

NELC NEWS



A Note from the Chair

NELC News is the first newsletter published by Yale Near Eastern Languages and Civilizations, marking a new phase in the department's long history. Coming up on the 175th anniversary of the founding of NELC as a subject of graduate study at Yale, the members of the Department look forward to continuing both traditional and novel research projects. We celebrate here the achievements of students and faculty alike, and invite the wider Yale NELC community—alumni and friends—to send us news of their own achievements for our next *NELC News*, planned for summer 2015.

Arabic Teaching at Yale

We are pleased to announce a new website for Arabic language teaching at Yale: arabic.yale.edu.

Dr. Muhammad Aziz, senior lecturer in the department and Arabic Language coordinator, has worked together with colleagues in NELC, the Council on Middle Eastern Studies (CMES), and the Center for Language >>> **P.6, TOP**

STUDENT NEWS



Newly-minted PhDs **Tasha Dobbin-Bennett** and **Mareike Koertner** move onto the next stage of their careers; graduating senior **Alan Elbaum** talks about becoming a NELC major. >>> **P.2**



Shiyanti Thavalapan (MA '11) breaks new ground in research on the color of Assyrian reliefs. >>> **P.3**

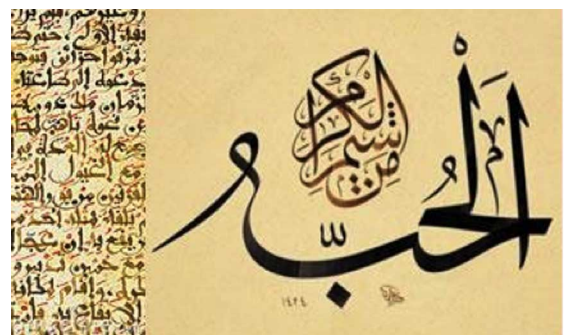
FACULTY / RESEARCH



Egyptomania: **Colleen Manassa** curates a perfectly formed show at the Peabody Museum. >>> **P.3**



Associate Research Scientist **Alberto Urcia** works on various projects for faculty and students, bringing in the expertise of the YDC2 and IPCH along with his own technological know-how. >>> **P.5**



Why I Chose NELC

Alan Elbaum, who graduated this May with a phenomenal record—he won the David Everett Chantler Award, the American Jewish Congress Prize, and Yale’s rare “exceptional distinction”—says this about his years in NELC:

“My decision to major in NELC happened more by chance than design. I was a math major for the majority of my time as an undergraduate, but I counted up my credits one evening junior fall and discovered that I had taken more courses in NELC than in math. By switching majors I was returning to an old love: I had been teaching myself Arabic since eighth grade but had inexplicably discounted it as a viable major when I came to college. I couldn’t be more grateful for the support and the freedom that I enjoyed within the NELC department. I especially valued the encouragement I received when I wished to



Alan Elbaum and his family at Yale College graduation, May 2014.

combine Arabic & Islamic Studies with my interest in Hebrew, Judaic Studies, and other cultures of the Jews of Arab lands, which led to an immensely rewarding senior thesis on the Hebrew-Arabic mystical poetry of the Jews of Yemen.”

We wish Alan the best of luck in his future career!

New Doctors

NELC proudly introduces four new PhDs in 2014.

Tasha Dobbin-Bennett’s thesis, “Rotting in Hell: Ancient Egyptian Conceptions of Decomposition and Putrefaction” won the department’s William J. Horwitz Prize for continuous excellence and distinction. She is currently the Papyrologist at the Beinecke Library.

Mareike Koertner, who wrote on “We have made clear the signs: Dala’il al-Nubuwa: Proofs of Prophecy in Early Hadith Literature,” received the Martin Buber Fellowship in the Humanities at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem, but declined it in favor of a position as Visiting Assistant Professor at Trinity College.

Niv Allon has submitted his dissertation, “Writing, Violence and the Military: Visualizing Literacies at the Time of Horemhab (1550-1295 BCE),” for a degree in December 2014. He has been an Andrew W. Mellon Fellow at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, where he will now take up a research position.



Tasha Dobbin-Bennett and Mareike Koertner with their PhDs at the degree ceremony in May; the Harvard interlopers are Kathryn Slanski (left) and Christina Kraus (right).

