2009 Officers
Gregory Starrett, President
William O. Beeman, Past President
Flagg Miller, Treasurer
Mara Leichtman, Secretary
Anne Meneley—Awards Chair
Lynne Swartz Dodd—Nominations Chair
Frances Trix, Board Member
Yasmin Moll, Student Representative
Emilio Spadola—Anthropology News Contributing Editor

1. Status, Activities and Accomplishments.

- 2009 Membership
The membership of the Middle East Section averaged 366 during 2009, with a low of 346 in April and a high of 382 in January, ending in December with 365. The last several years have been ones of steady growth, and this trend should continue with increased interest in the Middle East, particularly among graduate students. We have kept our annual dues quite low, in order to encourage membership.

- 2009 Financial balances
As of 31 December 2009 the Section financial assets stood at $15,866, down from $16,570 on 1 January 2009.

We have not spent much money in many, many years, but have recently increased the prize stipend for our biennial Distinguished Scholar Award (to $1000) and our annual Student Paper Prize (we included a travel stipend of $300 to the usual $500 award). In addition, we catered a reception after our business meeting this year. The result of FREE FOOD! at the reception and a particularly interesting Distinguished Lecture during the Business Meeting meant that there was standing room only in a room meant for fifty or sixty. We had about seventy-five people show up, which is probably more than we’ve ever had.

The Middle East Section has no paper publication, but we are the official sponsors of the online journal CyberOrient, edited by past president, Dan Varisco, who has energetically been developing international partnerships in hosting the journal.

- 2009 AAA meeting highlights
The 2009 Program Committee was chaired by our Treasurer, Flagg Miller, who worked with Ilana Feldman and Christa Salamandra. The Middle East Section invited 2 panels:

1-053 Equal Opportunities, Cultural Rights, and Ethics of Fieldwork and Publication (Organized by Smadar Lavie and Rafi Shubeli). Co-invited by the Society for Humanistic Anthropology

2-031 Crisis in Gaza: Challenges and Lessons for Anthropology and Human Rights (Organized by Deborah Poole) AAA Presidential Session, co-invited by the Committee for Human Rights
The program committee reviewed five pre-organized panels that appeared in the program:

0-077 Below the Radar of Mainstream Politics and Media III: Peace With Justice Initiatives for Israel/Palestine (Organized by Jasmin Habib and Gelya Frank)

0-165 Temporality and Location Made Visible: Middle Eastern Cultural Production as Modes of National Performance (Organized by Amy Malek)

2-175 The Social Life of Texts in Turkey (Organized by Kabir Tambar)

3-154 Conflict’s Generations: Socialization and Performance Genres in Middle Eastern and North African Conflict Settings (Organized by Tara F. Deubel)

4-055 Confronting the Power of Public/s: Media, Schools and War in the Middle East (Organized by Rehenuma Asmi and Amina U. Tawasil)

In addition, the committee developed five more panels from individually submitted papers, which also appeared on the program in Philadelphia:

0-053 Masculinity, Identity and Shifting Power Relations in the Islamic World And Beyond

1-056 Religious Pluralism, Syncretism and (In)tolerance in the Middle East and South Asia

3-121 Globalism’s Strangers Within: The Middle East and Beyond

4-023 Reconfiguring Spaces in Palestine and Israel

4-025 Shifting Bodies: the Middle East and Beyond

Because it is an area-focused section, MES members are also active in a broad range of topical sections. Our members presented papers in a dozen other panels, including ones reviewed and invited by the Association for Political and Legal Anthropology, the Society for the Anthropology of Europe, the Society for Urban, National, and Transnational/Global Anthropology, the Society for Cultural Anthropology, the American Ethnological Society, the Anthropology and Environment Section, the Society for Anthropology and Education, the Society for Psychological Anthropology, the Society for the Anthropology of Religion, and the Society for Medical Anthropology.

At the Section Board Meeting at noon on Friday 4 December, we welcomed several new Board members and officers: President-Elect Farha Ghannam, new Archaeology Seat Board Member Moain Sadeq, and new Board members David McMurray and Ilana Feldman. Departing Board members Anne Meneley, Frances Trix, and Lynn Swartz Dodd were presented with certificates of thanks for their distinguished service to the MES. Chairs for the 2010 Nominations Committee (Ilana Feldman), Program Committee (Anne Meneley), and Student Paper Prize Committee (David McMurray) were chosen.

