

Recipients of the Leigh Douglas Memorial Prize 2001-2018

2018

Joint Winners (£300 each)

Cailah Jackson

Patrons and Artists at the Crossroads: the Islamic Arts of the Book in the Lands of Rum, 1270s – 1370s
(University of Oxford)

This thesis presents the first detailed survey of a representative group of illuminated manuscripts produced in Anatolia in pre-Ottoman times, examining Qur'ans, mirrors for princes, historical chronicles, and Sufi works. In addition to examining 16 such manuscripts in appropriate detail, the thesis considers them more generally through quite another lens: namely that of the political and cultural environment of Anatolia (principally western Anatolia) between c.1270 and c.1370. This approach highlights the period's ethnic and religious pluralism, the extent of cross-cultural exchange, the region's complex political situation after the breakdown of Saljuq rule, and the impact of wandering scholars, Sufis and craftsmen....The strengths of the thesis lie in its thorough codicological examination of these 16 Persian and Arabic manuscripts, most of which have not been examined with this degree of depth before, and in so doing it constructs a framework for further research on similar manuscripts produced in this period and region. ...For art historians its rich array of illustrations, most of them still unpublished, will be of special interest. Altogether it brings into sharper focus than before the role of illuminated manuscripts in the cultural history of Anatolia in the 13th century....The thesis is very well written; the author's style is elegant and lucid, which makes it a pleasure to read. She keeps a proper balance between three competing types of discourse: technical analysis of the manuscripts themselves, a detailed discussion of their patrons and their specific local context; and finally, more general discussion of such larger themes as religious pluralism, the cultural level of Turkmen princes, the fashion for mirrors for princes, the impact of the Black Death, and the pervasive impact of Sufism. The scholarship is of a very high standard, revealing an impressive use of Arabic, Persian and Turkish and a remarkable depth of knowledge. She shows an astonishing maturity in the way she conducts her argument... This thesis is truly a major original achievement, publishable virtually as it stands.

Polly Withers

Performing Alterity: the translocal politics of an urban youth music scene in post-Oslo Palestine
(University of Exeter)

This is a theoretically sophisticated, beautifully researched, and joyous thesis about the polyvalence of Palestinian contemporary music scene inside Israel (Haifa), in the West Bank (Ramallah), in Jordan (Amman) and in London. Lucidly written and compelling to read, it argues that when performed for its Palestinian audiences at home, Palestinian music acts as a conduit for meaning-making about the musicians' everyday life and quotidian concerns.

However, when the music travels, and particularly when performed for international (read: European) audiences, these demands of travelling theatricality and of specific requirements of performing 'Palestinianness' place the burden of resistance on the music and the musicians. In this context, contemporary musicians assume folkloric aspects of Palestinian music as a means of instantiating the music's national(ist) authenticity for their international audiences. Several aspects of this research make it a particularly important contribution to our understanding of Palestinian cultural politics at home and in the world. First and foremost, the dissertation's judicious choice of research sites allows for a subtle and supple comparative examination of how musicians and their audiences perform in differing contexts and for different audiences. Second, the author provides an astute and perceptive gendered analysis of Palestinian cultural production in the aftermath of Oslo and in the context of transforming sexual and gender norms and mores. Third, her incorporation of the political economy of musical production shows that the domain of culture and politics is inextricably shaped by commercial considerations and neoliberal framings. Throughout, the thesis presents its ethnographic and interview findings beautifully while lightly wearing its theoretical sophistication. In all, this wonderful thesis is one of the most thoughtful accounts of the Palestinian music scene in a fast-expanding field of research.

Joint Runners Up (£ 150 prize)

Karin Ahlberg

'They are destroying the image of Egypt' – Tourism, statecraft and infrastructures of image making 1990-2013
(SOAS)

The dissertation is an ethnography of tourism in Egypt, a field that has been part of Egyptian society throughout the colonial era, and which was dramatically expanded in the 1990s and first decade of the 2000s, but which has been in relative crisis since political turmoil starting in 2011 greatly reduced the flow and value of tourism to Egypt...The primary fieldwork and the main focus of the dissertation took place from 2011 to 2013. , the most intense aftermath of the fall of the Mubarak regime in the January 25th Revolution.... Throughout the work a tension between values of openness and transparency on one hand, and on the other hand protectiveness toward perceived secrets—"cultural intimacies" not meant to be exposed to the outside world—animates the production, circulation and social dynamics of image production. The dissertation argues that the image-making deployed in tourism promotion plays a crucial role in a governance of "stagecraft" both domestically and in relations with non-Egyptians...The thesis shows that tourism acts as a prism for larger dynamics of national identity, and that it functions also as tool of governance both domestically and in a broader international context. Consequently the dissertation is about far more than tourism. It makes important arguments about politics, economics, and culture in the contemporary Middle East, and which puts the Middle East into wider currents of scholarship.... It was, on the whole, a very readable work with considerable subtlety and analytical depth...The work will be of interest not only within anthropology, but to scholars of Middle Eastern politics and media. Certainly anyone interested in the revolutionary uprisings of 2011 will find this a fascinating dissertation.

