Middle East Section (MES) Annual Report
2004

Submitted by Dan Varisco, MES President

This report covers MES activities from November 2003-2004. I extend my thanks to President-elect Jenny White for her help on behalf of MES since the 2003 AAA meeting. I also note that a number of members (including Bill Beeman) with expertise in the region have been presenting lectures and writing commentaries to combat stereotypes and misleading media rhetoric.

1) Accomplishments during the period covered.

Board Members and Officers

This is the last year for board member Bill Beeman, who has played an important role during his tenure on the MES Board. A nominations committee will solicit nominations for the board position he is vacating, and also nominations for president-elect.

Membership and Finances

As of October, 2004, MES membership has reached an all-time high of 348 paid members, which is an increase of 27 from the same period a year ago. Given the importance of the region in the news, it is not surprising that there is growth in membership. The 2004 MES Student Paper Prize was awarded to Lori Allen (University of Chicago) for her paper: "The Polyvalent Politics of Martyr Funerals in the Palestinian Intifada." Gregory Starrett served as column editor for the Anthropology News. MES, working with President Brumfiel, sent a letter of concern to appropriate government officials about the denial of a visa for Muslim scholar Tariq Ramadan.

The Net Assets of MES as of October, 2004 were $14,332, with annual revenues of $3,392 so far in the year. The costs for construction of the CyberOrient website will reduce this amount by $2,500 in the next budget readout. All other items are under the amount budgeted. We have sufficient funding to consider new initiatives in the future.

The Program for the 2004 AAA Annual Meeting

In 2004 MES had hoped to sponsor an invited double panel, organized by Jim Toth. Due to the cancellation of the meetings in San Francisco, the panel was unable to reconstitute in Atlanta.
While there was no official MES panel for the Atlanta meeting, the business meeting and board meeting were held. The San Francisco venue created the opportunity for two jointly sponsored panels by the AAA and MESA, which had an overlap on Saturday and Sunday, November 20-21. Thanks to the help of President Brumfiel, a special presidential panel would have been held at the AAA venue on "Anthropology Beyond Baghdad." Only one of the panel members could be at Atlanta. Since this was jointly sponsored, MESA graciously added it to their program and it was well attended (ca. 80 people). The panel brought together a number of anthropologists with research experience in Iraq, including McGuire Gibson, Robert Fernea, Peter Reiss and Bill Young. The presentation by Diane King was given in Atlanta at the AAA. The other joint panel was one I organized on Islam and violence. This was scheduled for the MESA venue and drew a large crowd of 100 people. Papers were given by Don Emmerson, Gregory Starrett, Rich Martin and myself; the paper by Robert Hefner was cancelled, when the AAA site was shifted.

2) Future plans or activities (3-5) year time frame)

Planning for the 2005 AAA Meeting

In my election statement I noted my intention to find ways to improve contact with anthropological colleagues in Middle Eastern countries. To this end I appointed board member Sayed El Aswad as chair of a new Committee on Middle East Anthropologists. Due to visa restrictions, which continue to keep away scholars from the region, no Middle Eastern anthropologists were brought to the meetings. The committee will continue to monitor the situation. Options for the 2005 meeting include reconstituting the accepted panel for this year. Last year MES members submitted several resolutions about conflict in Palestine, Iraq, Muslims in America and academic freedom. There was no quorum at the business meeting, so these resolutions need to be followed up.

MESNET: Transition Time for the Website

It is very difficult for any one individual to develop and maintain a professional website, so President-elect Jenny White has expressed interest in getting a new website designed and professionally monitored. To this end funding was allotted in the 2005 MES budget.

MES Initiative: An Online Journal
Over the year preparations continued for the MES on-line journal, *CyberOrient*. This is currently planned for 2007 in the phase-in cycle for AnthroSource. The Call for Papers has been issued and the structure of the site is currently being created. The first issue, on an independent server, is planned for late 2005. This will be an interdisciplinary, peer-reviewed, online journal devoted to how Middle Eastern peoples, cultures and religions are represented on the internet. Preliminary information on the proposal can be found at: [http://www.ahjur.org/cyberorient/cyberorient.html](http://www.ahjur.org/cyberorient/cyberorient.html). Thus far some thirty contributing editors have been lined up.

**MES Initiative: Speakers and Writers Bureau**

Our MES membership has a range of expertise on the major issues in the ongoing crises about the Middle East. A few members have been active in writing op-ed pieces or speaker to community organizations, but many more could be, and probably want to be, more involved. Bill Beeman was chosen to explore the possibilities for facilitating outreach of our members to the media and community groups looking for speakers. More work on this is planned.

**MES Board and Officers (Nov. 2003- Nov. 2004)**

**President:** Dan Varisco (anthdmv@hofstra.edu)

**President-elect:** Jenny White (jbwhite@bu.edu)

**Treasurer:** Flagg Miller (flagg.miller@lawrence.edu)

**Secretary:** Laurie King-Irani (lkirani@uvic.ca)

**Board Members:**

Bill Beeman (William_Beeman@Brown.EDU) 2002-2005

Dawn Chatty (chattymylne@dsl.pipex.com) 2003-2006

Sayed El-Aswad (melaswad@hotmail.com) 2003-2006

Andrew Gardner (gardner@email.arizona.edu) 2003-2006 (Student Rep)

Mitchell Rothman (rothman@pop1.science.widener.edu) 2003-2006

**Archaeology**

**Ex-Officio Members:**


Column Editor: Gregg Starrett (gsstarre@email.uncc.edu)

MESA Liaison: Larry Michalak (otis@uclink4.berkeley.edu)