

Annual Report 2025/26



The **Orient-Institut Beirut** (OIB) is an independent academic research institute, part of the Max Weber Foundation and mainly funded through the Federal Ministry of Education and Research in Germany. It conducts interdisciplinary research on the Arab world and the region of the Middle East and North Africa at large. Its research community comprises long-term research associates and short-term visiting fellows from all over the world, who represent the major disciplines of the humanities and social sciences, including Islamic and Arab studies, history and anthropology of West Asia, as well as sociology and political sciences. The OIB is a long-standing partner of academic institutions in Lebanon and the region at large. It aims to foster academic relations across the MENA region and increasingly conducts its research in transregional perspectives. One of the great academic treasures of the OIB is its public research library, which holds important collections of books, journals, and newspapers. It comprises around 130,000 volumes relating to Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies in the broad sense. The OIB publishes two major book series and additional titles through extra series. The Institute engages with a larger academic community through regular research seminars, lecture series, international conferences, and workshops. Local and international partnerships are crucial in designing and funding the Institute's projects. In particular, the OIB is at the forefront of facilitating research collaborations between institutions in the Arab world and institutions in Germany and Europe. It thereby seeks to encourage innovative academic perspectives on the region.



Contents

Preface	6
Jahresrede des Direktors, 2025–26, Jens Hanssen	7
Director’s Annual Address, 2025–26, Jens Hanssen	12
From the OIB Archives: Historical Document	20
OIB by Numbers (2025–2026)	27
In Memoriam	28
Presence as Method	30
A City that Brings Researchers Closer to Their Subjects	31
Researchers on Working in Beirut	32
Researching the Ottoman 19 th Century from Beirut: Peter Hill, Hans Robert Roemer Fellow	33
OIB Provides Intellectual Leadership	36
Director, Jens Hanssen	37
Vice Directors	40
Advisory Board	41
OIB Builds Knowledge Infrastructure	42
OIB Library	43
OIB Publications	54
OIB Research Associates Produce Knowledge	64
New Directions in Law, Religion, and Governance: A Conversation with Nahed Samour	129
OIB Supports Early Career Scholars	134
Residential Programme	135
The Fellows’ Seminars	166
OIB Connects Scholars	176
Hans Robert Roemer Fellows	177
Journalist-in-Residence Programme	182
Artist-in-Residence Programme	183
Affiliated Researchers	183
Fellows-at-Large Programme at OIB	194
Academic Interns	195
Research Across Disciplines: Til Reimer	198
Building Research Skills in Cairo: Ben Keberle	200
OIB Alumni & Friends Association	202

OIB Expands Collaborative Networks	204
OIB Engages Public Audiences	210
OIB Pursues Research Amid Adversity	232
OIB Looks Ahead	238
Shaping OIB’s Next Chapter: Barbara Winckler	239
From Fellow to Researcher: Simon Conrad	248
Expanding OIB to the Gulf: Rosie Bsheer	254
OIB’s Residential Fellows 2026–2027	255
Appendix	258
Imprint	259

The image shows a close-up of a wooden bookshelf filled with books. In the foreground, a wooden door with intricate geometric and floral carvings is partially open, revealing the shelves behind it. The books are arranged in rows, with some spines visible in red, green, and blue. The lighting is warm, highlighting the textures of the wood and the spines of the books.

About This Report

This edition of the OIB Annual Report reflects the remarkable intellectual vitality of a community that continues to ask ambitious questions, build connections, and produce scholarship in the midst of profound challenges. It offers a portrait of the people, collections, infrastructures, and collaborations that make the Institute a unique place of research and exchange. The report brings together the contributions of researchers, fellows, librarians, editors, administrators, and partners whose collective work sustains OIB's mission and keeps open a space for critical inquiry, dialogue, and discovery from the heart of its long-standing home, Beirut.

The report covers an eighteen-month period, from January 2025 through May 2026. The extended timeframe reflects the Institute's transition to a reporting cycle aligned with the academic year, bringing future reports into closer alignment with research, teaching, fellowships, conferences, and publication activities.

Organised around the core activities of the Institute including providing intellectual leadership, maintaining research infrastructure, producing and disseminating knowledge, supporting early-career scholars, fostering international networks, and engaging the wider public, the report traces developments in research, publication, fellowships, and public programming, alongside efforts to maintain international collaboration and intellectual exchange despite the disruptions caused by war in Lebanon.

Rather than listing activities, the researcher profiles are presented thematically. They highlight the broader intellectual questions that shape individual projects and situate publications, events, and collaborations within wider scholarly trajectories.