Talal Al-Rashoud

Modern Education and Arab Nationalism in Kuwait, 1911-1961
(SOAS)

This is a very well written and well-argued dissertation that revisits the study of Arab nationalism in the Gulf, and in particular Kuwait, through the new lenses of its link with the building of modern education in the country. Grounded in an exceptionally detailed historical research, the thesis brilliantly manages to both address, theoretically, a canonical question in nationalism studies – namely that of the role of education in the construction and diffusion of political identities, and empirically to question and profoundly renew the historiography of the Gulf. Through a nuanced and complex analysis of the transnational roots of modern education in Kuwait from the first modern school to the Education Department, the author powerfully debunks the myth of an ideationally insulated Gulf region before the discovery of oil, showing thereby that...the state modernisation process had indeed begun before the oil era. Using a refined sociological analysis that identifies a stratum of muthaqqafin (or effendiyya), comprised of Arab nationalist supporters, that did play a role within educational state institutions, along with Arab expatriates, the author also deconstructs the myth of a coherent patrimonial state system, highlighting instead islands of opposition within the administrative apparatus itself and, consequently, various modalities of opposition practices. One of the greatest strengths of the thesis is undeniably its extensive use of Arabic sources - some of these sources hitherto unexplored - conveying the vision of local actors...This thesis definitely constitutes an ambitious and most original contribution to the history of the Gulf that convincingly documents the transnational links that, from its position of periphery, anchored it to the Arab ideological world.

Lana Tatour

Domination and Resistance in Liberal Settler Colonialism: Palestinians in Israel between the Homeland and the Transnational
(University of Warwick)

This highly original dissertation explores—often in a counterintuitive manner—native resistance to settler colonialism. After providing a rigorous analysis of the relation between postcolonial theory and settler colonial studies, on the one hand, and liberal multicultural approaches, on the other, Tatour both depicts empirically and explains how these theoretical frameworks shape the modalities of resistance and subordination of '48 Palestinians (also known as the Palestinian citizens of Israel). Building on Abu-Lughod's insight that an analysis of forms of resistance can be used as a diagnostic of power and drawing upon fascinating archival research, primary texts and ethnographic fieldwork, Tatour closely examines two case studies: the Palestinian Bedouin struggle for land in the Naqab and strategies of resistance deployed by the Palestinian queer movement. Particularly innovative is her dissection of how Palestinian subjectivities and modalities of resistance are shaped by and through the racialising logics of settler colonialism as well as through their ongoing encounters with the liberal frameworks of multiculturalism and human rights. To make claims on their ancestral lands, the Bedouin, for example, are expected and encouraged by NGOs and academics who are assisting them to identify with and perform the liberal category of indigeneity. Yet, as Tatour brilliantly shows this category, which allows them to make rights claims upon the state, essentializes and fetishizes them as pre-modern. The two case studies illuminate that while the liberal framework can serve as a vehicle for empowerment, it also reproduces, reinforces and entrenches the racialising logics of settler colonialism and the intersectionalities of these logics with ethnicity, gender and sexuality.

Honourable Mention (£ 75 book token)

Azadeh Sobout

Reshaping Transition: Urbicide and grassroots perspectives of justice in Nahr el Bared refugee camp in Lebanon
(Ulster University)

Starting from the premise that post-conflict rebuilding is an act of remembrance, but complicating that through situating this trajectory in the context of the “permanent impermanence” of the Palestinian refugee camp of Nahr al-Bared, the thesis creatively links the issue of post-war reconstruction with transitional justice. The thesis shows, through taking a grassroots-based perspective, that the reconstruction of Nahr al-Bared camp demonstrated a struggle over power between the Lebanese state and the refugees of the camp, but also a struggle over identity and remembrance. It was also a question of presence, as Palestinian refugees in Lebanon are rendered invisible through their containment in camps that are considered “outside” Lebanese urban space. This process of spatial othering legitimizes urbicide in the camps and underscores the importance of thinking about transitional justice for the people on the receiving end of this urbicide. The thesis uses the concept of transitional justice to show how the residents of the camp used remembrance to contest the Lebanese state’s and media’ dominant discourse on the camp that framed its story from the perspective of the Lebanese army, disregarding that of its residents. Through documenting truth-seeking initiatives, the thesis shows how the camp residents resisted their silencing, opening the door to a bigger debate on urban planning and institutional reform. It’s an original take on the issue of Palestinian refugees that enriches understanding and succeeds in marrying different conceptual frameworks and academic disciplines.

2017

Joint Winners (£300 each)

Yasmine Laveille

Contestation in Marginalised Spaces: dynamics of popular mobilisation and demobilisation in Upper Egypt since 25 January 2011
(LSE)

This is an original and substantial dissertation that sheds interesting new light on the politics of contention among inhabitants of Upper Egypt. By using the framework of mobilisation and demobilisation the author develops a series of plausible explanatory theories, grounded in an excellent critical engagement with the contentious politics literature, but also backed by exceptionally detailed and authoritative empirical research in the relevant communities. This is one of the highlights of the dissertation and represents a genuinely new and impressive contribution to our knowledge of the dynamics of power at local level in Upper Egypt. But also, because of the theoretical sophistication of the analytical frame, it provides ways of thinking about similar processes in very different settings. The detailed dissection of the local contexts is systematic but also sensitive to local understandings and enactments of power relations. In doing so, it gives a nuanced reading of the political capacities of communities, as well as a balanced assessment of the circumstances of political mobilisation. It is a genuine and distinctive contribution of the field of contentious politics, as well as to the field of contemporary Egyptian politics.

Emilie Le Febvre

Tracing Visual Knowledge: the presence and value of images for Bedouin history and society in the Negev

(University of Oxford)

This is a very well-written and argued work that examines a much-neglected community, the Bedouin in the Negev, and their use of digital images and visualisation to respond to, and represent, their history themselves.

