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### ***"The Study of Middle Eastern History in the United States"***

**By Kenneth W. Stein**

#### Introduction

Half a year after I married a girl from New Orleans, I thought I would try to find a job in that quiet city. One Friday afternoon in December, 1969, I approached a member of the History Department in one of its universities. I inquired, "Do you have someone who teaches Middle Eastern history, and if not, would you be interested in hiring a Middle Eastern historian?" The reply came back like a shot. "We have a specialist in the Middle East, Mr. Williams. He has been here for more than a decade." I looked perplexed and answered, "But I checked in the card catalogue, searched the library shelves, and found very little on the Middle East." As I turned to leave the office, I was curious and asked to know Mr. Williams' Middle Eastern area of concentration. The History Department professor put his hand on my shoulder and said in an avuncular tone, "Mr. Williams did his work and has published numerous articles on Tennessee in the 1840s!"

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Today, my impression is that the state of Middle Eastern history in the United States is not much better off than that New Orleans professor's geographical definition of the Middle East was nineteen years ago.' Just as that professor possessed a parochial view of what constitutes the

Middle East, the number, nature and focus of historical writings need improvement and the number of Middle Eastern historians requires augmentation. What is written in English tends to be crisis driven, generated by the last unexpected, spectacular, or violent act in the region. Statistical findings presented in this paper suggest that the writing and research in Middle Eastern history is narrowly focused and specialized. Excellent historical research in Middle Eastern history has been completed during the last twenty-five years. But there appears to be an impatient tendency to rely on explaining contemporary events rather than waiting for documents or archives to reveal the intricacies of historical change. In addition to some abandonment of perspective, foreign language acquisition and usage as applied to the writing and interpretation of Middle Eastern history appear to be less rigorous than in previous years. This seems to be the case for European languages and especially for Arabic.

For the purposes of this paper the Middle East includes discussion of the Palestinians, the countries of Afghanistan, Egypt, Iran, Iraq, Israel, Lebanon, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Syria, Turkey, and countries of the Arabian peninsula. For reasons of time limitations, those Middle Eastern countries not included in my evaluation are Algeria, Libya, Morocco, Pakistan and Tunisia.

The history of the Middle Eastern profession in the United States is outlined elsewhere. For a sampling see R. Bayly Winder, 'Four Decades of Middle Eastern Study', *Middle East Journal* (Winter 1987), pp. 40-63; Leonard Binder, 'Area Studies: A Critical Assessment', in Leonard Binder (ed.), *The Study of the Middle East Research and Scholarship in the Humanities and the Social Sciences*, New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1976, pp. 1-28; Bernard Lewis, 'The State of Middle Eastern Studies', *The American Scholar* (Summer 1979), pp. 365-381; Albert Hourani, 'History', in Leonard Binder (ed.). For a fine assortment of analyses of contemporary Islamic Studies see Malcolm E. Kerr (ed.), *Islamic Studies: A Tradition and Its Problems*, Undena Publications, Malibu, California, 1980.

Evaluations of American Middle Eastern studies by foreign specialists is given by Bassam Tibi, 'Der amerikanische 'Area Studies Approach' in den -international Studies' am Beispiel der "Middle Eastern Studies' in Ann Arbor, Michigan und Washington', *Orient* (March, 1983), pp. 260-284 and Irene Errera-Hbchstetter, 'Les etudes sur le Moyen Orient aux Etats-Unis. Les enseignements d'une expérience', *Maghreb-Machrek* (1978), pp. 31-41. A bibliographic and historiographic assessment of literature on the Middle East from a US-Middle East point of view is presented by Roger Trask, 'United States Relations with the Middle East in the Twentieth Century: A Developing Area in Historical Literature', in Gerald K. Haines and J. Samuel Walker (eds.), *American Foreign Relations. A Historiographical Review*, Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, pp. 293-

309.

For more polemic views see Gary S. Schiff, *Middle East Centers at Selected American Universities*, The American Jewish Committee, 1981; 'Middle East Studies Network', MERIP Report, No. 38 (September, 1975); Naseer Aruri, 'The Middle East on the US Campus', *The Link* (May-June, 1985), pp. 1-14; and Ibrahim Abu-Lughod, 'Zionist Control of Arabic Studies in the US', *al-Adab* (Beirut) (June, 1974).

Fewer students are learning Middle Eastern languages because of the prolonged period of time necessary to gain research-usage competence. Those who were trained in languages are currently burdened by academic administrative matters; others, by choice, have been recruited at earlier stages in their educational training to policy- and business-oriented occupations, sometimes ending language training or its usage for research purposes. It also seems that fewer students are being trained in the cultures, religions and history of the region. In addition to the fascination with the Arab-Israeli conflict, which is reflected in our writings, many who teach the Middle East have become politicized, allowing emotional predisposition to influence professional judgment.

