

NMC NEWS

NEAR & MIDDLE EASTERN CIVILIZATIONS

THE HISTORY OF MODERN SYRIA

NMC's Professor James A. Reilly shares thoughts about writing a history book aimed at reaching an audience beyond academia

FUTURE HOME FOR NMC

The university has released plans for a new building to be the future home of NMC

RESEARCH SPOTLIGHT

NMC students and postdoctoral fellows share what attracted them to the department, their current projects, and their plans for the future



Near & Middle Eastern Civilizations UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO

Chair's Message

The start of a new year, and decade, presents opportunities to mark new beginnings, declare new resolutions and voice hopes for a new and better future. It also offers an occasion to pause and reflect on the year that has passed. For Near & Middle Eastern Civilizations (NMC), 2019 was an eventful year, and this issue of our newsletter provides a snapshot, highlighting some of the research activities of our faculty and students, and the important societal contributions of our alumni.

Professor James Reilly's new book grapples with the devastating, ongoing civil conflict in Syria, and demonstrates the importance of historical context and perspective in providing critical insight into this otherwise unfathomable conflict. A historic conference on Ibadism celebrating the remarkable pluralism within Islam; the participation of NMC archaeologists in public outreach events, most notably the wildly popular Science Rendezvous, which annually draws thousands of eager, aspiring students; and a student project reconstructing a Bronze Age Syrian tomb: these events accentuate the wide-ranging experientially rich learning opportunities in NMC.

Exciting discoveries can also occur in unexpected places, as PhD candidate Tracy Spurrier learned while studying ancient historical texts housed in Robarts Library, and SSHRC Postdoctoral Fellow Moujan Matin encountered investigating the early history of craft production technology. Our graduates, meanwhile, are distinguishing themselves in the "real" world, forging exciting new career paths, such as BA graduate Zubaida Abdul Hakim Taupan in the dynamic field of Islamic Art, and Noha Aboueldahab, who now finds herself at the intersection of human rights and international law as an authority on transitional justice. NMC's future looks bright as we look forward to a new home in a stunning cultural hub planned for 90 Queen's Park Crescent, facing one of the city's more prominent public spaces across from the Ontario Provincial Legislature Building.

Transitions also bring partings, and this past year saw the retirement of long-standing and dearly beloved colleagues, Anna Sousa, Maria Brosius and Linda Northrup, while we grieve the passing of Professors Paul Dion, Eleazar (Elie) Birnbaum and Richard Blackburn.

We hope you enjoy this issue and will continue to support NMC and its interdisciplinary programs.

Yours sincerely,

Dr. Timothy Harrison

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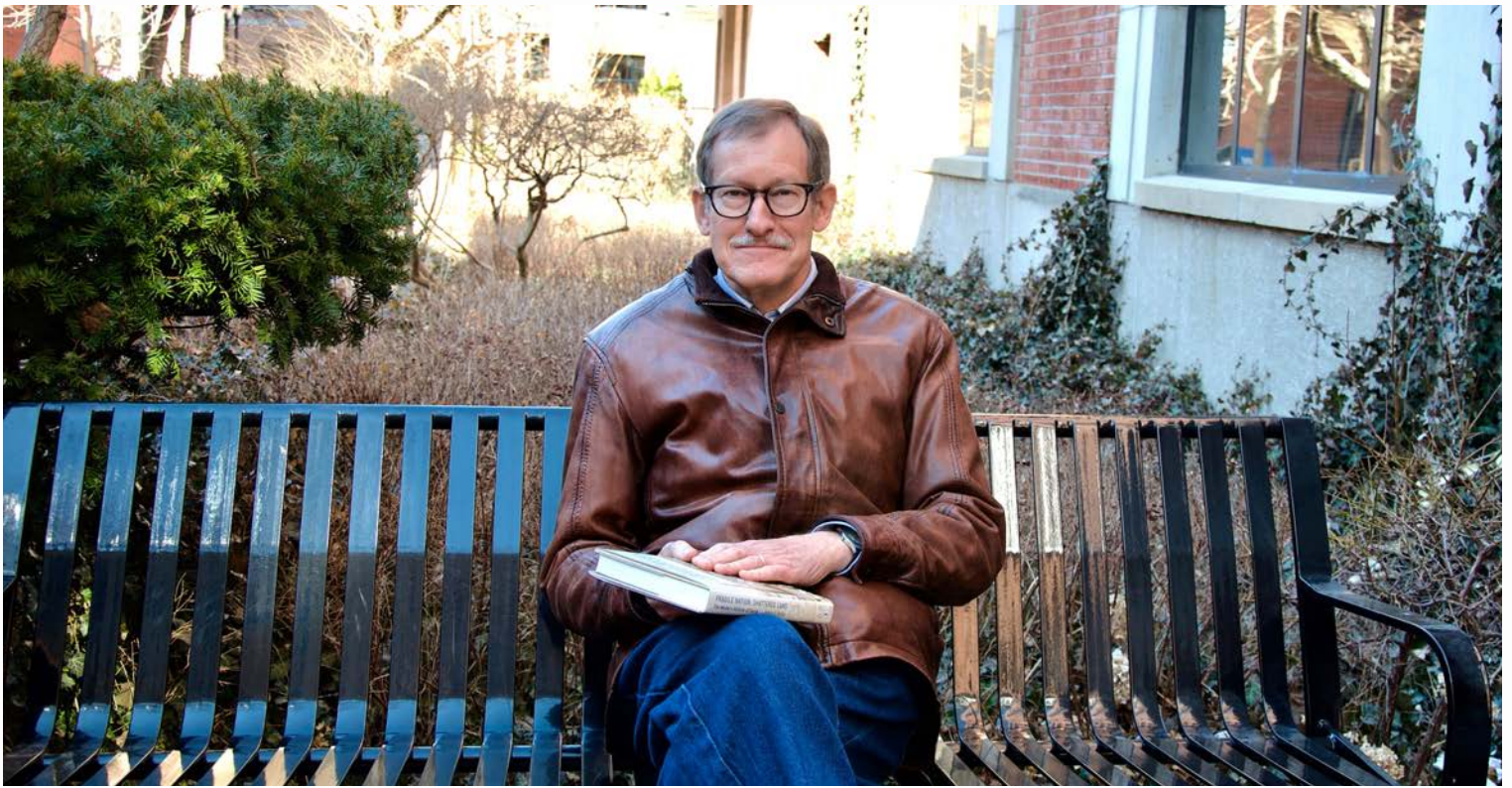


PHOTO: DIANA TYSZKO

New Book on Modern Syria – a Rich History and an Uncertain Future

By Jovana Jankovic

As an undergraduate student at Georgetown University in the 1970s, James Reilly was interested in classical archeology when he went to Lebanon to study at the American University in Beirut.

“I was living in the dormitories, my roommate was a Saudi and there were Palestinians and Iraqis across the hall,” says Reilly, now a professor in NMC.