Hadi Jorati has completed his dissertation on “Science and Society in Medieval Islam: Nasir al-Din Tusi and the Politics of Patronage,” and is an assistant professor in the NELC department at Ohio State University.

Finding Blue in Assyrian Reliefs



Shiyanthi Thavapalan

As a museum and center for the conservation of North America's largest assemblages of cuneiform tablets, seals and artifacts from ancient Mesopotamia, the Babylonian Collection supports research and education focused on the museum's

objects. Exemplifying this commitment, the collection has launched the "Babylonian Collection Digital Imaging Demonstration Project" in partnership with the Yale Digital Collections Center. Using 3D laser scanning, RTI (reflectance transformation imaging) and MSI (multispectral imaging), this initiative aims at producing digitally enhanced images of selected cuneiform texts. Assyriology is a field in which the decipherment and interpretation of texts and images preserved on the fragile surfaces of millennia-old objects constitutes a fundamental and primary course in research. As such, new digital imaging techniques, which can enhance traces of writing and carving no longer visible to the eye or

magnify particular features of an object, are invaluable (**SEE SIDEBAR P.5**). In one very special example of technology's contribution to ancient Near Eastern studies, **Shiyanthi Thavapalan**, '11 MA, a fourth-year doctoral student in Assyriology, is working with a team on a project to increase our knowledge of color conceptualization in ancient Mesopotamia. Investigating several reliefs in the Yale Art Gallery, the team found Egyptian Blue in several places including the eunuch's eye and the genie's beard. "Blue is an illustrious color and beards were a sign of masculinity, so it makes sense that the king has a big black beard with blue mixed in," she explains.

This research, along with her work on literary descriptions of color, allows Thavapalan to understand emotional and psychological elements of ancient material culture. She is continuing her research in Berlin during 2014-15, after traveling as a recipient of the Michael I. Rostovtzeff archaeological fellowship for the summer of 2014.

You can read more about the project and watch an interview with Shiyanthi at Yale's online news site:

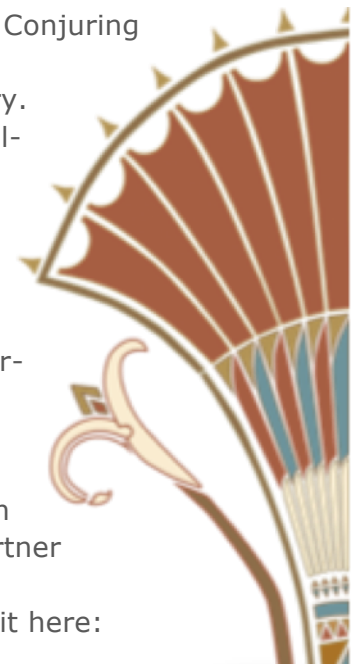
news.yale.edu/2014/05/05/digging-color-search-egyptian-blue-ancient-reliefs



Egyptomania at the Peabody

This past academic year, Professor **Colleen Manassa** ('01, PhD '05) curated "Echoes of Egypt: Conjuring the Land of the Pharaohs," an exhibition at the Peabody Museum of Natural History. Featuring treasures from across Yale's collections, many of them brought into dialogue here for the first time, the exhibition took visitors on a journey through

two thousand years of fascination with and reception of ancient Egypt. Beginning with a reproduction of the gateway of New Haven's Grove Street Cemetery (designed by Henry Austin in 1839), highlights of Manassa's masterful show included a section on the examination of the meaning and changing uses of hieroglyphs, an exploration of Egyptoscopy, the use of the magic and religious symbolism of ancient Egypt in later cultures, and—of course—mummies, treated not as oddities but as examples of the Egyptian fascination with regeneration through decay. Thanks to generous support from many partner institutions, the exhibition featured significant pieces from collections across the US and abroad. "Echoes of Egypt" has left substantial traces online. Visit it here: peabody.yale.edu/exhibits/echoes-egypt-conjuring-land-pharaohs.