It is difficult to gauge the impact the state and direction of Middle Eastern history have had on American foreign policy towards the region. It may be coincidental, but the state of historical scholarship on the Middle East and our foreign policy tend to be reactive and event specific, tunneling attention and channeling resources towards an evaluation of the last crisis. Policy makers work hardest in coping with today's events, leaving little time for more long-term conceptualization. Historical writings on the Middle East in the recent past have tended to be event specific as well.

The very nature of the American public's debate on Middle Eastern issues is heavily influenced by those who teach, write and expound in public about the region. Until recently, the United States avoided entangling alliances. With two major oceans insulating us and very friendly countries to our north and south, Americans, unlike Europeans or Middle Easterners, traditionally were not required personally to cope with international affairs on a daily basis. In addition to our geographic location, no major wars in the last century have been fought on American soil with foreign adversaries. For these and other reasons, including our American- and European-centered pre-college educational curricula, Americans tend to be less self-inclined and more dependent upon specialists, experts and educators for their knowledge of world affairs. Indeed, historians, political scientists, columnists, media specialists and lecturers at civic clubs help shape the public's view and understanding of the Middle East and its peoples. It is self-evident that with fewer trained historians or only those with more specialized viewpoints, the public's understanding and sophistication of the region is adversely affected or at

least limited.

A decade ago, when I finished my graduate training at the University of Michigan - after eight years of study for two masters degrees and a doctorate - I had recourse to six core social science professors: two political scientists (Waterbury and Grassmuck), two historians of the medieval period (Ehrenkreutz and Scanlon), an Ottomanist, and a modern Middle Eastern historian (Mitchell). Today at the University of Michigan, there is one political scientist, one Ottomanist, one modern historian, and one retiring medievalist who may not be replaced. Granted, temporary positions are occasionally filled, but a fifty per cent drop in permanent positions is one indication of a decline in the quality of graduate training offered.

Already there are fewer professors of the senior rank to fill vacant or soon-to-be-vacated positions at American universities. In September, 1986, at four major universities - Berkeley, Washington, Columbia, and Chicago - modern Middle Eastern history was either not being taught, or was being taught by those who were not trained as modern Middle Eastern historians. Who is to replace learned scholars like Gibb, Goitein, Hitti, Inalcik, Issawi, Kerr, Lewis and Rosenthal, when they leave the profession because of death or retirement?

How did we get ourselves into this fix? An analysis of current data and publications suggests that we have relatively few historians of the modern Middle East. An important factor is demand. The compositions of history departments and priorities for hiring new personnel continue to focus heavily on increasing the number of American and European historians. In addition, college and university budgets have contracted severely in the last decade, reducing in general the number of new academic positions created. A second factor is supply. In relative terms, money to train graduate students has been available. But attrition exists in our historical specialty due to demographics, alternative job opportunities, length of time necessary to finish a degree, and difficulty in learning Arabic. Breadth has given way to specialization, something perhaps characteristic of the slippage in liberal arts training in general, and the increase in pre-professional (law, business, and medicine) orientation in the college years.

#### Middle Eastern History in US History Departments

Since the late 1950s in the United States, in spite of gains made in opening fields of historical study to other parts of the world, history departments are dominated, if not overwhelmed, by American and European specialists. Though only a minority of Middle Eastern historians in the United States are affiliated with the American Historical

Association, a questionnaire circulated to its members in 1974 indicated that about 87 per cent were American or European historians; that 12 per cent taught other geographic regions of the world; and only 1 per cent of the total were Middle Eastern historians; in 1987, less than 1 per cent the membership of the American Historical Association were Middle Eastern historians.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Philip D. Curtin, 'African History', in Michael Kammen (ed.), *The Past Before Us*, Cornell, 1980, p. 114; Conversation with Phylis Coleman, membership secretary, AHA, May 26, 1987.