“I had come from a fairly homogeneous American background, and they had experiences and perspectives that were so new to me.”

Along with his new friendships, Reilly also experienced the breakout of the Lebanese civil war in 1975, which further piqued his interests in the history, politics and peoples of the Middle East.

Fascinated, he quickly changed the trajectory of his studies and has since built a career as an acclaimed historian of the modern Middle East, particularly the Ottoman Empire, Lebanon and Syria.

But Reilly's new book about modern Syria isn't an academic work. *Fragile Nation, Shattered Land* aims to reach a wide audience with an accessible portrait of Syria, a country with a rich past and, at the moment, a very uncertain future.

“I wanted to talk not only about politics, conflicts and institutions in this book, but also about culture and intellectual life, so readers could understand that Syria — whether 200 years ago or today — is a society that is full of people who think, create, enjoy life and suffer,” says Reilly.

A massive and violent conflict has engulfed Syria since 2011. Half of the country's people have been displaced from their homes and an estimated two per cent of the population — nearly 500,000 people — have lost their lives. Many Syrian refugees have ended up here in Toronto.

A number of different groups are vying for power. While the dominant narrative often frames the clash as one of authoritarian dictator Bashar Al-Assad versus the people, less is discussed about the roles of the Kurds, the Muslim Brotherhood, ISIS, various rival rebel groups, the Saudis, the United States, Israel and Russia.

"Al-Assad's regime is by any measure a terrible regime," says Reilly. "But there are many Syrians who equally fear the alternative. Whether by default or through resignation, they passively or actively support the regime, or at least oppose the armed opposition to the regime."

Syrians caught in the middle of this multi-sided conflict "very often don't have choices," says Reilly. "They just have to follow the path of least resistance."

Reilly and his colleagues have been "appalled by the bloodshed and the conflict that has engulfed Syria since 2011," he says.

"At first, I couldn't think of anything that I, as a historian, could bring to the public discussion, which focuses on the here-and-now and on scenarios for the future. But then I realized perhaps we could draw connections between the historical phenomena that we study and some of the underlying issues in Syria.

"Writing something that wasn't only for other specialists was important," says Reilly. "If we want to put something out there for more general use, it has to be addressed to a general audience."

Reilly hopes readers of his book will come away with an appreciation of the usefulness of history in helping us comprehend the present — what is past is neither gone nor forgotten, but continues to influence "the way in which people understand themselves and their choices," he says.

"I WANTED TO TALK NOT ONLY ABOUT POLITICS, CONFLICTS AND INSTITUTIONS IN THIS BOOK, BUT ALSO ABOUT CULTURE AND INTELLECTUAL LIFE."

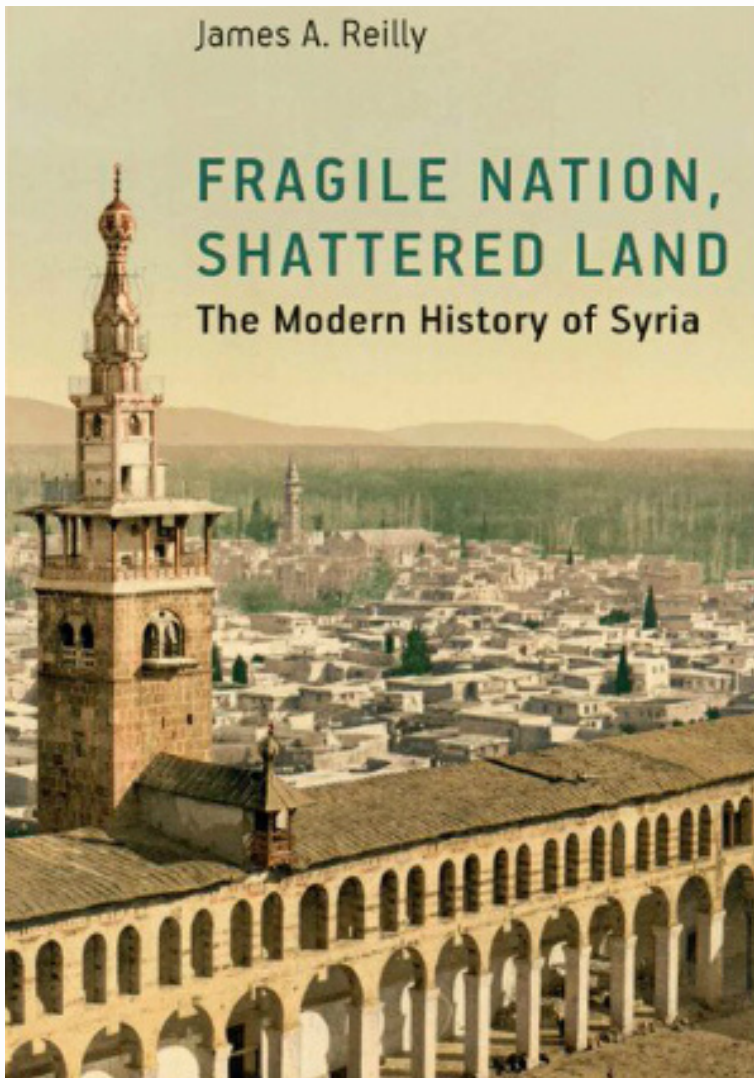
To contextualize the current situation, Reilly's book examines the last three centuries of the region, tracing global developments in modernity, early industrialism, nation-state building and world wars alongside events and communities specific to the region. The book delves into everything from leisure activities in various eras to the rise of literacy, the role of religion in public life, rural-urban tensions, coast-interior rivalries and Syria's relationships with various external powers including the Ottoman Empire, Israel, Egypt and France.

Reilly credits his students with helping him work through some of the issues and narratives in his book. "A lot of the

themes I develop in the book come from years of teaching undergraduate courses because, to effectively teach, you have to construct a narrative that is not only accessible but also one that opens up questions rather than closes them down," says Reilly.

"Being able to teach at U of T for 30-plus years, where we have excellent students, prepared me to write a book like this. My students have brought things up to me that have made me confront gaps in my own knowledge, or they've asked questions I had not thought of."

“IS THERE ANYTHING WE, AS HISTORIANS, CAN DO?”



Reilly considers dispelling myths about the Middle East to be one contribution a historian like him can make to effect change.

“People only think of the Middle East as a place that’s full of troubles, a place of conflict. That’s a very simplistic and ahistorical notion. Instead, in my teaching and in this book, I ask: ‘What happened? Who did what? What were the consequences?’ without appearing to be partisan. There are ethnic or other stereotypes that can get in the way of understanding why people do what they do, and why they live the way they live.

“In teaching history, you’re deconstructing, but also trying to reconstruct a story so that people feel some empathy for fellow human beings confronting situations that are existential. What kinds of choices should people make, and how much choice do they have?”

Fragile Nation, Shattered Land aims to answer those questions about modern Syria for anyone who wants to know.