Situated in anthropological approaches that combine situated fieldwork, participant observation, interviews, social biographies and intensive archival research, the author meticulously uses existing scholarship and empirical data to map what she calls 'nested visual economies' characterising Bedouin society in the Negev to interrogate Bedouin iconography, describing members' own growing command of visual technologies over the last twenty years and the cultural principles that influence the visual practices in their society. The thesis offers a fresh perspective that not only moves out of dominant approaches to understanding their everyday lives and relations to the wider Israeli/Palestinian populations and histories, but also addresses how they use visual technologies in their negotiations of tribalism, Islam, nationalism and citizenship in southern Israel. Based on fieldwork, the thesis argues that their notions of 'insiders' and 'outsiders' in Bedouin society were diverse, thus underlining the importance of addressing identities, irrespective of how they are defined and talked about, as dynamic and changing according to contexts. Another refreshing element in this thesis is the author's steering clear of dominant academic arguments about the role of media technologies and instead addressing how the subjects studied use visual materials in the form of photographs and digital images to articulate their history and identities. This approach is a significant and much needed corrective to approaches in media studies that often assume a role for media rather than media users as agents. Another interesting aspect of the fieldwork is the discussion around the dislocation of original images from their original material constraints and spatial contexts and their re-appearance in other spaces, which in itself merits further investigation, particularly with reference to the changing functions of the photos as they are dislocated and shared in public. These areas of study remain little discussed in the burgeoning scholarship on digital images and digital story-telling. This is a solid thesis that merits recognition.

Joint Runners Up (£150 each)**James Eastwood**

The ethics of Israeli militarism: soldiers' testimony and the formation of the Israeli soldier-subject

(SOAS)

This is a sophisticated dissertation that lays out a series of key arguments regarding the role of ethics in the constitution of militarism in Israel. It is theoretically engaged and develops a framework that allows a thoughtful dissection of the phenomenon, bringing a critical perspective to bear on existing literatures on militarism, as well as on the forms of explanation that have been deployed in general and with reference to the Israeli case. The empirical research is very substantial and encompasses a range of different sources and methods, combining to make an excellent case for the thesis that is being advanced, and demonstrating throughout a sensitivity to language and to the predicament of the soldier-

subject in Israel that is remarkable. In addition to the insights into military pedagogy and the relationship between ethics and militarism in Israel, the insights developed have much to say beyond the particular case. They also suggest ways of thinking of non-military subject formation in Israel and elsewhere and the effects of this on the larger systems of power that are thereby sustained. This is a strong and well-crafted thesis.

Hussein Omar

The Rule of Strangers: Empire, Islam and the Invention of 'Politics' in Egypt 1867-1914
(University of Oxford)

This is a very interesting and provocative thesis that engages with a number of scholarly historiographical and methodological debates surrounding Egyptian politics of the late 19th and early 20th century. It constitutes an ambitious and original contribution to our understanding of the development of political debate and thought in Egypt during the early decades of the British occupation. In its discussion of the articulation of British imperialist policies in Egypt, first under Dufferin and then Cromer, and the response of the Egyptian nationalist politicians, the thesis seeks to pursue a critique of our understanding of intellectual history, postcolonial criticism, and Eurocentric understandings of politics, among other things.... The argument creatively engages with a wide range of theoretical literature and shows a strong knowledge of the relevant material of the topic. The dissertation offers an original and close reading of a number of important primary texts, especially the writings of Ahmad Lutfi al-Sayyid and Mustafa Kamil. At times.... the critique of the existing scholarship is rather broadbrushand the point of criticism regarding the way in which the Indian example has been ill-used in analysing Egypt, could have been further developed.... The argument is clearly set outand the author competently brings together a number of complex ideas... for the most part successfully. Rich in original insights this is a dissertation that represents a clear contribution to the field and would be most welcome as a fuller publication.

Elsa Tulin Sen

The Struggle of the Kurds in Turkey: from national aspirations to social movement
(KCL)

This is a well thought through and well researched dissertation that puts forward a clear thesis that is both theoretically informed and empirically supported. The author looks in detail at the trajectory of the Kurdish movement(s) in Turkey and focuses in particular on their transition from a nationalist movement (seeking self-determination and the independence that would allow for the realisation of such an objective) and a social movement, or more accurately a total social movement (influenced by the thinking of Touraine). The case is a convincing one and the inner workings of Kurdish politics and of the movements that were the principal actors are set out in convincing detail. At the same time, a balanced and clear sighted view is presented of the relationships between such movements and the Turkish state authorities on the one hand, and the Kurdish population as a whole. Thorough as the dissertation is, it is occasionally rather mechanical in its exposition of nationalism and social movement theories (a common failing of SMT) but there is a good use of comparative material and there is no faulting the quality of the primary research. The question of violence is raised and is acknowledged to have an impact on the argument but could have benefited from greater elaboration, especially given the forms that violence can take and the ways it may be integral to certain kinds of power relation.

2016

Joint Winners (£ 300 each)

Dorthe Engelcke

Processes of Family Law Reform: Legal and Societal Change and Continuity in Morocco and Jordan
(University of Oxford)

This is an excellent thesis, extremely well written and researched with an impressive range of sources well deployed and compellingly engaged in support of the candidate's overall aim of comparing the processes of family law reform in the two selected countries. The thesis looks at 'family law reform as an example of policy making in authoritarian states' and at family law as an examination of 'state-society relations rather than gender relations alone'; the combination of the two is innovative and works very well here. The 'empirical puzzle' of why these two monarchies followed different paths to reform is well presented and the theoretical framework is well selected and supplies a cogent framing of the chapters. The main theoretical framing comprises a careful and relevant exposition of Bourdieu's work in particular including the concept of 'cultural capital' which is invoked consistently in the study and which results in an excellent comparative effort that goes beyond most such efforts at comparison.The empirical research is carefully explained and used to very good effect; it includes a wide range of pertinent sources accessed with clear commitment to the needs of the thesis. The empirical work includes presentation and analysis of the records of relevant parliamentary debates and interviews, with an illuminating discussion of 'intra-royal competition'; the tracking and analysis of the debates and process of law reform at the department of the Chief Islamic Justice in Jordan in particular presents new material that is of particular and immediate relevance to the thesis. The exposition of calls for further family law reform in Morocco in 2012 also presents original material of great significance; and the section on the role of the social assistant is a further and particularly interesting original contribution. Reflections on the teaching of the law opens new avenues in studying the different parts of systems at play in developing and implementing family law 'reform.' The structure is very well conceived and the Bibliography full, wide-ranging and well presented.