Just how many modern Middle Eastern historians are there in the United States? In 1986, there were only 640 full-time faculty positions in all disciplines for Middle Eastern studies.<sup>3</sup> In 1986, one third, or 506 of 1,582 of the Middle East Studies Association (MESA) members identified themselves as historians. This was an increase of 200 self-identified historians from the 1977 MESA statistics.<sup>4</sup> (There is no information to determine which historians focus just on the modern period.) When historians are counted in the 1986 roster of MESA members in affiliation with an academic institution, one finds 250 Middle Eastern historians covering all time periods.<sup>5</sup> Middle Eastern historians hold approximately forty per cent of all Middle Eastern study positions at academic institutions. By comparison, a decade ago there were 1,500 Asian historians and 600 African historians in the United States.<sup>6</sup>

History departments in the United States continue to hire more American or European historians than historians with a foreign area competence. In American history, for example, departments are not judged complete until they have certain sub-fields covered, such as colonial, new nation, antebellum, progressive/ new south, reconstruction, modern American, southern, western, labor, social, urban, intellectual and cultural history. Over the last decade the trend for new hires in history departments reflects some tendency towards interdisciplinary or ethnic studies recruitment in areas such as Women's Studies, Jewish Studies, Hispanic Studies, Afro-American Studies, etc. It is beyond the realm of possibility that a history department in the US could contain Middle Eastern components that were divided in chronological and specialty sections according to Muhammad's life, the rashidun period, the Umayyids, Abbasids, Mamelukes, early Ottomans, late Ottomans, and then a historian for each country in the modern Middle East, along with an urban, intellectual, cultural, social and economic historian.

Can we blame our colleagues who specialize in European or American history? No, we can not. But we can alter this hiring trend if we present to our colleagues qualified graduate students who have disciplinary training and working knowledge of foreign languages. Money is needed from

university allocations to create new positions in non-European and non-American area histories. Colleagues, chairs of departments, deans, provosts, university presidents, and chancellors must be told repeatedly that foreign area studies positions vacated can not be automatically phased out, relinquished, or cannibalized for American or

3. Winder, p. 47.

4. Ibid., p. 48.

5. Middle East Studies Association, Roster of Members, 1986, Phoenix, Arizona, 1986.

6. Kammen, pp. 44 and 163.

European fields of study. Middle Eastern! history, like other area history, requires bolstering and building. But a case for Middle Eastern history can only be supported if we train students properly.

#### Middle Eastern History and Middle Eastern Area Studies

Unfortunately, a quantity of trained modern Middle Eastern historians does not exist today, even if job opportunities were available. Before we can legitimately lobby our colleagues in European or American history for more positions, we need to put our own house in order. The generation of Middle Eastern historians trained around World War II in Europe or the United States is gone or in the twilight of its years without sufficient qualified historians of equivalent rank, experience and productivity to replace it. Unlike after World War II, native-born specialists are not entering the profession today. In comparative terms, Israel has the largest number of Middle Eastern historians in ratio to population. The United States has the largest absolute number of Middle Eastern historians in the world, even if it is only one Middle Eastern historian per million US citizens. By comparison, West Germany has no more than three dozen Middle Eastern historians attached to academic institutions, or about one for every two million West Germans. Several factors have militated against the training of Middle Eastern historians in the United States. Many first-generation Middle Eastern historians were trained in the early 1960s at National Defense and Foreign Language (centers). They found jobs and obtained tenure at many other institutions by the end of that decade. Those trained in the late 1960s or early 1970s found obtaining a tenure-track academic appointment more difficult. The October, 1973 war and its political and economic aftermath caused many institutions to create positions in Middle Eastern history. I was among four dozen candidates applying for a three-month non-tenure track position at Emory University in late 1976. A review of job openings in the

Chronicle of Higher Education and the American Historical Association's Employment Information Bulletin indicates, however, that there were on the average less than eight new Middle Eastern History positions announced per year from 1980 to 1987 in the United States.

A handful of new jobs were created in the late 1970s and early 1980s. But committing an average of eight years necessary to complete a PhD in an area studies discipline proved very difficult and not financially inviting. Some students who chose graduate training in the late 1960s did so not because they were just interested in the field of study, but they saw continuing their education as a means of avoiding military service in Vietnam. Many stayed on in graduate school at least until the graduate student deferments were practically removed in 1970-71, or until the lottery system for conscription was implemented and those with safe dates were no longer liable for service. Already in the early 1970s there was a tight academic job market for Middle Eastern historians, but the pull away from completing the PhD became very strong in the mid-1970s.

Just as the October, 1973 war created some academic openings, it also generated job opportunities for Middle Eastern specialists who did not require doctorates. Many who had intended to study a Middle Eastern field abandoned the increasingly uninviting quest for the PhD. Many were lured by jobs generated by petro-dollar opportunities: in public-policy arenas, government, business, consulting, and other alternative career development. As a consequence doctoral oral examinations were not taken, dissertations were left incomplete or unpublished, or trained historians with doctorates merely chose a profession where they earned a salary, and often a good one. The arduous task of language training was broken. In the mid-1970s, there was a proliferation of area studies Masters programs, which allowed many students to qualify themselves sufficiently for lucrative jobs without prolonged language study. Throughout the country, many Middle Eastern centers established joint interdisciplinary programs with professional schools, especially in law and business. Information provided in The Digest of Education Statistics 1985-86 tallies degrees granted in area studies, in foreign language and Literatures from 1970-1982 degrees. These statistics indicate an increase in Middle Eastern area studies MA degrees and a decrease in people receiving degrees with a concentration in Arabic during this twelve-year period.