New U of T Building to Create a Cultural and Intellectual Gateway Between University and City

By Romi Levine

A proposed new University of Toronto building at 90 Queen's Park Crescent will bring together academic and public spaces to create a hub for urban and cultural engagement.

The proposal will come forward for consideration by university governance.

The nine-storey building will be designed by world-renowned architects Diller Scofidio + Renfro, the firm behind New York City's High Line and the Institute of Contemporary Art in Boston.

The New York-based firm is working with Toronto's architectsAlliance. ERA Architects is serving as the team's heritage consultants.

"This stunning architectural landmark will provide the University of Toronto with an invaluable opportunity to create a meeting space for scholars and the wider city around us," says U of T President Meric Gertler.

"It also gives the School of Cities a permanent home for its urban-

focused research, educational and outreach initiatives."

In addition to the School of Cities, the building will house a number of academic units from the Faculty of Arts & Science, including NMC, history, as well as the Institute of Islamic Studies, an arm of the Anne Tanenbaum Centre for Jewish Studies and the Archaeology Centre. It will also provide a home for the Faculty of Law and the Faculty of Music.

There will also be space designated for classrooms and public spaces, as well as for the Royal Ontario Museum.

"It will be a building that brings a diverse grouping of folks together to advance knowledge around cities and how they can work successfully, contributing to a positive impact here in the city but also more globally," says Scott Mabury, U of T's vice-president, operations and real estate partnerships.

As design architects, Diller Scofidio + Renfro will draw on their experience designing cultural and academic spaces to create a building that will inevitably become a Toronto landmark, says Gilbert Delgado, U of T's chief of university planning, design and construction.

"They're very provocative and thoughtful architects," he says. "This dramatic

building expresses the very special role of the university within the city."

Among the building's showpieces is a music recital hall, with a large window serving as an exceptional backdrop to the stage and providing the audience with south-facing views of the Toronto skyline. Above the hall will be a 400-seat event space with similar skyline views. There will also be a café on the ground floor and a multi-storey atrium leading up to the recital hall.

"Because the building is a large and complex site, the experience doesn't just play out on the ground floor; it climbs through in a kind of spiral up until the performance space," says Richard Sommer, dean of the John H. Daniels Faculty of Architecture, Landscape, and Design, and a member

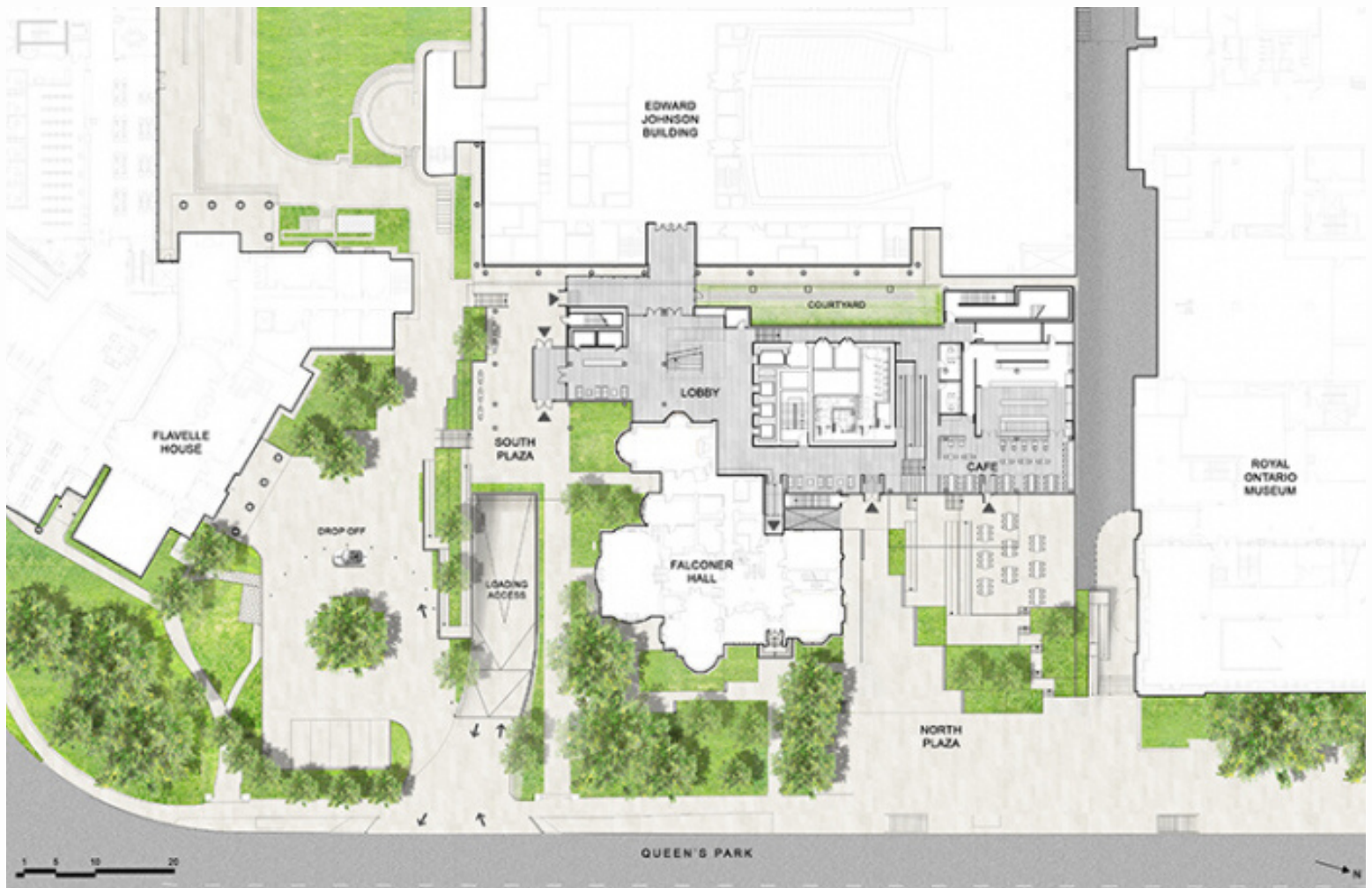
of the University's Design Review Committee.

And the views will be just as impressive from the exterior of the building, says Delgado.

"The building is very engaging," he says, adding that it will be particularly striking when driving or walking northbound along Queen's Park Crescent.

Delgado says the building's location will serve as a gateway that connects Toronto's cultural corridor with the University. "It represents an important new addition to the cultural corridor with the Gardiner Museum, the Royal Ontario Museum, the Faculty of Law and Queen's Park."





It's important for the University to have public-facing buildings that sit on the borders of its downtown Toronto campus, says Sommer.

"The edges of the campus and its borders with the city are the places where you engage the community and the vibrancy of the city of Toronto," he says. "When you have buildings that are at these edges, it's particularly important that they have programming that produces a platform for public exchange."