Carl Rommel

Revolution, play and feeling - Assembling emotionality, national subjectivity and football in Cairo, 1990-2013
(SOAS, University of London)

This thesis is a thoroughly researched ethnography of football in Egypt during the tumultuous events of 2011-2013. Using extensive participant observation in football playing-and watching milieus of young men in Cairo, Dr Rommel develops an argument about the deeper meaning of football in popular culture. A Latourian assemblage of the sport is constructed from various snippets of popular culture including newspapers, fanzines and other online material. Rommel shows how and why football lost its allure and was fundamentally transformed during the Egyptian uprisings. A highly sophisticated yet very readable urban ethnography, the thesis draws on current debates about affect, emotionality and rhythms of everyday life in anthropology. Rommel puts these debates to great effect by interweaving thematic vignettes with theoretical discussions. Having researched football at such a critical juncture in Egypt's political history, Rommel's dissertation allows for interventions into the

political - and sometimes de-politicising - work of sport. It is conversant with key works in Middle East anthropology and studies of Egyptian political culture, and will be of interest to anyone working on Egypt, revolutions, and sport in the Middle East. Finally, Rommel conveys the central element of joy and pleasure in football, which makes it a phenomenon that should be taken very seriously by scholars.

Joint Runners Up (£ 150 each)

Maayan Geva

The Politics of How Law Works in War: The Case of the Israeli Military International Law Department
(Open University)

This is an extremely well written and meticulous piece of research that critiques the conventional assumption that international humanitarian law is a tool for constraining military violence against civilians through an analysis of the ways in which Israel has adopted and utilised IHL to legitimize its repression against Palestinian resistance to Zionist occupation and colonization. The clarity of prose, which is to be commended for its lack of jargon, logically unfolds the complex arguments in a clear and concise way. The author makes an excellent case that Israel has pioneered the use of ‘lawfare’ (the use of law as a weapon of war) that has subsequently been utilized by the US in its ‘war on terror’, and that this was achieved through the interaction of the International Law Department (a military legal unit of the IDF), the Israeli High Court of Justice, and Israeli human rights NGOs – all three of which form an intricate interrelationship that she analyses through the concept of Bourdieu’s ‘sociology of the field’. The thesis analyses the developments of this historically, but builds up to a focus on the 2008/9 war on Gaza (‘Operation Cast Lead’), where the reinterpretation of the distinction between ‘civilians’ and ‘combatant’ as well as ‘proportionality’ allowed the most extreme use of violence ever used against Palestinians to take place – but in the context of the most extensive involvement of lawyers to date. The author freely and openly acknowledges the pioneering empirical research of Eyal Weizman. The originality, however, lies in the theoretical framework the author develops. By utilising Bourdieu’s ‘sociology of the field’ to argue for a reinterpretation of law as a reflexive practice, thus critiquing conceptions of law (both formalism and legalism) as well as the regularly utilized dualistic framework that regards law as either a preventative or a regulatory force, the author develops a novel framework for analyzing law as a socially dynamic practice – which should be acknowledged and commended.

Jamil Mouawad

The Negotiated State: State – Society Relations In Lebanon
(SOAS, University of London)

Overall, Dr. Mouawad’s thesis, entitled “The Negotiated State – State-Society Relations in Lebanon”—is an outstanding, original and superbly researched study on contemporary Lebanese politics and society. Its focus on how the Lebanese state is narrated, practised, and received/resisted is a very welcome addition to the literature on Lebanon and the nature of the state in the MENA region more generally. By its sophisticated and nuanced perspective, the thesis provides a viable analytical alternative to the contested and arguably unfruitful notion of the ‘weak state’. The thesis is littered with insightful observations, and rich in empirical detail blending primary and secondary sources with truly excellent fieldwork. The chapters

on the Litani River project and on local projects in the Akkar region are particularly strong in providing a nuanced account and analysis of the ways in which the state in Lebanon functions and presents itself....This thesis is of a very high standard that current books on the topic – in Lebanon and the region more generally – have not been able to match. As the thesis is embedded in a perceptive reading of social science approaches to state and society....the thesis when published will also gain traction beyond Middle East studies and finally grant Lebanon a place in the comparative study of the state by no longer serving as the archetypical (or even caricatured) example of the ‘failed state’. To the extent that policymakers continue to anchor their own approaches to the Middle East and beyond in the notion of the ‘failed state’, Dr. Mouawad’s study will come highly recommended.

Honourable Mention (£ 75 book token)

Ceren Lord

Rethinking religio-politics in Turkey through the prism of religious majoritarianism
(LSE)

This dissertation is an effective and critical engagement with much of the literature concerning the relationship between religion and state in Turkey. As such, it traces the ways in which Islam has been very much part of public discourse and institutionally embedded in the structures of the state, even when the state has been represented as being at its most ‘secular’. This emerges from and elaborates a set of questions that problematize how one might understand ‘the state’ as a general category, not simply in its Turkish incarnation, and uses productively the concept of majoritarianism to reconceptualise the place of Islam in Turkey’s public life. This is all persuasively developed, butthe reconceptualization of the state might have been usefully taken further. Nevertheless, there is evidence here of the systematic use of original sources and a great deal of detail on different aspects of the question, grounded in an exceptionally well-informed and sensitive understanding of the dynamics of Turkey’s modern history and political condition.