In all area studies (Middle Eastern, Russian, East Asian and Western European studies) there was a precipitous decline in degrees granted from the Masters to the PhD level in interdisciplinary area studies. At the Bachelor's level the number of degrees increased in the Middle Eastern area studies field from 1972 onwards, reflecting in part the training of

undergraduate students by that first group of center trained PhDs educated in the early and late 1960s. In comparison to Bachelor's degrees awarded in East Asian or Russian area studies through this period, there were two-and-a-half times more Bachelor's degrees awarded in Russian area studies than in Middle Eastern area studies, and three-and-a-half times more East Asian area studies BA degrees awarded than Middle Eastern area studies Bachelor's degrees.

From 1970 to 1982 there was a slow but steady increase in Middle Eastern area studies Bachelor's, Master's and Doctor's degrees. If we assume an average of two or three years to complete the Middle Eastern area studies MA degree, there was a doubling of MA degrees from 1976-1977 onwards, about two academic years after the October, 1973 war and the application of the OPEC oil embargo. While the absolute number of BA degrees in Middle Eastern area studies decreased in the late 1970s, the number of MA degrees remained about the same. For comparative purposes, there was a regular decline in number of area studies MA degrees conferred from the BA to the MA level in East Asian, Russian, and Western European studies, but not in Middle Eastern area studies, where the number of MA degrees awarded remained relatively constant from 1976-77 through 1981-1982. The data clearly reveals that as an area study, the Middle East is less studied than East Asian or Russian area studies, but more studied than Western European studies.

In an analysis of number of degrees granted in foreign languages and Literatures during the same period at the BA, MA and PhD level in Arabic, Chinese, French, Hebrew, Japanese, Latin and Russian, (no information was available for Turkish or Persian), degrees in Arabic were the least for all languages and at all levels. Our statistics do not indicate how many students were taking Arabic and using it as a research tool in an ancillary discipline. At the BA, MA and PhD levels, French degrees represent the largest percentage conferred in the United States in foreign languages and Literatures. In the twelve-year period investigated for all the languages tallied, for French there were 160,618 BA degrees conferred, 34,993 MA degrees, and 8,131 PhD degrees. For Arabic and French respectively, the total degrees conferred at the BA, MA and PhD levels for the twelve-year period were 123:51,813, 67:9,431, and 26:1,808. For the period 1970-71 through 1981-82, there were ten times more Bachelor's degrees in Hebrew than in Arabic, six times more Master's degrees in Hebrew than in Arabic, and three times more PhD degrees in Hebrew than in Arabic. Anyone who traces the decline in student enrollments from first- to third-year Arabic training is aware of the tremendous attrition rate. In 1982, at five of thirteen US Middle Eastern centers, 341 students were learning Arabic. Of that number only 9 per cent were studying Arabic in the third year and only 6 per cent at the fourth year or higher. In the same sample, 141 students were studying



Persian and 43 were studying Turkish at all levels. Only 4 per cent and 6 per cent of these respective students were in their third year. At the third-year level, by comparison, there were 49 students learning Hebrew and only 39 students learning Turkish, Arabic or Persian.<sup>7</sup> An important reason why graduate students shy away from the study of Middle Eastern History is the prerequisite to study Arabic. Arabic is classified as one of the four most difficult languages

<sup>7</sup> Association of American Universities, *Beyond Growth: The Next Stage in Language and Area Studies*, Washington, April, 1984, p. 322.

to learn, along with Korean, Japanese and Chinese.<sup>8</sup> Instructional materials and a variety of teaching methods are available for teaching Arabic. But enormous amounts of time are required to learn and retain Arabic for use in research and scholarship. According to the 1983 Rand report on Federal Support for Training Foreign Languages and Area Specialists, an average of 3.67 years is spent acquiring formal Middle Eastern language skills among undergraduates. This is the longest amount of time invested in undergraduate language acquisition when compared to all other languages studied.<sup>9</sup> Put differently, more time is spent learning languages in the undergraduate study of the Middle East than for any other world area. For those who study for the PhD in the United States in a Middle Eastern discipline, it is estimated that more than one-third of graduate course work will be devoted to the study of languages.<sup>10</sup> As for the current Middle Eastern specialists and their ability to use foreign languages, Professor Leonard Binder in his fine 1976 essay on Middle East area studies using data from the late 1960s and the 1973 report by Richard D. Lambert, *Language Area Studies Review*, notes that unfortunately only 16.7 per cent of the 'so-called Middle East specialists are language and residence qualified'.<sup>11</sup> Says Binder, "A little surprising is the tolerance of the lack of language skills among Middle East specialists."<sup>12</sup>