The building will also honour U of T's history and heritage, carefully incorporating the 118-year-old Falconer Hall, part of the Faculty of Law, into its design.

"Falconer Hall provides an opportunity to integrate the old and the new in an exciting way,"

says Delgado. "As opposed to an addition to an historic building, what we see here is a novel and creative way of having an historic building influence a new building."

"This 'campus within a campus' is revealed in the building's dual identity – a smooth cohesive block of faculty offices and workspaces gives way to a variegated expression of individual departments as the building is sculpted around Falconer Hall, the historic home of the law department. Several public programs are revealed in the process. At the heart of the building is a dynamic central atrium and stairs linking all floors with clusters of lounge spaces, study spaces and meeting rooms, mixing the various populations of the building with each other and the general public," he says.

As part of U of T's commitment to sustainability, the building will adhere to the American Society of Heating, Refrigerating and Air-Conditioning Engineers' sustainability standards.

"It will use roughly 40 per cent less energy than a conventional building of this type," Delgado says. "The dominant issue right now in terms of sustainability is minimizing the carbon footprint of our buildings and our facilities."

The new U of T landmark will be built on the site of the McLaughlin Planetarium, which was closed in 1995. The University's David A. Dunlap Department of Astronomy & Astrophysics has included a state-of-the-art planetarium theatre in its plans for a proposed new building at 50 St. George St.



PHOTO: D. OLMS

U of T conference on Ibadism highlights pluralism within Islamic tradition

By Jovana Jankovic

Ibadism is a theological sect within Islam that stands alongside the more widely practiced Shi'a and Sunni traditions. It isn't nearly as well known in North America, a blind spot a recent conference at the University of Toronto sought to rectify.

The conference, titled "Ibadism and the Study of Islam: A View from the Edge," brought together a diverse range of global scholars to discuss historical and contemporary topics in Ibadism, from the preservation and study of ancient manuscripts to questions of ethics, language, community-building, religious and legal traditions and more.

It was the first time the annual conference has been hosted in Canada.

"Thinking from the edges allowed us to examine the presumptions that animate most studies of Islam and Muslims today," says Professor Anver Emon, a scholar of Islamic legal history appointed to the Faculty of Law and the Department of History who is also the director of the Faculty of Arts & Science's Institute of Islamic Studies.

"When we think of the term 'Muslim,' we might think of certain ethnic groups, language groups and so on. We also might think of sectarian conflict between Sunnis and Shi'as – the dominant sects within Islam. But Ibadi Muslims offer us a third sectarian group that highlights an oft-ignored pluralism within the Islamic tradition."

While there are Ibadi Muslims living all over the world, Ibadi communities are largely concentrated in Oman, at the mouth of the Persian Gulf, and North Africa. The institute hosted the 10th annual Conference on Ibadi Studies this past June with support from the country of Oman's Ministry of Endowments & Religious Affairs. The conference looked at the movement's position on the margins of the larger study of Islam, whose adherents make up an estimated 24 per cent of the world's population.

Speakers at the conference included Ayman Shihadeh, chair of the British Association for Islamic Studies and a historian of Islamic philosophy and theology, and U of T's Ruba Kana'an, an assistant professor of Islamic art and architecture at U of T Mississauga's Department of Visual Studies.

"The conference also offered us an opportunity to get to know Canada's own Ibadi community," says Emon, "many of whom joined us from Montreal."

As the conference's host, Emon says Canada presented an interesting parallel to the country of Oman, where the majority of the population is Ibadi. "Both have neighbouring countries that can sometimes be challenging to engage with. Both often play important behind-the-scenes roles in fostering peace and prosperity regionally and internationally.

"To be the first Canadian host of the Ibadi conference illustrated the shared sensibilities regionally and globally that both countries play."





PHOTO: PERRY KING

How a U of T Researcher Discovered a Lost Mesopotamian Queen – Without Leaving the Library

By Perry King

The memory, and remains, of Queen Hama were effectively lost – until the University of Toronto's Tracy L. Spurrier “found” her in a tomb that may have since been destroyed by the Islamic State.

But rather than unearthing the 3,000-year-old Mesopotamian queen on an archeological dig in Iraq, Spurrier, who is working on her PhD in NMC, helped identify Queen Hama by poring over old historical texts in a U of T library.

Keen to share Hama's story – and her own – Spurrier created the exhibit on the first floor of Robarts Library after U of T Libraries named her one of four recipients of the inaugural Graduate Student Exhibition Award.

She named it “Finding Hama: On the Identification of a Forgotten Queen Buried in the Nimrud Tombs.”

“I felt so special – it's not every day that you win an award,” says Spurrier, while seated by the display. “The librarians, I could see their faces were so happy for me, and happy that this project got such a good turnout.

“I teach, and I talk a lot, but it isn't about me – it's about Mesopotamia, ancient mythology, about these stories.”

The award recognizes work, based on papers and projects, that demonstrate an effective use of library resources. Graduate students from all three U of T campuses are eligible, regardless of their discipline.

Two other exhibits, on display until the end of February, were also created as a result of the awards. Sandhya Mylabathula, who is working on her PhD at the Faculty of Kinesiology & Physical Education, was recognized for “Concussions: The ‘Impact’ of Injury.” The exhibit takes a look at the science behind concussions, concussion policies and the recovery experience.

The other winning entry focuses on artificial neural networks in health-care organizational decision-making. It was put together by Nida Shahid and Tim Rappon, graduate students at the U of T Institute of Health Policy, Management, and Evaluation. Their exhibit looks at how health-care organizations are using artificial intelligence to provide more patient-centred, efficient, and cost-effective health care.

“We are proud to showcase the excellent research of the winning students to the thousands of people who visit Robarts every day,” says Larry Alford, U of T’s chief librarian.

Alford says Spurrier’s research exemplifies why libraries preserve materials for the future cultural and scholarly record.

“Even if the original monuments are lost, they remain discoverable through researching in our collections,” he says.



“I WAS LOOKING THROUGH THE SHELVES AND I THOUGHT ‘WHAT IS THIS BOOK? I’VE NEVER SEEN THIS BOOK – ROBARTS AND MOST LIBRARIES DON’T HAVE IT”

With a combination of colourful posters and objects, Spurrier’s exhibit walks onlookers through the story of Queen Hama’s discovery. The left side includes an introduction that explains the scope of Spurrier’s research and images of the original tomb, first discovered three decades ago in the ancient Mesopotamian city of Nimrud, near present-day Mosul.

“These are some of the excavation reports of the ancient city of Nimrud, as background,” explains Spurrier, as she pointed to a borrowed Mesopotamian sculpture on the top shelf. Spurrier’s curiosity about Hama began when she came across a rarely studied book in her department’s rare book archive that was brought to U of T from Baghdad by another professor. The book, published in 2000, contained dense tomb information.