At the Business Meeting on the evening of Friday 4 December, the MES awarded its biennial Distinguished Scholar Award to Professor Brinkley Messick of Columbia University, who delivered our Distinguished Lecture, “The Anthropologist as Reader.”
annual student paper prize was awarded to Canay Ozden of New York University for her paper, “The Wardrobe Republic.” An Honorable Mention was awarded to Jeremy Walton of the University of Chicago, for his paper, “Confessional Pluralism and Liberal Piety.” Ms. Ozden and Mr. Walton delivered very short summaries of their papers prior to the Distinguished Lecture at the Section business meeting. Summary versions of both papers were published in the Section column of the Anthropology News. (Ozden, “The Wardrobe Republic,” AN 50(7):55, and Walton, “Toward a (New) Anthropology of Liberal Islam,” AN 50(8):47-48). The Section thanks the Awards Committee, Anne Meneley, Chair, along with committee members Ahmed Kanna and David McMurray, for their hard work evaluating the fifteen papers submitted for the prize competition.

A catered reception followed the business meeting. A splendid time was had by all!

- **Internal communications**

The Middle East Section Website was comprehensively redesigned several years ago, but maintenance and updating have been an issue. For that reason, the Board decided in 2008 to move the site to the AAA Central Server. This migration will take place in 2010, a process overseen by Past President William O. Beeman.

After three years of distinguished service, AN Contributing Editor Emilio Spadola is stepping down, and being succeeded as column editor by our Student Representative on the Board, Yasmin Moll.

Although the MES does not maintain a listserv of its own, there is a well-subscribed listserv, aaamideast, utilized mostly by graduate students and maintained by members of the independent Task Force for Middle East Anthropology, which posts material of interest, including job announcements and other news. For official Section business we use the AAA master membership list, which reaches all current MES members.

2. **Future plans or activities (3-5) year time frame including efforts to increase membership**

- What projects does your Section have underway?

The Section will again award its annual Student Paper Prize in 2010, and both the paper prize and the Distinguished Scholar Award in 2011. Nominations for the 2010 Student Paper Prize competition are currently being solicited.

The Section will have a large turnover on its board in 2010. The nominations committee under the Chairmanship of Ilana Feldman has done an excellent job putting together a slate of candidates for Treasurer, Secretary, and 2 Board positions. The Board has recently become much more active in carrying out Section functions (running the nominations, prize and program committees, tasks which in the past were often contracted out to Section members who were not elected to the Board). This is a positive development.

3. **Other Items. Please tell us what your chief concerns and issues are, especially if they are not previously noted.**

Our section finds itself in the admirable situation of having a healthy budget balance. We are actively working to find meaningful ways to spend our budget to advance Middle East Anthropology. Our President-Elect Farha Ghannam, along with new Board members David McMurray and Moain Sadeq, were tasked with developing proposals for the creative use of between $3,000 and $5,000 over the next two years. Our hope is to
develop a sustainable program of workshops that will be repeated regularly, and will benefit the Section’s graduate student members.

- What issues would you like raised or recommendations would you like to make to the Long-Range Planning Committee?

Given that the U.S. Army’s Human Terrain System project is probably not going away any time soon, I would like to make a personal recommendation that the AAA leadership investigate the possibility of arranging for sustained, responsible and objective ethnographic evaluation of the project in both its training and field deployment phases. The ad-hoc Commission on the Engagement of Anthropology with the Security and Intelligence Community has made some valuable contributions to the debate about HTS and related ethical and professional matters, but there’s no substitute for real knowledge of what’s actually happening on the ground.

- What issues would you like raised or recommendations would you like to make to the AAA Executive Board?

The new “Plan Your Meeting Itinerary” electronic search service for the 2009 meetings worked beautifully, and the Association’s IT people should be heartily congratulated for developing it. However, the paper indexing for the 2009 Philadelphia Program was very poor. Panels sponsored or reviewed by sections should be noted under an entry for that Section in the regular index. Right now, note is made of invited panels per Section in a separate listing, but the main index does not note other panels reviewed by sections.

I remain concerned that so-called “political resolutions” introduced by members of the Association appear to be treated more positively by the Executive Board when they address Americanist issues (e.g. the Honduras Resolution) than when they address Middle Eastern issues of equal import to, impact on, and professional relevance to anthropologists (see “The Spirit of Your Resolution,” in An 46(2):11-12, February 2005).

Overall, though, as Past President Bill Beeman wrote in last year’s Annual Report, “The Middle East Section is exemplary of healthy sections with moderate enrollment that represent a distinct constituency within the Association. We appreciate the continued efforts of the Executive Board to preserve a voice for sections like ours.” I second his thanks for the work of the Executive Board and the leadership of the Section Assembly, but particularly for the hard labor provided by the professional staff of the Association.

Submitted by Gregory Starrett
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