### Politicization and Current Crises

Professor Kemal Karpat, in his Presidential address to the Middle East Studies Association annual meeting in 1985 in New Orleans said, 'To challenge another's view of an issue by presenting contradictory research results of one's own, by offering well-supported objections to the validity of another's research methods, or by countering another's conclusions with carefully reasoned conclusions ... is to engage in true scholarly debate. To direct one's argument ad hominem is to engage in propaganda - which has no place in the realm of scholarly endeavor.'<sup>13</sup> Clearly the study of the Middle East in the United States is overly politicized, Middle Easternized, specialized and fashionized. This has caused undue harm to scholarly inquiry and teaching. Already the

academic profession in various social-science disciplines is torn by schools of interpretation, but doubts exist whether the venom expressed

8. Ibid., p. 48.

9. Lorraine M. McDonnel, Federal Support for Training Foreign Language and Area Specialists, The Rand Corporation, 1983, pp. 54-55.

10. Ibid., p. 24.

11. Leonard Binder, pp. 4-5.

12. Ibid.

13. Kemal H. Karpat, 'Presidential Address - MESA 1985: Remarks on MESA and Nation and Nationality in the Middle East', Middle East Studies Association Bulletin (July, 1986), pp. 3-4.

between Marxists and non-Marxists, or the level of antagonism directed at liberals by neo-conservatives and vice versa can equate with the personal attacks that have dominated the study of the Middle East. The 'Orientalist' controversy that bloomed in the 1970s is only one aspect of the politicized nature of Middle Eastern studies in the United States.

Partisanship and fascination with contemporary politics have shaped our profession. The region of the world which we study is wrenched by conflict, turmoil and dissension, and we have sometimes tended to become part of what we study. There was a time when it was just the Arab-Israel conflict that polarized colleagues. But, like the area, professional social scientists of the Middle East are balkanized. Though an ethnic last name does not and should not qualify or disqualify a teacher, my impression is that it is of greater importance to a search committee considering a candidate for a position in modern Middle Eastern history than it would be for a historian of early modern France or Latin American colonial history. Credentials such as language competencies, archival experience, publications and teaching evaluations and other relevant qualifications are neutralized or replaced by 'hidden agendas' of political philosophy and one's religious or ethnic identity.

Partisanship does not start or stop when candidates are interviewed or their dossiers reviewed. Book-review editors sometimes carefully select reviewers for their political attitudes, rather than seek reviewers with substantive archival knowledge of a book's contents. Far too often, in the absence of qualified reviewers, graduate students or even established scholars are asked to review books on topics in which they only have a

passing interest or no real research knowledge or competence. Sometimes their reviews tend to be facile, polemical, and shallow. At American universities, Middle Eastern courses or programs that are stated as the 'Muslim Middle East', 'Arab World', or 'Islamic countries', are euphemisms for the exclusion of Christians, Jews, Zoroastrians, and Bahais in the first case, Turkey, Israel and Iran in the second case, and Israel in the third case. Much has been written about the influence of money, foreign governments, and domestic interests upon the study and teaching of the Middle East in the United States.<sup>14</sup> To dwell on that issue or the currently renewed 'Orientalist' debate deflects from the concern about the training of Middle Eastern historians and the nature of what is written in the field of modern Middle Eastern

14 Fredelle Z. Spiegel, 'Arab influence on Middle East Studies in the United States', *The Jerusalem Quarterly*(Summer 1984),pp.48-65; Fredelle Spiegel, 'How Not to Establish a Middle East Center', *MERIP Report*(December, 1979), pp. 3-5; Nicholas Lemann, 'War-Torn Georgetown', *The New Republic*(June 2, 1979), pp. 16-19.

history.<sup>15</sup> To argue about who should write or teach the history of the Middle East is to throw embers on a sadly and inevitably smoldering fire. Perhaps there is a consolation in the fact that in other areas of historical inquiry, such as China, Africa, and Latin America, similar debates are held: should the region be studied exclusively in terms of its relationship to the West or to the United States? In writing the history of China, Africa, and Latin America the 'Western-centric' view of writing and interpreting history is under constant review. <sup>16</sup>

Not only is our profession politicized, but recent writing of modern Middle Eastern history appears reactive to contemporary politics. Most recently, Middle Eastern historians have tended to write in response to current regional or country crises. Though no statistics were gathered for other area histories, it is my impression that being 'crisis driven' is not unique to the writing of Middle Eastern history.<sup>17</sup>