“I was looking through the shelves and I thought ‘What is this book? I’ve never seen this book – Robarts and most libraries don’t have it,’” Spurrier says. “I started going through that book and other books and the paleo-pathology report, and I started putting together hints about this one coffin that the report said has a woman and a child buried in it.”

By cross-referencing with other reports, including texts in German, Spurrier verified the sarcophagus contained a crown, and that there was no child – most of the bones actually belonged to the woman.



In the middle of the display, Spurrier explains that the queen's body dated back to King Assurnasirpal II in the Neo-Assyrian Period, around 3,000 years ago. Below the text is the republished report on the findings from the tomb's initial discovery – with a cover image of Hama's crown, a golden piece with floral details and winged female genies.

Hama's tomb was barely touched because of a curse inscribed on the tomb, with the gold and artifacts rivalling the tomb of King Tutankhamun in Egypt, according to Spurrier.

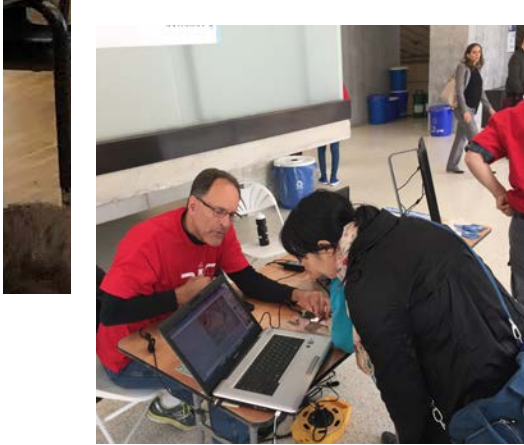
"I feel very lucky; this is fabulous," says Spurrier, who also teaches at U of T Scarborough. "I have found something amazing in this research that I can share with the world – that I can put my name on."

With modern-day Iraq and Syria embroiled in ongoing regional conflict, Spurrier says she felt a call of duty to uncover the region's past: "Screw ISIS. They think they're erasing this history, but I've already proven you don't need to be at this site to make new discoveries, to find new things. They're trying to anger us."

There are still questions that remain unanswered about Hama, including how she died or why her coffin was placed in this particular spot. But Spurrier was nevertheless glad her exhibit helped to make sense of the findings. "This has to be more understandable to a general audience," she says. "That's my thing; you have to make things more approachable to the public."

**"THIS HAS TO BE MORE
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Community Engagement

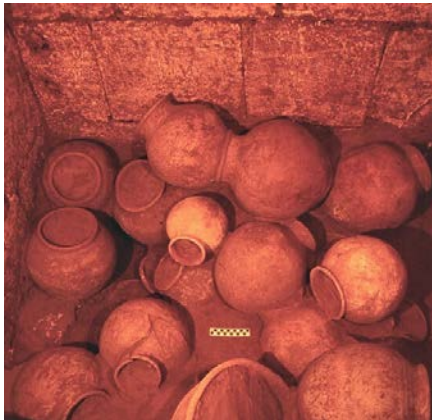


Throughout the academic year, NMC participates in various public outreach activities that bring scholars and the wider community together, and provide a unique opportunity for prospective students to get an insight into the inner workings of the field of Near Eastern Archaeology, as well as modern Middle Eastern cultures. The activities include visits to local primary and high schools, university open house events, Friday Night Live at the ROM, Archaeology Days, and many more. This February we participated in the Program Exploration Days where our students and staff presented the various fields of study within NMC.

On May 9, 2020 NMC will return to the annual Science Rendezvous at the St. George campus, where it will be presenting various aspects of the CRANE (Computational Research on the Ancient Near East) and the Tell Tayinat Archaeological Project (TAP). Enthusiastic visitors will have a chance to learn about the ongoing TAP excavations, the Orontes watershed climate modelling initiated by the CRANE Project, and enjoy manipulating the digital 3D models of basalt sculptures uncovered at Tell Tayinat. Bone and ceramic artifacts from the NMC archaeology lab will also be on display for those eager to examine them using modern digital technology.

RESEARCH *Nmc* SPOTLIGHT

RECONSTRUCTING TOMB 7 *at* TELL BANAT



As a part of the course “Seminar in Syro-Palestinian Studies: Archaeological Approaches to Mortuary Practices/The Archaeology of Death” (NMC 1408Y) taught by Professor Anne Porter, a group of students have been working on material from Tomb 7 at Tell Banat. Tell Banat is a 3rd Millennium BCE site located on the north bank of the river Euphrates in modern-day Syria and is one of the most significant settlements for mortuary practices in Northern Mesopotamia.

Throughout the classes the students have been developing a background on the theories about the archaeology of death, how the living treat the dead, and burial practices at other sites in the Near East.

With this background they are able to apply new ideas to their individual projects. Although their individual projects focus on one aspect of Tomb 7, they work as a group to discuss their theories and process the data like a supercomputer. Working on this material together has really helped them to understand the hard work and cooperation that goes into interpreting archaeological evidence.

With the combination of detailed plans, photographs, catalogues and drawings of the artifacts, they are able to understand different aspects of the tomb, including how the furniture in the tomb disintegrated, how stacks of pottery fell, and how the tomb filled in

with soil, which sealed it. So far they were able to reconstruct some of the types of furniture found in the tomb using the bitumen impressions left on the tomb's floor. These include objects such as reed baskets, boxes, a possible lyre and a wagon/chariot. They have also been able to figure out where certain objects may have been originally placed based on the impressions of tables and remnants of decayed wood.

"Investigating the tomb has been fascinating, but also occasionally a huge difficulty," the group states. "Every day we learn something new that confirms, alters or flat out denies a theory we're working on. It's the days when you can sense that you're really on to something that the excitement for investigating this tomb is renewed." Weeks of hard work have

paid off and the students are now becoming more confident with their ideas regarding the use and potential rituals within the tomb, "but the smallest objects, such as a cup, can make or break a theory!" The students suggest that understanding the tomb is much like solving a puzzle, where one needs to be able to look at the individual pieces and the big picture. Their goal this semester is to continue solving this puzzle in order to piece together the information they have been collecting, which will then result in a co-authored article to be submitted for publication at the end of the spring term.

Left to right at top of page 17: Sarah Cavaliere, Patrick Keenan, Zeynep Kusdil, Mohammed Abualsaid, Raquel Robbins and Katlin Long-Wright. Not pictured, Evelyn Ulyott Hayes. Other images courtesy of the Euphrates Salvage Project at the Tell Banat Settlement Complex.



The modern village of Tell Banat (foreground), which lies on top of the third millennium BCE site, with Tell Banat North in the background.

Early this year NMC welcomed **Dr. Moujan Matin**, our new SSHRC Postdoctoral Research Fellow.

Moujan's research focuses on the intersection between archaeology and the history of technology and science in the Near and Middle East and Central Asia, from the ancient period through the medieval Islamic periods and up to the nineteenth century.

