



From the Editor

This issue of *RoMES* has been edited in a national atmosphere of anti-Muslim rhetoric, openly expressed by several candidates during the presidential primaries. Now the election campaign has moved to the appointment, by President-Elect, Donald J. Trump, of cabinet members and close advisors, many of whom share his views of the Middle East and its diverse population. And it does not look good for Muslims in America, including Muslims who are U.S. citizens. Along with Hispanics, African Americans, and Jews, Muslims—and indeed the Middle East as such—are regarded as problems that President-Elect Trump seems intent on doing something about. It is a view of Islam and the Middle East shared increasingly in word and deed by a sizeable and vocal portion of the electorate. What are we to make of the possibility of foreign and domestic policy being crafted by the likes of John R. Bolton, who associates Islam with jihadism and is an admirer of the Islamophobic writings of Robert Spencer? Will there be any tolerance in the new Trump administration of debate and the free exchange of ideas on the need for education about and understanding of the Middle East? The importance of this question relates to the growing population of naturalized and second generation citizens of Middle Eastern origins now living in the U.S. The Middle East is *here*, and contributing to American culture, religious life, economy, and citizenship.

By the time this issue becomes available online, many of the top posts in the new administration will have been filled. But serious questions for Middle East studies will no doubt remain. What will be the impact of the election on federal and state support for education, research, and area studies? Will some university administrators, especially if they are pressured by state legislators and boards of trustees, become less willing to protect the legal and constitutional rights to free speech of students and faculty? MESA's Committee on Academic Freedom (CAF) wrote twenty-three letters last year to governments and universities on behalf of colleagues whose academic freedom had been denied; this year the number of letters is

fifty-seven, and counting. Will there be more bad news for Middle East studies like the Department of Education's announcement (under the Obama administration!) that it will no longer fund the Center for Arabic Studies Abroad (CASA)?

We are entering uncharted, if not entirely unfamiliar, waters on the eve of the New Year. Despite different strongly held views among scholars and specialists in Middle East studies, we are all stakeholders in a vital area of studies whose future cannot be taken for granted.

Editor's note. The current issue is coming out sooner than usual after volume 50 (1). When RoMES converted to digital-only publication with Cambridge Journals Online two years ago, delays in publication were difficult to avoid. The current and previous issue are dated 2016. Our goal is to bring out the February 2017 issue, volume 51 (1), on time or very close to it. ✦

Richard C. Martin
Editor