In an effort to understand what we write about the Middle East, a review of all articles and books published from 1962 to 1985 on the Middle East in the English language and indexed in historical Abstracts was undertaken. The publications of non-Americans

<sup>15</sup> The writing and debate on 'Orientalism' abound. A historiography of the controversy is no longer emerging, it is here. What appears below is merely a sampling. It did not begin with Edward W. Said's 'Arabs, Islam, and the Dogmas of the West', *The New York Times Book Review*, October 31, 1976, his *Orientalism*, New York 1978, and a reply by Bernard Lewis, 'The Question of Orientalism', *The New York Review of*

books, (June 24, 1982), p. 49 ff., or with their public jousting at the 1986 Annual Meeting of the Middle East Studies Association now chronicled as 'Special Document' in *Journal of Palestine Studies* (Winter 1987), pp. 85-104. Of special interest is Emmanuel Sivan's 'Edward Said and His Arab Reviewers', *The Jerusalem Quarterly* (Spring 1985), pp. 11-23. In addition to the book reviews commenting on Said's book, one should read some of the earlier commentary in the 'Orientalist' debate. For example, see H.A.R. Gibb, 'Social Change in the Near East', in Philip W. Ireland, *The Near East: Problems and Perspectives*, University of Chicago Press, 1942; Gustave E. von Grunebaum, 'Attempts at Self-interpretation in Contemporary Islam', in his *Islam: Essays in the Nature and Growth of a Cultural Tradition*, London, 1961; Anouar Abdel-Malek, 'Orientalism in Crisis', *Diogenes*, 44 (1963), pp. 103-140; Jacques Waardenburg, *L'Islam dans le miroir de l'Occident*, Paris: Mouton and Co., 1962; A.L. Tibawi, 'English-Speaking Orientalists: A Critique of Their Approach to Islam and Arab Nationalism', *The Muslim World*, parts 1 and 2 (1963), pp. 185-204 and pp. 298-313; Jacques Waardenburg, 'Changes of Perspective in Islamic Studies over the Last Decades', *Humaniora Islamica* (1973), pp. 249-52; William G. Millward, 'The Social Psychology of Anti-Iranology', *Iranian Studies* (1975), pp. 48-69; A.L. Tibawi, 'Second Critique of English-Speaking Orientalists and Their Approach to Islam and the Arabs', *The Islamic Quarterly* (1979), pp. 3-43; A.L. Tibawi, 'On the Orientalists Again', *The Muslim World* (1980), pp. 56-61; Muhammad Benaboud, 'Orientalism and the Arab Elite', *The Islamic Quarterly* (1982), pp. 3-15; and Edward Said, 'Orientalists Reconsidered', *Race and Class* (Autumn 1985), pp. 1-15.

16. See for example Paul A. Cohen, *Discovering History of China: American Historical Writing of the Recent Chinese Past*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1984.

17. David E. Pinkney, 'American Historians on the European Past', *American Historical Review* (1981), pp. 1-20.

writing in English are included. A breakdown was made by historical periods for 1450-1914 and 1914-the present. (No information was gathered for modern North African history or for the pre-1450 period.)

As producers of scholarship, Middle Eastern historians do not publish a great deal. If we compare the number of academically affiliated and unaffiliated historians with the number of publications indexed, each historian of the Middle East is producing less than an article per year. This is a generous assessment, since there are social scientists other than historians who had their publications indexed by *Historical Abstracts*. As Middle Eastern historians we publish our work in close to 300 journals, some of which do not undergo peer review prior to the publication of our research. The edited volume is in vogue and appears almost as frequently as the publication of individually authored

monographs.

The data indicates that the number of published works on the Middle East increased dramatically in 1970-1971. This would coincide with the academic mainstreaming of the first group of Middle Eastern scholars trained at Middle Eastern centers in the United States in the post-Sputnik period. The early 1970s saw a continued growth in published productivity. This occurred for at least two reasons: archives of the pre-1950 period were available and there were more historians writing. While the number of articles covering the 1450 to 1914 period increased by about 100 per cent in terms of annual output from 1970 through 1984, during the same fourteen years, articles and books published for the period of 1914 to the present increased by more than 250 percent. The continuity in publication of articles on the Ottoman Empire, Turkey, and Iran was directly dependent upon archival availability and the fact that Israeli scholars of the modern Middle East, who did not have access to archival facilities in Arab countries, focused a portion of their scholarly attention on these two countries and the history of their predecessor regimes. It should also be noted that in self-identification by specialties, 10 per cent of the Middle Eastern historians in the MESA Roster of Members for 1986 indicated that they were Ottoman historians.

