On Monday, September 14, the Middle East and South Asia Studies program launched its annual fall 2015 Arabic Film Series. The first of the four films that will be shown this fall, The Virgin, the Copts and Me, was in French and Arabic with English subtitles and drew a sizable crowd. Set in Egypt, the documentary follows filmmaker Namir Abdel Messeeh and his investigation of claims of the appearance of the Virgin Mary at a Coptic church. Namir travels back to his ancestral village in search of answers and the film follows the funny and sweet reconnection he makes with relatives he has not seen in years. Eventually, Namir gains the villagers trust and enlists their help, transforming his film into a hilarious retelling of the Virgin apparition. The movie left itself open to multiple interpretations, particularly regarding its portrayal of religion, and fourteen students were glad to stay after the viewing to share their thoughts with each other as well as some MESAS faculty. The next film in the series will be Cairo 678, shown on Monday, October 5th at 7:00 pm in the Z. Smith Reynolds Library Auditorium (Room 404).
A Big Year for Dr. Raisur Rahman

This year has been a busy one for History professor Dr. Raisur Rahman. He was promoted to Associate Professor of History in the spring and his book, entitled *Locale, Everyday Islam, and Modernity: Qasbah Towns and Muslim Life in Colonial India*, was published this summer by the Oxford University Press. The launching of the book took place at an event in New Delhi presided over by the Vice President of India, Mr. Hamid Ansari. Dr. Rahman said of the book launch, “It was a huge honor and I am particularly humbled by it.” Mr. Ansari has read the whole book. The publicity surrounding the book’s appearance portends to a much wider readership.

The subject matter should appeal to many audiences, as it is really about how one associates with a place. The work strikes new ground in that there is not much previous work on the Indian Qasbah. Qasbahs were small towns prominent in colonial India. Dr. Rahman examines how people related to the Qasbah, the intellectual development that occurred in the Qasbahs, and how the Qasbah becomes part of Indian identity. Dr. Rahman worked on this project for fourteen years, researching and writing, engaging with original sources, and conducting interviews. The project was inspired by the book *Rulers, townsmen and bazaars* written by C.A. Bayly. Having read Bayly’s work as an undergraduate student, Dr. Rahman became interested in the Qasbah, which was briefly examined though an economic lens. His work instead looks at the social aspects. There is still work to be done in the area of Qasbah studies.

Dr. Rahman is working on a new work on Bombay Muslims. He is examining the cosmopolitan and diverse nature of the life of Muslims in the port town. If you are interested in hearing more about this project, you can hear Dr. Rahman speak on the topic November 11 as part of the ZSR Library lecture series. This lecture comes after he was awarded the Nathan
and Julie Hatch Prize for Academic Excellence and conducted research at Oxford during the summer.
Dr. Rahman further spent part of his summer expanding his knowledge farther east, when he participated in the CIEE International Faculty Development Seminar on “Exploring Environmental, Cultural, and Economic Sustainability in China’s Rural and Urban Landscapes” in Beijing. Students interested in taking a class for credit in the MESAS minor with Dr. Rahman are invited to enroll in “History through Film: Bollywood and the making of Modern India” in spring 2016.

The Middle East & South Asia studies program congratulates Dr. Rahman on a very impressive year!

**Wake Forest Junior Explores Egypt on Richter Scholarship**

Junior Politics & International Affairs major Sarah Fahmy traveled to Cairo, Egypt on a Richter scholarship to conduct research over the summer. Fahmy’s project was to interview different women about their decisions to veil or not to veil themselves and to what extent they veiled. The project examined if there was any relationship between the veil and political decisions that these women make. What Fahmy found was myriad reasons that women veil and a more complex view of her topic.

The biggest challenge Fahmy faced during the experience was adjusting to a different way of life. “Everything was very chaotic. Relatively, the United States seems much more calm and orderly,” Fahmy said. Conducting interviews with about 12-15 Egyptians, Fahmy said that she realized that “People are people everywhere.” Getting to know those people she interviewed on a personal level was one of the highlights of the trip.