FACULTY / RESEARCH



Dimitri Gutas and Joed Elich from Brill

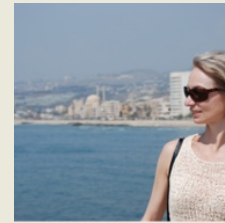
This year **Harvey Weiss** is a keynote speaker at four conferences devoted to the topic of his ongoing research on climate change. **Karen and Ben Foster** spent May leading "The Five 'Stans: An Extraordinary Experience Along the Silk Road" with a group of lucky Yale alumni. The 2014 Rosenthal lecture combined international conference and party, an event commemorating the centennial of the birth of Franz Rosenthal. Led by Professor **Dimitri Gutas**, "Graeco-Arabica: Present State and Future Prospects of an Emerging Field" celebrated the publication of Rosenthal's *Man versus Society in Medieval Islam* (Brill), edited by Gutas. NELC PhDs **Alexander (Sasha) Treiger** ('07) and **Kevin Van Bladel** ('04) both spoke at the conference. In 2013 **Eckart Frahm** was Chair and saw the publication of his *Geschichte des alten Mesopotamien*. He was on leave for the Spring working on his ongoing research project focused on developing a database for known Assyrian and Babylonian commentary texts, inscribed on some 950 cuneiform tablets. In addition to electronic editions with translations and notes, the website will contain high-resolution photographs of the tablets. He serves on the Steering Committee of the new Initiative for the Study of Antiquity and the Premodern World (www.yale.edu/yisap). **Colleen Manassa** saw the publication of *Imagining the Past: Historical Fiction in New Kingdom Egypt*, which provides the first critical edition of several literary texts of the 19th and 20th Dynasties (OUP 2014) (**SEE 'EGYPTOMANIA' P.3**). **John Coleman Darnell** brought out the second volume of the *Theban Road Desert Survey* (Yale 2014), while **Bentley Layton** continued to direct the recording and documenting of the present state of the White Monastery church building constructed by Shenoute in the mid-fifth century A.D.



Shiri Goren has revamped the Intermediate Hebrew course, restructuring existing materials and enhancing the online dimension of the curricula. Shiri continues her research on the effects of violence on domestic space through articles and lectures. On September 24, she delivered a paper about Kashua as part of the CMES Colloquium Series. Shiri's colleagues **Ayala Dvoretzky**

NELC Says Farewell

Some big changes are happening this year. Professor **Beatrice Gruendler** is leaving NELC to take up the directorship of the Seminar



für Arabistik und Semitistik at the Freie Universität Berlin. Her research interests have complemented her teaching

at Yale and inspired students for nearly 20 years to study topics ranging from the development of Arabic script, classical Arabic poetry and its social context, the integration of modern literary theory into the study of Near Eastern literatures, and early Islamic book-culture (3rd-9th century) viewed within the history of media. NELC feels her loss keenly, but wishes her success in her new life.



We will greatly miss, too, **Aaron Butts**, Senior Lector in Semitic Languages, who has accepted one

of the very few tenure-track positions in his field, and will be teaching from Fall 2014 in the Department of Semitic and Egyptian Languages and Literatures at Catholic University in Washington, DC. He leaves behind grateful students and many friends.

(coordinator of Modern Hebrew) and **Dina Roginsky** (senior lector) work tirelessly within Yale and internationally to create a dynamic, successful Hebrew language program. As part of the CMES Cinema series, Dvoretzky and **Youness Elbousty** successfully co-moderated the discussion that >>> **P.5, BOTTOM LEFT**

STUDENT NEWS

Nick Aubin ('14) has a pre-doctoral fellowship at the Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin. **Ben Scruton** ('14) will stay in New Haven to work for a PhD in Assyriology. **Jade Kim** graduated this May with a MA in Assyriology, while **Ahmet Topal** and **Hatem Alzahrani**, a noted poet, received MAs in Arabic.

Esraa Shammari has finished her first year of doctoral studies; **Elizabeth Lang** has spent the summer digging in Gabii. **Mary Frazer** won a John F. Enders Fellowship and Research Grant to study cuneiform tablets for her dissertation on Akkadian royal letters at Oxford this summer. After a year of research in Heidelberg, Germany, **Shana Zaia** and **Maria Gutierrez** have returned to New Haven to continue their dissertation research. Shana also joined Mary Frazer, **Shiyanthi Thavapalan** and other Yale colleagues at the Assyriology Rencontre at Warsaw, Poland this summer. **Marina Brown** continues work on her thesis, "Keeping Enemies Closer: the Role of the Foreigner in Ancient Egyptian Foreign Policy." **Julia Goetz** (Graeco-Arabic) and **Michael Rapoport** (Arabic and Islamic Studies) are studying for their qualifying exams. Rapoport also received a FLAS Fellowship from Yale to attend an intensive Persian program at College Park, University of Maryland. He's looking forward to his last year of coursework. **Matteo di Giovanni**, who won the 2013 Theron Rockwell Field Prize, is now on the Philosophy faculty at the Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität München.