Some clear pictures emerge from the data. There is a definite correlation between the occurrence of an event in the Middle East and the number of articles or books about that event published immediately or in subsequent years. Conversely, during those few times of relative quiet or nonviolence in the Middle East, as in 1976-1978, the number of publications dropped noticeably in subsequent years. Several examples will suffice to indicate how crisis-driven modern Middle Eastern history publications are. In the 16 years before the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in December, 1979, there were 32 articles published on Afghanistan; in the five years after the invasion there were a total of 143 publications. Before the oil embargo of 1973-1974 virtually nothing was published regarding oil matters: in fact only a total of seven articles were published from 1962 to 1973; in 1974 alone there were 14 articles published and at least five additional articles each year through 1984. From 1969 to 1979, before the oil shortage of 1979-1980, only 26 articles were published on Saudi Arabia, but from 1979 to 1984, 75 articles were published. Publications on Iran proliferated dramatically after the 1979 hostage crisis and change in regimes in Iran in 1979-1980. Publications on modern Iran numbered 17 in 1974, 12 in 1975, 12 in 1976, 7 in 1977 and 11 in 1978. In 1979 through 1984 the number of articles numbered 32, 44, 47, 41, 47 and 29 respectively. From 1974 to 1977 there were 37 articles published on Cyprus, corresponding almost directly to the Cyprus issue, which erupted in 1974; the October, 1973 war saw a gain in writing the next year, with a major decline in subsequent years. Finally, the

turmoil in Turkey in the 1980s caused a doubling of publications on Turkey in 1981 as compared to previous years. The rush to write instant history about an event or about a topic related to a contemporary issue has some validity, but such writings lack historical perspective and the use of archival sources.

Perhaps the least surprising finding from the data is that writings on aspects of the Arab-Israel conflict have dominated our professional writings. If one totals all of the publications from the various topics related to the Arab-Israel conflict - Israel, Palestinians and the PLO, the 1967 war, the 1973 war, the Arab-Israel conflict, occupied territories, mandate Palestine, and Zionism - more than one third of all the publications written each year and since 1970 have focused on the conflict. Of the 4,128 publications indexed on the modern period, more than 1,500 have been written about some aspect of the Arab-Israel conflict. In terms of future historiographical assessments it will be found that more than twice as much was published on the Palestinians and the PLO than was written about Jordan. Undoubtedly, this will give fuel to arguments about political legitimacy over time.

## Conclusions

It is not a startling revelation that obtaining a position in the social sciences in American higher education is more difficult today than it was twenty years ago. There is greater supply than demand. Standards for tenure considerations are far more rigorous. Applicants for vacant or new positions not only have their PhD in hand, but have obtained grants, have experience in the classroom, are published, and are professionally active in their disciplines or specialties. Those dedicated to their academic interests have found ways to stay in the profession through improvisation and sheer perseverance. In part, the number of positions available in Middle Eastern history grew because of turmoil and crisis in the region in the 1970s. On the other hand, the continued religious, ethnic, and political turmoil of the early 1980s did not see a corresponding interest to establish more tenure-track Middle Eastern history positions. But in the spring of 1987, half a dozen new positions were announced at American universities and colleges where such slots did not exist previously. It is certainly too early to suggest that the region's unrest is again the primary cause for more interest by higher education in the Middle East. Yet being in the headlines on an almost daily basis has helped some departments decide to hire Middle East specialists.

Nonetheless, in 1987, History Departments in the United States continue to focus their teaching on Western civilization, not Middle Eastern or other area history. Departments continue to be dominated by American and European historians who focus on roughly 700 million people in

America and Europe. The bulk of the world's population of 5 billion and their history is left to a scant handful of other historians. There may be two historians of the colonial or national American period at an American university before our Middle Eastern population of 200 million is even considered for coverage by one professor. Where there is a Middle Eastern position, our Middle Eastern historian is generally responsible for covering a period equivalent of Plato to NATO, or Muhammad to Khomeini. She or he often participates in teaching the history of Western civilization. Not until Middle Eastern historians, in concert with other area specialists, can persuade their colleagues in American and European history that future appointments need to be made to cover the rest of the world, will there be additional slots opened for the history of the Middle East. Of all the regional areas studied in the United States, there are fewer Middle Eastern historians today than of any other regional area.