2015

Joint Winners (£ 300 prize each)

Jamal Bahmad

Casablanca belongs to Us: globalisation, everyday life and postcolonial subjectivity in Moroccan cinema since the 1990s
(University of Stirling)

This is an outstanding and original work that makes a substantial contribution to diverse fields of knowledge. Using the medium of film, and an authoritative understanding of the principles of film studies, Dr Bahmad engages effectively with the social and political processes that have been so much a feature of contemporary Morocco and that are the outcome of the transformations set in motion throughout the country. By choosing as a focus the city of Casablanca he provides us with a detailed and sensitive understanding of the ways in which power, space and social fabric have interacted in the city – and the ways in which contemporary Moroccan film makers have sought to capture these emblematic changes, using them to represent and to understand these processes throughout the country, and the tensions to which they have given rise. This analysis is underpinned by a lively engagement with social theory that provides the basis for a fine-grained and richly sourced body of

cinematographic evidence. This results in one of the richest and most deep-rooted interpretations of the currents of power, resistance and self-understanding in Morocco that are presently available. A real tour de force.

Perla Issa

Palestinian Political Factions: an everyday perspective
(Exeter University)

A seriously interesting dissertation of considerable originality in conception and execution. It has a strong argument that is theoretically informed with an approach well suited to the support of the thesis. The ethnographic method is well thought out and justified and, most importantly, provides outstanding insights in ways that allow the writer to advance and develop the larger themes that emerge from this....It is one of the most impressive pieces of work that I have read concerning the ways in which imagined structures come to take on a reality, despite their mythic origins, through the practices of those who help to create them, even while opposing what it is that 'they' are supposed to be doing. This does two things of considerable significance for wider political arguments: it places thought in context, demonstrating how ideas of practices, and practices as the embodiment of ideas can bring new institutions and networks into being as mediators of power; it can be used as a way of developing critical reappraisals of other structures that appear to frame and bound political life, such as the state itself.....The rich and original research provides a clear setting and a substantial backing for a complex and multi-faceted argument.

Runner Up (£ 150 prize)

Jessica Watkins

Policing Disputes: power and social order in Jordan
(KCL, University of London)

This work is to be commended for its originality and for taking a question and an approach that has rarely been used before to such good effect. It opens new ground by examining aspects of power and administration in Jordan that have never been subjected before to such searching and thoughtful scrutiny. By making a close and sensitive study of policing in Jordan the writer throws light on processes of policing, authority, social interaction, state power and coercion that go far beyond the stereotypes and treats policing as a social activity with complex repercussions in Jordanian society, sometimes producing unexpected observations..... The writer is to be congratulated on the outstanding nature of the research and the excellent use made of it in the framing of the argument. The clarity of expression is also to be commended, avoiding jargon and communicating both the empirical evidence, but also some complex arguments with skill and authority.

Honourable Mention (£ 75 book token)

Hussein Alqarni

Negotiating Abbasid Modernity: the case of Al-Asma'i and the Rearguard Poets
(Manchester University)

This is a sound and meticulous piece of scholarship, demonstrating extensive knowledge of the genre. Through close reading of both the texts and the contexts of poetry and criticism in this key period of dynastic transition the dissertation throws a searching light onto an important aspect of literary production at this time. In particular, the dissertation brings out well the philological, as well as the genre-specific aspects of the work of these poets whose work has been grouped together.... there is no denying the depth and seriousness of the research that has gone into this and the extent to which it has brought together work that has rarely been subjected to such careful examination. In particular, the skill of the author in situating the works of these poets, and of the critics, within the changing cultural landscape of the early Abbasid empire is marked and goes a long way toward explaining the distinguishing characteristics of this curiously – and ambiguously – named grouping of poets. The author succeeds in linking word usage and the development of imagery to the commonalities of an oeuvre that suggested to critics a unity of style, and possibly of purpose that helps to define the grouping. The dissertation, as well as being a close and authoritative study of the poets' output, their use of language, the models they followed and the nature of their craft, also provides some key insights into a moment of transition that was to reverberate through Islamic and Arab history.

2014

Joint Prize Winners (£300 each)

Chikara Hashimoto

British intelligence, counter-subversion and 'Informal Empire' in the Middle East
(Aberystwyth University)

An original and thoughtful exploration of a little studied subject...Demonstrates an excellent feel for the period and the forces at work, as well as a commendable sensitivity of interpretation. It is grounded in a good understanding not only of some of the larger issues at stake, but also of the theories of historiography and of IR within which the argument is set...In particular, the approach to and handling of the sometimes fragmentary sources in this deliberately inaccessible field is highly commended, showing an exemplary determination, but also developing a balanced argument that takes into account some of the inevitable silences or absences in the archival record. Overcoming this, the dissertation nevertheless makes a very plausible case for the direction of British intelligence operations in the Middle East during the Cold War – and lays out also some of the unforeseen consequences that followed from some of the measures taken to deal with what were then perceived to be immediate and all-consuming dangers. A salutary warning against some of the costs of more recent responses to security panics in the region.

Nahid Siamdost

Iran's troubled tunes: music as politics in the Islamic Republic
(University of Oxford)

A real tour de force that breaks new ground in the study not simply of music in Iran, but also in the constitution and development of the public sphere in the Islamic Republic. Engaging fully in the theoretical debates that have characterised studies of cultural production and their link with various systems of power production,

the dissertation succeeds in using wholly original material effectively and well. The treatment of this material on a number of levels is thoughtful, sensitive and displays a finely attuned ear that can bring out the nuance of language, as well as musical genres.... The rich empirical material is wonderfully used, not merely to illustrate, but also to develop a set of arguments about culture and power, and about the political dynamics of contemporary Iranian society. The interpretative power of the dissertation lies in its ability to draw on a number of disciplines in order to set before the reader an enlightening thesis that restores to the study of Iranian society and politics the full complexity that it truly merits.

