excessive focus on violence and 'extremism' in public discourse."

Editors of journals, especially academic journals, do not hire their successors, nor do they own the publications they work for. Nevertheless, in a very deep, personal sense, RoMES has been an essential part of my being for the past five years—every day I opened my email, found a typo, got an author's meaning wrong in the course of editing, or received messages from readers who took the time to thank me and the journal for publishing particular pieces on subjects deemed important. I am grateful to the MESA Board of Directors and the Secretariat—especially Amy Newhall—as well as Ann Avouris and her production staff at Cambridge University Press for

allowing me and helping me to edit the *Review of Middle East Studies*. I will hand the editorship off to Heather Ferguson with utter confidence that it will be in very good hands. ✂

Richard C. Martin
Editor