From the data collected, our profession only began to publish in significant numbers in English after 1970. It took eight years after that, until 1978, for the number of publications to double their 1970 output on a regular annual basis. We are in the process of training the third and fourth generation of historians after the inception of center and foreign language programs in the early 1960s. We remain relatively young in terms of age cohorts, few in our total numbers and only moderately productive in the number of our publications. We are still writing primarily political histories. Social histories are beginning to be written, as are biographies of secondary political leaders. Much needs to be written in the fields of modern intellectual, economic, urban and cultural history. Institutional histories are needed. From the data, the areas where there are the least publications are for country topics that deal with Iraq, Jordan, Syria and Yemen. Almost nothing has been written recently about World War II in the Middle East, except for its relationship to the independence struggles of the former provinces of the Ottoman Empire. Cross-national topics such as Arabism and Islam still need much attention from historians of the modern Middle East. Retrospective evaluations of the 1973 Middle East war, Cyprus and the military in the contemporary political history of the region are in order. One may expect that as archives and documents become available in future years, some of our crisis-driven historical assumptions about current events will be revised if not cast aside.

Unfortunately, much of our writing is no longer centrally derived from the use of memoirs, archives, documents and analyses of texts. The Middle Eastern historian should become less susceptible to writing about the last crisis. Likewise, we should be careful not to become too overly dependent on the use of new methodologies such as oral history and Quantification. Both are very important tools for the study of history, but should not become exclusive methods for the writing or interpretation of

events. Personal recollections or numbers should not replace archival or documentation study in describing historical phenomena or charting the mechanisms of change. An overdependence on statistics or numerical acrobatics in writing Middle Eastern history can be dangerous. Until very recently there was little tradition for accurate statistics gathering in the region. To use cross-tabulation or regression analysis in order to keep up with the cutting analytical edges of the American social science profession is au courant, but not necessarily valuable to the fading broader picture of the Middle East. Elsewhere I have argued that caution must be exercised against drawing spurious conclusions from the use of incomplete or 'cooked' statistics. For some, statistics have become irrefutable data for the explanation of historical trends or events. When misused for political purposes, data and statistics create myths and eventual beliefs which result in historical fiction.<sup>18</sup> Those who are inclined to use statistics for purposes of polemic or propaganda in their writings and call their contributions scholarship must be held accountable.

Though candidates for positions in the history profession today have more experience, many are unfortunately more specialized in their focus and research. Many have forgotten their broad undergraduate training base. Some insist on teaching narrowly- defined courses particularly as they age and pass the tenure hurdle. It is easy to forget that history is the study of perspective. In the study of modern Middle Eastern history that ingredient is crucial. Specialization or responding to events in the writing of

<sup>18</sup> Kenneth W. Stein, 'A General Historiographic and Bibliographic Review of Literature on Palestine and the Palestine Arabs', *Orient* (March, 1981), especially pp. 106-107; Kenneth W. Stein, Letter to the Editor commenting on Joan Peters' *From Time Immemorial* in *Commentary* (October, 1986), pp. 8-11.

Middle Eastern history gives Middle Eastern historians a fragmented view that denies the importance of perspective. As the fifth President of MESA, John Badeau, commented during his Presidential address in 1971, 'history and the contemporary scene interact, and both the historian and the student of modern affairs need to build bridges between the past and the future, using one to illumine the other'.<sup>19</sup> In a region where family ties, ethnic affinity and religious affiliation play such an important role in daily affairs we can not forget historical precedent. It is an absolute necessity that any teaching of the modern Middle East have in tandem the discreet teaching of early Islamic and Ottoman history. If we do not teach the earlier periods of Middle Eastern history, we can not condemn journalists or media reporters for their facile interpretation of contemporary Middle Eastern events. If we do not introduce students to



the early history of the region, we are to blame for the continuity of shallow stereotypes and images of the Middle East. If we do not have properly trained graduate students we cannot hope to influence the public debate on the making and implementation of foreign policy, which requires understanding the linkage of culture and history to policy choices.

Finally, in the absence of more trained modern Middle Eastern historians with competencies in Arabic, in other Middle Eastern languages, particularly Hebrew, in European languages, and rigorously schooled in the region's formative periods, there are few compelling arguments to History Department colleagues that current or contemplated vacancies or new positions should be filled by specialists in modern Middle Eastern history. We need to focus our efforts in training a few good historians and teachers of the modern Middle East. As a profession we are no longer centered at a few excellent institutions. Like our society, we have become geographically dispersed and fascinated by the most recent event. We have lost some depth and breadth in preparing the next generation of Middle Eastern historians. Certainly the time has come for journalists not to spell Shi'ism, 'sheism', or have students write that Muhammad was a 'Profit' and a statesman. The responsibility is ours to be sure that Tennessee in the 1840s is not considered the modern Middle East in the 1990s and beyond.

19 John S. Badeau, '1971 Presidential Address (to MESA)', Middle East Studies Association Bulletin (February 1, 1972), p. 5.