Matthew Glassman received an award from the Council of Archaeology to fund a trip to Jerusalem. **Nicholas Kraus** was digging at a site in Israel this summer. **Geoff Moseley** passed his comprehensive exams last year and participated in the interdisciplinary Mellon concentration in the Humanities. He spent the summer in New Haven working on his prospectus and other research, and is looking forward to his first year without coursework! >>> **P.6, BOTTOM RIGHT**

FACULTY / RESEARCH >>> FROM P.4

followed the viewing of the Israeli film "The Attack." Elbousty also co-edited the book *Vitality and Dynamism*, released by Leiden Press this September. **Etem Erol**, lector in Turkish and coordinator of the Turkish Program, has again this year been successful in an application for a Fulbright Foreign Language teaching assistant; in the fall he will welcome another fellow to benefit from his enthusiastic and professional teaching and mentoring. In August, **Farkhondeh Shayesteh**, coordinator of the Persian Program, presented a paper entitled "Persian and Japanese Expression in the Face of Modernization" at the Tenth Biennial International Society for Iranian Studies Conference in Montreal.

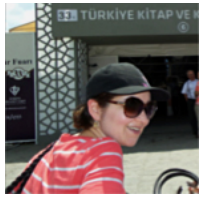
Research in the News



The Gilgamesh tablet (above) is being prepared for photography on Yale's West Campus. The exciting project is overseen by **Ben Foster**, curator, and **Elizabeth Payne** (PhD '07), conservator of the Babylonian Collection, with technical participation by the indefatigable **Alberto Urcia**, NELC's associate research scientist, who has his talented fingers in many digital pies, from Egypt to Mesopotamia (**SEE TOP P.3**). Each year, **Ulla Kasten**, associate curator, organizes the Assyriological Seminars, an informal forum for visiting scholars researching in the collection to present their current work. This year's speakers considered topics including music in Mesopotamia, recent Iraqi excavations at the site of Nineveh, good and bad days for divination, and Babylonian notions of the past. **Enrique Jiménez**, a specialist in Babylonian literature of the first millennium BCE, is a postdoctoral associate of the "Cuneiform Commentaries Corpus Project" (**SEE LEFT P.4**). Since 2013, the collection has boasted the talents of **Agnete Lassen**, lecturer in NELC and Kohut post-doctoral associate. Specializing in Near Eastern seals and ancient textiles, she taught a course this year on the collection's seals to a fascinated group of students.

ARABIC TEACHING AT YALE >>> FROM P.1

Teaching to develop a portal providing information for students and faculty alike.



Sarab Al Ani presented “Language for the 21st century: practical applications” at the 2014 Hawaii University International Conferences on Education and STEM. She explored some

avenues for best practices in teaching ACTFL’s language skills, shedding light on the effective use of technology, student proficiency, and classroom-based assessment. At the 33rd Turkish Book Exhibition, she met with colleagues from Middle East Technical University to discuss collaborative contributions in international language teaching and learning events, as well as to brainstorm ways to improve second-language teaching techniques via online collaboration.

Youness Elbousty evaluated locations for Yale’s summer study abroad, while pursuing his internationally-based consultant work for intensive Arabic programs. He also traveled to Denmark,



Istanbul University

Germany and Morocco to deliver lectures; and moderated the discussion of the four screenings of the Spring 2014 North Africa film series.

Finally, though we are sad to see **Hasmik Tovmasyan** leave NELC’s teaching staff, we are delighted to report that she has begun a job teaching Arabic at Choate Rosemary Hall, just up the road, in the fall. We hope to see her and her family at future NELC events.

STUDENT NEWS >>> FROM P.5

Finally, the NELC graduate students are delighted to report they now have a handbook—collaboratively written—and a study area/lounge in HGS. **Ad Astra!**

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Please send us your news!!

Email us at miguel.perez-cabello@yale.edu or send to Snail Mail (shown above).