Kyle Haddad-Fonda

Revolutionary allies: Sino-Egyptian and Sino-Algerian relations in the Bandung decade
(University of Oxford)

This thesis revisits the era of non-aligned Third World cooperation in a way that brings the subject to life and thereby provides a balanced and productive understanding of some of the major motives and factors at work in shaping relations between China, Egypt, the FLN and then the Algerian Republic. The argument is carefully developed and sustained by a close reading of the Chinese archive...[that] allows a plausible thesis to emerge. In taking seriously both sides of these relationships, the dissertation provides original interpretations and manages to throw new light on a field that has rarely been studied in this detail.

Honourable Mention (£ 75 book token)

Stremmel, Fabian

Changing approaches and new structures: German cultural diplomacy in Syria and Lebanon during the late Kaiserreich up to 1918
(SOAS)

This is a meticulous study of this era in the Near Eastern diplomacy of the German Kaiserreich, examining both the drivers of these policies in Berlin and the ways in which they played out in the Levant. Following a number of case studies with care and excellent attention to detail, the dissertation builds up a convincing picture of the motivations and the outcomes of these policies of language and technical instruction.... In doing so, it brings to light a series of developments that have been somewhat ignored in the literature, but that helped to constitute the emerging elites and intelligentsia of the Arab provinces in the late Ottoman Empire. It therefore meets an important need in the historical understanding of the Levant in the early 20th century.

2013

Joint Winners (£300 each)

Francesca Burke

Students of Resistance: Palestinian student mobilization at home and in exile
University of Oxford (2011)

A powerful and original thesis that examines a subject much generalised about, but rarely studied in such a serious way. The dissertation makes a good case for the study of these cohorts of young Palestinians both in theoretical terms – attaching it to larger understandings

of contentious politics – and in terms of the political history of Palestinians under occupation and in exile. The thesis is supported by sound empirical research that links the predicament of the students to the larger forces shaping Palestinian consciousness and action over the past few decades.

Jorg Matthias Detterman

Globalization, the State and Narrative Plurality: historiography in Saudi Arabia
(SOAS, University of London)

This is a work of extraordinary value and scholarly integrity. It engages effectively with larger questions of historiography in order to bring to light aspects of Saudi history that are often overlooked by those who do not have access to these remarkable resources. The author has made extraordinarily good use of primary materials, assembling an impressive array of local and personal histories that form a more plural and complex picture of the peoples of Saudi Arabia than has often been appreciated. This is a truly impressive work that could serve as a model of its kind and stands as a testimony to the meticulous scholarship of the author.

Honourable Mention (£75 book token)

Rebecca Steinfeld

War of the Wombs: the history and politics of fertility policies in Israel, 1948-2010
University of Oxford

This is an original dissertation that is ambitious in its scope...but it also deals with an important topic that has been remarkably little studied in this particular context...It explores a number of facets of this question that help to illuminate some of the key processes at work in Israeli politics and society, demonstrating both a detailed knowledge of these processes, as well as a sound understanding of the larger questions they raise in terms of theorising about gender politics and reproduction.

Honourable Mention (£75 book token)

Reza Zia-Ebrahimi

The Emergence of Iranian Nationalism – modernity and the politics of dislocation 1860-1940
University of Oxford

A mercifully jargon-free exploration of some of the features of an emerging Iranian nationalism....[It] takes its key texts seriously and subjects them to a sound contextual analysis, demonstrating persuasively the ways in which many of their central ideas were taken up and used in the service of the Pahlavi monarchy.

2012

Joint Winners (£ 300)

Farah Al-Nakib

Kuwait City: urbanisation, the built environment, and the urban experience before and after oil (1716-1986)
SOAS, London University

An extraordinarily impressive contribution to the fields with which it engages – the historiography of Kuwait and the Gulf, urban history, political economy, spatial politics and the social foundations of power...these are confidently handled, developed and integrated in ways that highlight the originality of the argument...The ambitious historical span of the dissertation allows arguments in all these areas to be fully developed, reinforced by exceptionally thorough and painstaking research, informed throughout by a determination to bring the evidence to bear on a distinct set of theses, taking it far beyond the merely descriptive...As befits such a study, a variety of disciplinary approaches were deployed but to the mutual benefit of each of them, and certainly to the great advantage of the dissertation as a whole. This is an exemplary study of the social and political effects of the dramatic transformations made possible by the exploitation of oil that never loses sight of the human element or of the environment built by successive generations of workers and planners in Kuwait.

Noam Leshem

Taking Place: spatial history in Israel and the case of Salama/Kefar Shalem
Birkbeck College, London University

This study of a very specific place is wonderfully deceptive in its focus: it encompasses a topic, or series of topics much greater in scope than its title would suggest. In doing so, it reveals through careful research and argument the processes that have gone into not only the shaping of this place during these years, but also the socio-political setting in which it exists, as well as the kinds of forces that have gone into the making of this reality. Thus, it provides the basis for a wide-ranging and original examination of the history and politics of space, not only in Israel, but also, through its comparative and theoretical sophistication, in very different locations....it has used the insights gained in this meticulous study of the evidence presented here to back up significant arguments about space and power. In doing so, it uses multidisciplinary approaches to excellent effect, bringing out through how space, memory and power are intertwined in ways that can be surprising and revealing of the structures, material and imaginative that shape the social world.