Her DPhil thesis, *Revisiting the Origins of Islamic Glazed Pottery: A Technological Examination of 8th-10th century ceramics from Islamic Lands* (University of Oxford, 2017), focused on the development of tin-opacified glazed ceramics based on the study of sherds from sites in the Near East and Egypt. After completing her DPhil, she was awarded a Junior Research Fellowship at Wolfson College, University of Oxford (2016-2019), to work on the project *Hearing the Footsteps of Genghis Khan: Technological Changes in the Production of Stonepaste Ceramics from Iran, Syria and Egypt*. The project is aimed at further understanding the processes that led to a technological boom at a time of significant social and political turmoil after the Mongol invasions in the Middle East. As part of this project, Moujan undertook fieldwork at Moshkin Tepe, Iran. After this fellowship, she served as an invited research fellow at the Sun Yat-Sen (Zhongshan) University, Guangzhou, China, to participate in the *Nanhai I* Shipwreck project.

As a SSHRC Postdoctoral Research Fellow at the University of Toronto, Moujan is excited to begin her new research *Playing with Fire: The Discovery of Ceramic Glazes*. This project focuses on innovations in pyrotechnological activities (i.e. copper smelting, glaze making and glass making) in Egypt and the Near East during the Late Chalcolithic and Early Bronze Age (ca. 4500-2500 BC).



MOUJAN
Matin



ZUBAIDA ABDUL HAKIM *Taupan*

Zubaida Abdul Hakim Taupan completed her master's degree at NMC with a focus on Islamic Art. Upon finishing her undergraduate degree as an art history specialist at the University of Toronto, she decided NMC would be the ideal department in which to continue delving into the Arabic language and Islamic history, as it pertains to material culture.

Zubie organized the first Islamic Art Conference at the University of Toronto, bringing together the Royal Ontario Museum, the Aga Khan Museum and U of T. Her interest in event organization has led her to organize orientation 2019 for the U of T Students' Union.

When asked where she would like to end up, she says:

"Art in Islam has always been controversial from all perspectives, internal and external. Internally, groups and sects of Islam denounce art and its place in Islamic discourse. Externally, Islamic art is seen as separate and foreign rather than accepted into art as a whole. Islamic art occupies its own museums and in larger museums specific sections. In other words, Islamic art is polarized as it's prohibited internally and categorized as 'other' externally. Parallels can be drawn between Islamic art and Islamic peoples in this sense. I want to pursue a position in this field to contribute to bridging the gap between a largely Western understanding of art as 'art' and progress to the inclusion of Islamic art as distinctly art rather than distinctly Islamic."



PHOTO: COURTESY OF NOHA ABOUELDAHAB

A&S alumna strives to ensure justice is served

By Sean McNeely

Last month, Canada's Ambassador to the State of Qatar, Stefanie McCollum, tweeted a list of 10 women of influence, including diplomats, other ambassadors and one University of Toronto alumna. A few weeks earlier and time zones away, that same alumna was honoured at the British Council's Study UK Alumni Awards for her research on human rights, politics and international law in the Middle East and North Africa. That's quite the month.

"I'm clearly the black sheep in that group!" says Noha Aboueldahab of the tweet modestly.

Currently a transitional justice specialist, author and a Fellow at the Brookings Doha Center, a non-profit public policy organization based in Washington, DC, Aboueldahab is also an adjunct assistant professor at Georgetown University in Qatar.

Her book, *Transitional Justice and the Prosecution of Political Leaders in the Arab Region: A Comparative Study of Egypt, Libya, Tunisia and Yemen*, is described by legal scholar, Vasuki Nesiah, as "an important contribution to the study of international criminal law, transitional justice, and the broader field of political transition."

Aboueldahab, a member of University College, graduated from the Faculty of Arts & Science in 2003 with an honours bachelor of arts joint specialist degree in international relations and peace and conflict studies, and a double minor in political science and French.

Today, she commands the attention of ambassadors and policy-makers, and is asked for her expert opinion by top news agencies. Despite the constant demand for her time and insights, she vividly remembers being a shy undergraduate student at U of T.

"I moved to Toronto from Egypt during my last year of high school, which was very difficult for me," she admits. Though struggling with adjusting to a new country and culture, she had her sights set on U of T.

"I was drawn to the diversity of its student body as well as the selection of courses and programs," she says. "And the critical thinking skills I developed at U of T, thanks to my professors and to the conversations with fellow students, have been vital to my career."

Two professors in particular had a lasting effect.

Professors James Reilly and Jens Hanssen had a major impact on how she thinks about the world and about history.

"More than 16 years later, I still think back to my conversations with Professor Hanssen while I was writing my thesis under his supervision," says Aboueldahab. (Her thesis was about the Algerian struggle for independence from French colonial rule.)

Reilly's course sparked rich conversations about nationalism in the Middle East.

"I've made long-lasting, life-shaping friendships that originated in both these professors' classes," says Aboueldahab,

who also met her husband in Reilly's class. "Many of these friends are spread out across the world, but we still keep in touch and catch up whenever we can."

After U of T, Aboueldahab completed her master of international and comparative legal studies at SOAS, University of London, and her PhD in law at Durham Law School, University of Durham.

As part of her graduate school applications, Reilly wrote, "Noha strikes me as someone who is serious about employing her knowledge and skills in ways that will have a social impact."

Indeed, Aboueldahab's work at the Brookings Doha Center and at Georgetown University in Qatar is making a significant social impact in international research and policy.

"It's given me the opportunity to put my critical thinking skills to great use in multiple ways — whether through the publication of Brookings analysis papers, or through the rewarding experience of teaching international law to a group of bright students," she says.

"Engaging with the media and presenting complex ideas to a global audience is also a challenging but crucial part of what I do. I'm drawing attention to issues that would not normally be

brought forward on such global platforms."

Aboueldahab plans on drawing even more attention to these issues through upcoming publications that range from a critical analysis of how (backchannel) diplomacy has aided conflict resolution in the Middle East, to what Third World Approaches to International Law look like in 2019.

She's also started her next book, which will examine the role of Arab diasporas in the pursuit of justice for mass atrocities in the context of ongoing violent conflict.