Fahmy is half Egyptian and her interest in exploring her heritage prompted her to take on the project: “It was definitely a life changing experience, just as the Richter is meant to be.” Fahmy says would love to be able to go back to Egypt, noting that there is still a lot more research that she would like to do. Fahmy has a short documentary on her research in the works, so watch the MESAS page for a possible screening! More information on the Richter scholarship can be found by visiting http://college.wfu.edu/ureca/richter. This year’s application is due February 12.
Welcome Dr. Obiedat

The MESAS program would like to extend a warm welcome to the newest member of the Romance Language Department, Dr. A. Z. Obiedat. Dr. Obiedat is originally from Jordan. Before joining the language department here Dr. Obiedat taught at the University of Virginia for eight years. At Wake Forest, Dr. Obiedat is teaching classes in Arabic language and culture. He received his PhD in Arabic Philosophy from McGill University in Montreal, with a dissertation entitled “Mario Bunge’s Secular Worldview and its Implications for the Modernization of Arab-Islamic Philosophy.” His current research focuses on modern views on Arabic semantics.

Dr. Obiedat is enjoying getting to know the Wake Forest University and the city of Winston-Salem. His first impression of the community came during the first town hall faculty meeting. Being able to interact with faculty and the administration so easily is very unique to Wake Forest. It gives the University a sense of integral unity in his eyes.

As for the future at Wake Forest, Dr. Obiedat hopes to advance the Arabic minor and work on the creation of an Arabic major as well. He is interested in presenting courses in Arabic literature in translation over the coming years. Next semester, along with Arabic language courses, Dr. Obiedat will be teaching “ARB 260 - Classical Medieval Arab-Islamic Civilization.” It will be an intellectual history class, but with a slightly different approach compared to most traditional survey classes. The interdisciplinary class will draw primarily from political history, humanistic literature, and divine religions, while also engaging geography, environment, economics, and science. The course will count for credit in the MESAS minor.

Dr. Omaar Hena to Lead “Global London” Trip

Dr. Omaar Hena of the English Department will be leading a group of approximately fourteen students to the Worrell House for the Fall 2016 Semester. The theme is “Global London”. The group will examine how artists, writers, and intellectuals have emphasized the cross-cultural constitution of Britishness. Literature studied will range from Shakespeare to Forester. While the class will certainly review the canonical British literature, there will also be some attention paid to literature written by diaspora and minority authors. With these works in mind, the class will examine how the concept of Britishness is refashioned by ethnic writers.
Dr. Hena hopes to be able to bring in different poets who live in and around London to talk to the class and explore the concept of “Global London”. Students will gain a new perspective of what the British identity means to different people and explore the true global nature of the historic city. Dr. Hena’s classes will explore the rich and multifaceted history of British literature, exploring the diversity of the culture and literature. Also, students will recognize that many of the same questions that authors like Milton and Shakespeare were dealing with are still being dealt with today.

Dr. Hena, who graduated from Wake Forest in 1999 also had studied London as a student and is very excited to be able to offer the same opportunity that he enjoyed so much as a an undergraduate student. If students are interested in this study abroad opportunity, please reach out and contact the Study Abroad office. Dr. Hena is happy to answer any questions about the trip. One of the classes taught in London, ENG 358 Postcolonial Literature, provides credit for the MESAS minor.

**Dr. Michelle Voss Roberts Publishes Book, Receives NEH Grant**

Professor Michelle Voss Roberts of the Wake Forest Divinity School has published a book, entitled *Tastes of the Divine: Hindu and Christian Theologies of Emotion*, which contributes to the emerging field of comparative theology. She will be awarded the American Academy of Religion’s Award for Excellence in the Study of Religion: Constructive-Reflective Studies, at the November meeting in Atlanta.

Along with the book release, this summer Dr. Voss Roberts received a stipend from the National Endowment for the Humanities for her current research project, “Body Parts: Re-visioning Theological Conceptions of the Human”. Dr. Voss Roberts is the second MESAS affiliated faculty member to receive an NEH grant in the past year. History professor Dr. Charles Wilkins, who was featured in the Spring 2015 newsletter, was an earlier recipient.
MESAS Study Abroad Opportunities: Morocco, Egypt,

As the school year begins, students must begin to think about their plans for upcoming semesters. Study abroad trips are just one of the many opportunities that Wake Forest offers its students. The Middle East & South Asia Studies Program will offer three unique opportunities for students in the coming year.