Runner-up (£150 prize)

Sophie Richter-Devroe

Gender and Conflict Transformation in Palestine: women's political activism between local and international agendas
Exeter University

Ground-breaking research that brings out the many facets of women's activism in the occupied territories of Palestine....Taking a refreshingly independent approach that is nevertheless grounded in a full understanding of larger questions raised by the subject and by the methodologies so skilfully deployed, the author succeeds in bringing a fresh and original view of the forces at work in Palestine and the particular challenges facing women under occupation....This is a major contribution both to gender studies and to the understanding of the particular dynamics of the politics of Israeli occupation and Palestinian activism and the conflicts that have characterised this relationship. The author engages critically and effectively with some of the principal arguments in the study of conflict, as well as in gender studies, fruitfully interrogating both through the invaluable primary research carried out for the dissertation.

Honourable mention (£75 book token)

Amara Thornton

British Archaeologists, Social Networks and the Emergence of a Profession: the social history of British archaeology in the Eastern Mediterranean and Middle East 1870-1939
University College, London University

This is a highly original achievement that maps with extraordinary skill and an eye for detail the emergence of the social and political, as well as disciplinary, field of British archaeology in the Middle East...The author is to be congratulated for using so much original material so effectively to create a fine-grained and persuasive account of the ways in which this sector of the profession came into being. It is a valuable contribution not merely to the history of this intimate and elaborate network of individuals, but also to the social history of the British Empire. The links between power and knowledge are well known, but here we have an opportunity to see in startling detail the constitution of the field, the power that went into the making of it and the norms that governed its internal regulation. This is a powerful contribution to the fields of social, intellectual and colonial history that can serve as a model for the examination of other areas and other professional networks at different epochs.

Honourable mention (£75 book token)

Reem Abou-El-Fadl

Divergent Pasts, Diverging Choices: foreign policy and nation building in Turkey and Egypt during the 1950s
Oxford University

A well-developed thesis that successfully integrates the fields of comparative politics and international relations to produce a convincing argument about the nature of foreign policy making under particular historical conditions...It throws light on trends that were equally visible across the world in the period of decolonisation and independence and... [thereby] makes a substantial contribution to our understanding of global political processes beyond the particular case studies....These [Egypt and Turkey] are handled exceptionally well, with a good feel not only for the context of political decision-making in the two countries, but also for the aspirations of their political societies.

2011

Joint Winners

Elvire Corboz

Negotiating Loyalty Across the Shi'i World: the transnational authority of the al-Hakim and al-Khu'i families
(University of Oxford)

and

Abdel Razzaq Takriti

Revolution and Absolutism: Oman 1965-1976
(University of Oxford)

Honourable Mention (£ 50 book token)

Laetitia Nanquette

The Eye Sees Not Itself? Mutual Images of France and Iran Through Their Literatures (1979-2009)

(SOAS, University of London)

2010

Winner (£500)

Daniel Neep

Colonising Violence: Space, insurgency and subjectivity in French Mandate Syria

(SOAS, University of London)

The dissertation pursues the idea that practices of violence produce modernity....No-one has taken this approach very far with regard to Syria, or with regard to French colonialism in the Middle East, or with such a particular and developed focus on violence itself. The way in which Neep formulates his question and pursues his theme is therefore seriously distinctive....this is a thesis of striking, first class originality. The research is meticulous, the evidence rich, well-tied to the arguments, and well-organized;...The thesis is remarkably lucid;[and] clearly outstanding.

Honourable Mention

Avi Raz

The Palestinian Option:; Israel and the West Bank Leadership, 1967-1969

Wolfson College, Oxford University

This affords the reader a detailed and scrupulously researched account of negotiations between Israel and various Palestinian interlocutors, as well as the King of Jordan in the eighteen months or so following the war of 1967....It provides an unparalleled insight into the ways in which the Israeli government effectively resisted external pressure to relinquish the territories occupied during the war...based on exhaustive and well organised use of a variety of archives, as well as on a wide-ranging set of interviews...It is an exceptional piece of research

2009

Winner (£500)

Mark Dickens

Turkâyé: Turkic Peoples in Syriac Literature Prior to the Seljûks

(University of Cambridge)

This is an outstanding piece of work in a field which is grossly under-researched, the perception of the Turks as seen by the Syriac-speaking Christians of the areas they entered. It displays an extraordinary grasp of sources not only in Syriac but in several other relevant

languages, combined with a historical analysis of a high order and an intimate knowledge of the Eastern Turkic/Central Asian regions involved. This is really serious scholarship of a kind which will stand for many decades, if not longer.

Honourable mention (£50 book token)

Abeer Abdullah A. al-Abbasi

Astrology in Literature: How the Prohibited became Permissible in the Arabic Poetry of the Mediaeval Period

(University of Leeds)

This is an original and substantial work of scholarship that uses literary evidence effectively to illuminate social and philosophical attitudes during the Umayyad and Abbasid periods. Taking the theme of astrology, and changing views of the acceptability of its various forms, the dissertation convincingly demonstrates the enduring power of astrology in shaping beliefs about destiny, despite condemnation by orthodox religious scholars...An impressive range of primary sources adds to the authority of the dissertation.

2008

Joint Winners (£250 each)

W. Judson Dorman

The Politics of Neglect: the Egyptian State in Cairo, 1974-98

(SOAS, London University)

This is an original and theoretically engaged work which looks at the modes of governance in Egypt from a fresh perspective...The thesis develops a plausible and interesting argument about the nature of the power exercised by the Egyptian state, setting this within important current debates in the discipline....It supports this with detailed and meticulous empirical research which adds considerable credence to the thesis, investigating aspects of urban power in Cairo that have rarely been examined in this way and thereby making an original contribution to our understanding of the workings of politics in Egypt, with significant implications for understandings of the state elsewhere...It is a highly accomplished work.