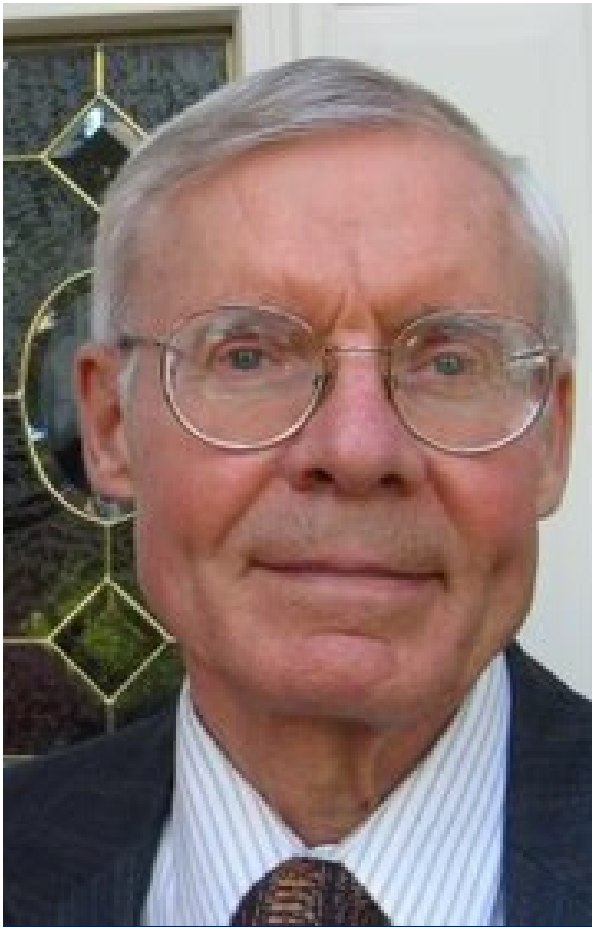
For students starting to think about life after graduation, Aboueldahab has this advice: "Find the time and space for critical self-reflection — a task that's increasingly difficult in this fast-paced world. It's necessary because it forces you to 'check-in with yourself now and then.'"

"Adaptability, but not settling, is important," she continues. "Ask yourself, 'Am I settling? Or am I actively pursuing the things that I genuinely want to pursue?' This requires tough decisions, like quitting a stable job to end up in a series of short-term jobs that are more rewarding. That has done wonders for the expansion of my networks."

THANK YOU FOR YOUR SERVICE

On behalf of the Department of Near and Middle Eastern Civilizations, we would like to express our sincere gratitude and thanks to **Anna Sousa**, **Maria Brosius** and **Linda Northrup** for their many years of service to our students, staff, faculty and community at large. We wish them all the best for a long, happy and healthy retirement!





In Memoriam

PAUL DION (1934-2019)

Paul-Eugène Dion, the only child of Omer Dion and Cécile Rouleau, was born in Québec City on September 28, 1934.

After secondary studies at the venerable Petit Séminaire, he joined the Dominican order, was educated at the Dominican house of studies in Ottawa and ordained to the priesthood in 1959. In 1961 he was sent to the École Biblique et Archéologique Française in Jerusalem, where he benefited from the teaching of Pères Roland de Vaux, Pierre Benoît, and their learned colleagues; he visited Jordan, Israel, Lebanon, Syria and Turkey.

In 1963 Paul returned to his alma mater in Ottawa, where he taught biblical and theological subjects. In 1970, he was allowed to study at the University of Toronto and obtained a Ph.D. in Near Eastern Studies (1973), with a dissertation on an Old Aramaic dialect. In 1980, after teaching in Ottawa some more years, Paul returned to U of T and his former Department, to teach the history of ancient Israel, and conduct seminars on Deuteronomy, Second Isaiah, and Job.

In 1982 Paul married the archaeologist Michèle Daviau, who was soon to dedicate her career to the antiquities of Jordan, while Paul's position enabled him to research and publish numerous essays on the Old Testament, the Aramaeans, and other nations surrounding ancient Israel, culminating in *Les Araméens à l'âge du Fer* (Paris: Gabalda, 1997).

Retiring in the year 2000, Paul moved to Waterloo, Ontario, keeping a strong interest in the ancient Near East, especially Syria and Jordan.

In 2004, unfortunately, a minor stroke, followed by more illnesses, soon put an end to his academic pursuits. With the still very active Michèle, he enjoyed the peace of Luther Village on the Park, in the heart of Waterloo. Paul passed away peacefully on August 3, 2019.

We are saddened by the passing of our dear, long-standing colleague, **Paul Dion**, on August 3, 2019. A celebration of life service was held for Paul on Friday, August 9, at Luther Village on the Park Chapel in Waterloo.

Michèle Daviau has shared the following obituary.

In Memoriam

ELEAZAR BIRNBAUM (1929-2019)

On October 2, 2019 Eleazar Birnbaum, Professor Emeritus of the Department of Near and Middle Eastern Civilizations passed away at the age of 89. Born in Hamburg, Germany on November 29, 1929, Professor Birnbaum was the son of Solomon Asher Birnbaum, a distinguished professor, linguist and palaeographer whose specialities included Yiddish, Hebrew and other Semitic languages, as well as Slavonic and Germanic languages. With the rise of the Nazis, Solomon Birnbaum along with his wife and children emigrated from Germany to the UK.

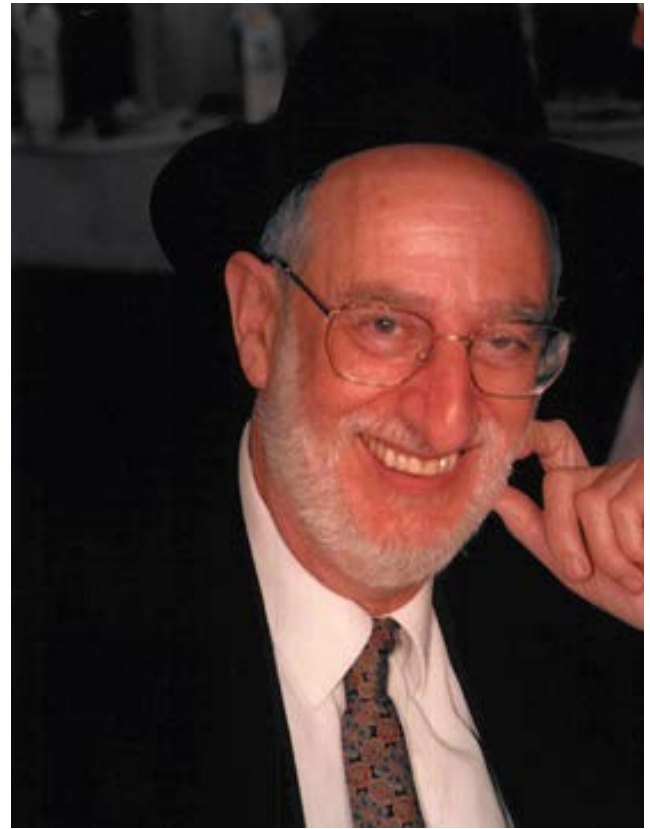
Professor Birnbaum was trained in Islamic history and Middle Eastern languages at the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS) of the University of London graduating in 1953. In 1951–1953, as a graduate student at SOAS, he attended the famous Ottoman sources seminar of Paul Wittek.