Over winter break, Dr. Neal Walls of the divinity school will be leading a 15 day trip to Egypt along with Iman Kahlid Griggs. This interfaith student trip is open to undergraduate students, especially those that are involved with the MESAS program. The "Egyptian Pilgrimage" is December 28 through January 11, at $3250 per person in a double room. The class will visit numerous pagan, Christian, Muslim, and (historically) Jewish places of worship in the greater Cairo area and in Egypt’s stunning archeological sites at the southern environs of Luxor. Interested students should contact Professor Neal Walls in the Divinity School (wallsnh@wfu.edu).

This coming summer, Dr. Darlene May of the Arabic Department will be taking a group of students on a study abroad trip to Morocco. The students will live in Fez with host families and study at the Arabic Language Institute. The curriculum includes 6 hours at any level of Arabic or French course as well as Dr. May’s 3 hour course on Islam in Morocco. During the trip, the students will take day trips and weekend excursions to places like Casablanca, the Roman ruins at Volubilis, the Middle Atlas mountain range, and a 3-day desert excursion in the Sahara desert, including a camel ride to an oasis. The trip will be a remarkable experience for any student interested in learning about Moroccan or Islamic
The program lasts about six weeks is estimated at around $9300 including airfare. If you have any interest in the program feel free to reach out to Dr. May (maydr@wfu.edu).

This past summer, Dr. Ananda Mitra of the Communications Department led a trip to India. The group visited Delhi and Calcutta and also experienced tourist attractions as well. Dr. Mitra taught COM370, which focused on learning by engaging with all aspects of India including history, religions, politics, economics, and culture. The trip also included a service aspect called WAKE the Himalayas. The group goes annually, so look for information in the Spring if you are interested in traveling to India this coming summer.

*For students interested in trips abroad, we encourage you to visit the Center for Global Programs and Studies or inquire with your professors. For the study abroad opportunities noted above, feel free to contact the coordinating professor directly.*

**Islamic Art: Dr. Chanchal Dadlani**

Art professor Chanchal Dadlani was granted a residential postdoctoral fellowship from the Getty Research Institute in 2013-2014 and a number of articles resulting from her time there have been recently published. Her essay, entitled “Transporting India: The Gentil Album and Mughal Manuscript Culture,” appeared in the Fall 2015 issue of *Art History*. A second work, entitled "Innovation, Appropriation, and Representation: Mughal Architectural Ornament in the Eighteenth Century,” is forthcoming in *Ornament: Between Global and Local*, edited by Gülru Necipoğlu and Alina Payne (Princeton, 2016), and a third, entitled "Beyond the Taj Mahal: Late Mughal Visual Culture," is expected in the *Companion to Islamic Art* (Wiley-Blackwell, 2016). She continues to enjoy offering a variety of classes in Islamic and South Asian art, and has remained an executive board member for the Historians of Islamic Art Association.
The Program in Middle East & South Asia Studies

The Middle East and South Asia Studies program organizes events, encourages study abroad, and offers an undergraduate minor, all aimed at providing students with opportunities to engage in a multidisciplinary study of the history, politics, literature, peoples, and cultures of the region. To sign up for the minor in Middle East and South Asia studies, see Silvia Correa in Kirby 313.

Upcoming Events

- **October 5** *Arab Film Series: Cairo 6,7,8*
  ZSR Library Auditorium Room 404 7pm

- **October 19** *Arab Film Series: A World not Ours*. Post-film discussion with Dr. Nadia Yacoub (UNC-Chapel Hill)
  ZSR Library Auditorium Room 404 7pm

- **October 26** *Lecture: Dr. Tissa Jayatilaka, Director of the US-Sri Lanka Fulbright Commission*
  Kirby Hall Room B02 5:00pm

- **November 2** *Arab Film Series: Iraq ‘n’ Roll*
  ZSR Library Auditorium Room 404 7pm

- **November 11** *Bombay Muslims: A Lecture by Dr. Raisur Rahman*
  ZSR Library Auditorium Room 404 4pm

For additional information about Middle East & South Asia faculty, events, course offerings, visit [http://college.wfu.edu/politics/mesasprogram/](http://college.wfu.edu/politics/mesasprogram/)