Maria Petsani

The Dhabih Allah as Metaphor for Self-Submission: a critical reassessment of the sacrifice narrative in Q. 37:99-113

(University of Durham)

A remarkable thesis which approaches the topic both with specialist textual knowledge and with an interpretative imagination informed by a range of different disciplines...this multidisciplinary approach results in a rich and stimulating interpretation, showing considerable innovation and originality...It sets the sacrifice narrative in a comparative setting, bringing out historical parallels, but also the symbolic and metaphorical aspects which provide a semiotic key of some power.

Honourable mention (£50 book token)

Shahira S. Samy

The Politics of Reparations in the Case of Palestinian Refugees - a comparative approach
(University of Exeter)

A well-constructed synthetic and comparative analysis of the question of reparations, with particular focus on the case of the Palestinian refugees...Historical and comparative material has been used to good effect to bring out the various legal and political issues surrounding the question of reparations to civilian populations....The thesis brings together in a clearly structured way a diverse set of readings on these topics and adds interpretative value to the phenomenon and to the cases explored.

2007

The prize was not awarded in 2007.

2006

Joint Winners (£250 each)**Fabio Caiani**

Innovation in the novels of Muhammad Barrada, Idwar al-Kharrat, Ilyas Khuri and Fu'ad al-Takarli - 1979-1999
(University of St Andrews)

Jennifer Dueck

Competing for Culture in a Levantine Mosaic: oeuvres de propagande in Syria and Lebanon, 1936-1946
(University of Oxford)

2005

Winner**Konrad Hirschler**

Narrating the Past: Social Contexts and Literary Structures of Arabic Historical Writing in the Seventh/Thirteenth Century
(SOAS)

Honourable Mention**Simon O'Meara**

An Architectural Investigation of Marinid and Wattasid Fes Medina (674-961/1276-1554) in terms of Genda, Legend and Law.
(University of Leeds)

2004

The prize was not awarded in 2004.

2003

Joint Winners (£250 each)

Paul G. Newson

Settlement, Land Use and Water Management Systems in Roman Arabia: an integrated archaeological approach
(University of Leicester)

Nicola Pratt

Globalization and the Post-Colonial State: human rights NGOs and the prospects for democratic governance in Egypt
(University of Exeter)

Honourable Mentions (£50 book token each)

James McDougall

Colonial Words: Nationalism, Islam and Languages of History in Algeria
(University of Oxford)

Martin Whittingham

Al-Ghazali and Qur'anic Hermeneutics
University of Edinburgh

2002

Winner

James Onley

The Infrastructure of Informal Empire: a study of Britain's Native Agency in Bahrain, c. 1816-1900
(University of Oxford)

This is a detailed and original study of the British Political Residency in the Persian Gulf during the 19th century. In particular, it studies the role and activities of the 'native agents' employed by the British in Bahrain during this period to protect and further British interests. The Native Agency was headed during these years by a succession of affluent men from Arab, Persian and Indian merchant families who acted as agents for Great Britain in their dealings with local society, both political and commercial. Through the meticulous use of family archives and local, as well as British sources, the dissertation succeeds in rescuing from obscurity these key actors in the British imperial system. As such it also engages with larger questions concerning the historiography of British India and of the British Empire. It presents a persuasive and well-grounded study which leads the way for a re-examination of the nature of British imperial power in the Persian Gulf during the 19th century. The clarity of exposition and the detailed use of sources were particularly commended.

Honourable Mention

Recep Cigdem

The Register of the Law Court of Istanbul 1612-1613: a legal analysis
(University of Manchester)

This thesis analyses in impressive detail the records of the Law Court of Istanbul - the most important court in the Ottoman Empire - during the years 1612-1613. It sheds light on the application of Hanafi law through close examination of the sicils of the court, revealing a wealth of information not only on the application of the law, but also on aspects of Ottoman society in the capital at this time.

2001

Joint Winners

Ahmed Abdul-Kareem Saif

A Legislature in Transition: the Parliament of the Republic of Yemen 1990-1999
(University of Exeter)

and

Anthony B. Toth

The Transformation of a Pastoral Economy: Bedouin and States in Northern Arabia 1850-1950
(University of Oxford)

Honourable Mention

Francine Stone

Tihamah Gazetteer - the Southern Red Sea Coast of Arabia to 923/1517
(University of Manchester)

Graphic depictions of violence are by no means exclusive to Arabic cultural production, but they do play an ongoing role within the poetic canon as well as within accounts of legendary battles, lamentations for the deceased and the iconography of heroism. Blood vengeance is an institutional mechanism for restoring lost honour according to a ritual process which consists of poetic incitement, followed by active blood-letting, a period where tribal identity is reinforced and a poetic closure. Through an examination of verse from across the Arabian Peninsula, woven over fifteen hundred years, I focus upon the poetic ritual and how speech can shape memory, cement ideology and condition behaviour along an epic continuum of time and geography, with the mood music of a glorious history as accompaniment. Initially, I view conflict from the perspective of the ancient institution of the blood feud which facilitates survival in challenging desert circumstances, where resources are scarce and honour is bestowed upon a dominant hero. In so doing, I study the paradigm from anthropological, mythological and politico-economic perspectives, and demonstrate that the feud cycle is a continuous metaphor that contextualizes a vengeful act as an aspect of sectarianism, border conflict between empires, anti-colonial resistance or militant jihadism. Within my analysis, I consider classical examples of verse, such as the Jahili heroic

poem, Kharijite verse from the early Islamic period and war propaganda of the Abbasid court; as well as a neoclassical poem from the mid-twentieth century and twenty-first century jihadist poetry. By identifying recurrent motifs, repetitive content and traditional forms, I argue that poems appear to transcend their own time and conform instead to a political meta-narrative of armed struggle, which variously involves tribes, class, religious affiliation and ethnicity.