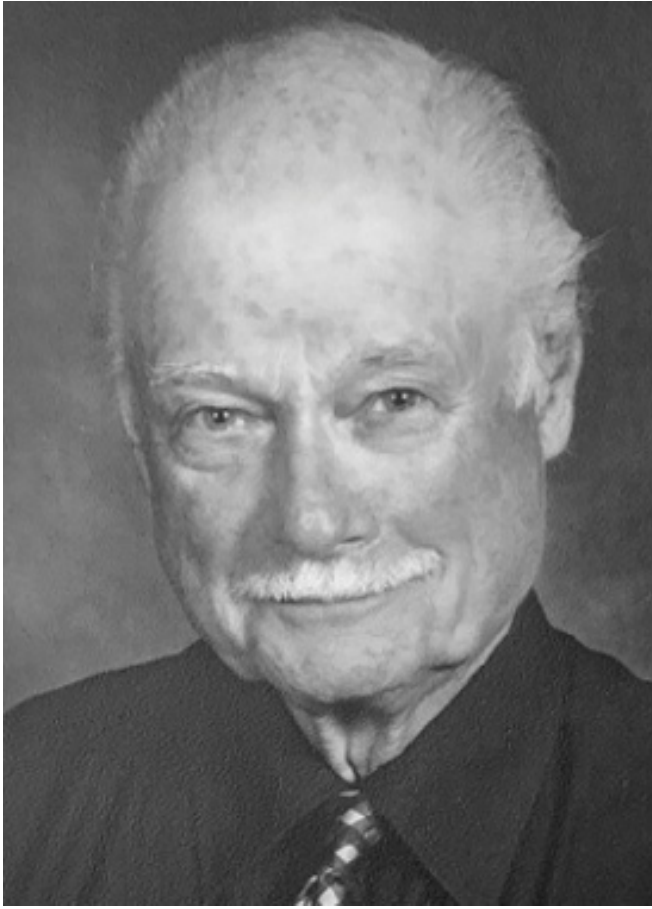
He worked as an Assistant Librarian at Durham University until 1960 and in 1960–1964 as Near East Bibliographer at the University of Michigan. At both Durham and Michigan he played a major role in building up serious collections in Middle Eastern studies. In 1964 he joined the then Department of Islamic Studies (later renamed Middle East and Islamic Studies and in, 1996, Near and Middle Eastern Civilizations) as an Associate Professor and in 1970 he was named Full Professor. He retired in 1995 but remained active in scholarship and the department until his recent death.

In addition to teaching Turkish and Ottoman language and literature and serving on the graduate faculty, Professor Birnbaum served as an advisor to the University of Toronto Library, in effect as its Ottoman and Turkish bibliographer. It is thanks to his great expertise and efforts that the university library's collection in Turkish and Ottoman studies is currently one of the strongest in North America and the best in Canada. In addition, he developed an Ottoman Turkish transliteration system that was adopted by the Library of Congress.

Professor Birnbaum's main field was in Ottoman Turkish and other Turkic languages along with Arabic and Persian, but his particular specialty and passion were old Ottoman manuscripts. Over the course of his long career he amassed a large collection of Islamic manuscripts mostly from Turkey. He published catalogues of his collection in two recent publications—*Ottoman Turkish and Çagatay MSS in Canada: A Union Catalogue of the Four Collections* (2015) and *Arabic and Persian Manuscripts in the Birnbaum Collection, Toronto* (2019). His other publications include a critical edition of the earliest Ottoman Turkish translation of the 11th-century Persian manual of advice, *Qabusname*.

Eleazar Birnbaum is survived by his wife, Rebecca (Rivka) and five children and their families. A commemorative evening was organized in early February 2020 by NMC.





In Memoriam

RICHARD BLACKBURN (1939-2020)

NMC mourns the loss of long-term professor and researcher Richard Blackburn, who passed away in Stratford on January 15, 2020, after a long illness.

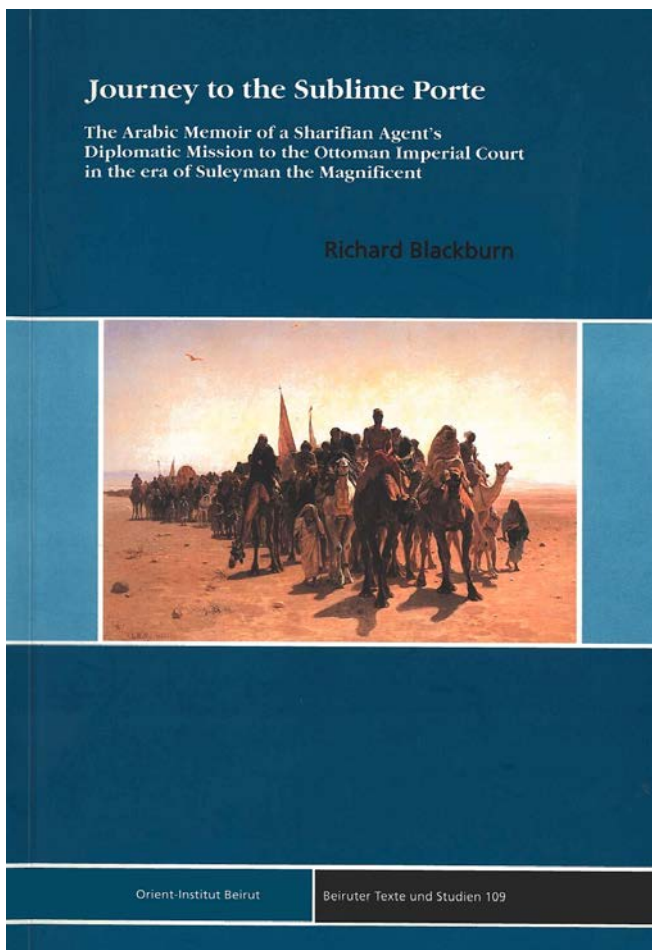
Richard was born in Sault Ste Marie and raised in Stratford, Ontario. He completed his B.A. at Trinity College, University of Toronto, then continued with his graduate studies at the Department of Islamic Studies, where he received his M.A. and Ph.D.

He remained at U of T, where he taught Arabic and also Ottoman history. Richard served terms as both Associate Chair and Chair of the Department now known as NMC.

Among his most notable publications is his book titled *Journey to the Sublime Porte: The Arabic Memoir of a Sharifian Agent's Diplomatic Mission to the Ottoman Imperial Court in the Era of Suleyman the Magnificent. The Relevant Text from Qutb Al-Din Al-Nahrawali's Al-Fawa'id Al-Saniyah Fi Al-Rihlah Al-Madaniyah Wa Al-Rumiyah* (2005), a travel diary of an official sent on a diplomatic mission from Mecca to Istanbul in the years 1557 to 1558.

After 42 years as an academic, Richard retired with his wife Barbara to Stratford, where he had time to pursue his passion for postal history. He won a Vermeil award at the National Stamp Show and Exhibition in 2013 for his exhibit on the Early Post Offices of the Huron Road. He and Barbara enjoyed many trips abroad but none better than the annual visit to enjoy the magic of Manitoulin Island.

(Full obituary published in *The Globe and Mail*, January 18-22, 2020.)





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