01

Preface



Jahresrede des Direktors, 2025–26, Jens Hanssen



Präsenz als Methode

Während eines Kommunikationsworkshops im Regionalen Deutschlandzentrum in Kairo im vergangenen Mai wurde mir bewusst, wie wichtig es geworden ist, unsere Arbeit in den sozialen Medien über die bereits überzeugten akademischen Kreise hinaus bekannt zu machen. Wir werden in den nächsten Monaten eine Online-Strategie zur Wissenschaftskommunikation auf den Weg bringen. Vorerst jedoch, und vielleicht zum letzten Mal, haben wir unsere Anstrengungen verdoppelt, um eine anspruchsvolle Printausgabe zu produzieren und ganz altmodisch zu zeigen, wie viele Erfolge wir trotz aller Widrigkeiten seit Januar 2025 erzielen konnten. Chefredakteurin Zeina G. Halabi hat einen Jahresbericht für die Ewigkeit versprochen. Sie hat ihr Versprechen gehalten.

Die Arbeit war zweifellos schwierig, insbesondere seit dem Wiederaufflammen des Krieges am 2. März 2026. Israelische Drohnen schwebten bedrohlich über unseren Köpfen, und unser geliebtes Viertel ist erneut zu einem Zufluchtsort für Tausende von vertriebenen Libanes:innen geworden, die die israelische Besatzung aus ihren Häusern vertrieben hat. Und wieder einmal wurden die vielen historischen Schulgebäude von Zokak el-Blat von den Opfern israelischer Militärgewalt besetzt. Der Unterricht wurde an andere Orte verlegt, gerade als wir begonnen hatten, eine große Forschungsk Kooperation mit den Schulen in unserer Nachbarschaft anzubahnen. Wir hoffen sehr, dass alle so bald wie möglich zurückkehren können.

Dieser Jahresbericht hat „Präsenz als Methode“ zum Thema in einer Zeit massiver Vertreibung und Zerstörung. Er spiegelt sowohl die langjährige raison d’être des OIB in Beirut wider als auch die Art und Weise, wie unser Standort unsere Forschung im Laufe der Jahrzehnte geprägt hat. Was hat es bedeutet, in Beirut zu studieren statt in Tübingen, wo ich 1989 mein Studium der „Islamkunde“ begann? Welche Möglichkeiten stehen uns bei unserer Arbeit in Beirut und Kairo im Gegensatz zu Damaskus oder Riad offen—für die Islamwissenschaft, für ethnografische Feldforschung, für den Zugang zu Primärquellen und seltenen Zeitschriften, zu Kollegen, Intellektuellen, Politikern, führenden Vertretern der Zivilgesellschaft und das Forschen mit verschiedenen Religionsgemeinschaften, etwa Schiiten, Sunniten, Drusen, Maroniten, Orthodoxen, Kopten oder Armeniern? Dies waren auch die Fragen, die den OIB-Gründungsdirektor, Hans Robert Roemer (1961–63), auf seiner entscheidenden Erkundungsreise im Jahr 1960 von Kairo über Amman, Jerusalem, Damaskus und Beirut in Hinblick auf die Beurteilung antrieben, wo Deutschlands erstes Nahost-Forschungszentrum angesiedelt werden sollte. Der Bericht, den er dem damaligen Präsidenten der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft (DMG), Hans Wehr, vorlegte, sowie Wehrs Empfehlung an den deutschen Innenminister zugunsten von Beirut werden hier aus unserem Institutsarchiv erstmals veröffentlicht.

Die Argumente unserer Vorgänger für Beirut im Vergleich zu konkurrierenden Standorten finden auch heute noch bei uns Anklang. Die Präsenz in Beirut—in guten wie in schlechten Zeiten—ist eine langfristige Strategie, die auf dem Erbe von Generationen von Wissenschaftler:innen und Mitarbeiter:innen aufbaut. Die Entscheidung für Beirut fiel trotz der hohen Wertschätzung, die die wissenschaftliche Zunft traditionell den Handschriftensammlungen beimisst. Kairo und Damaskus hatten in dieser Hinsicht viel mehr zu bieten. Der Umzug nach Beirut war am Ende eine Folge der hohen Qualität der akademischen Partnerinstitutionen und Druckereien vor Ort.

Das OIB hat diese lange Buch- und Manuskripttradition durch unsere Publikationsabteilung fortgesetzt, die im Berichtszeitraum aus Christian Thueselt, Ahmed Abd-Elsalam, Barraq Zakariyya und Micheline Kachar Hani bestand. Die vier sorgten dafür, dass die Buchreihe *Bibliotheca Islamica (BI)* bei De Gruyter Brill (DGB) wuchs und gedieh, während wir gleichzeitig unsere Reihe *Beiruter Texte und Studien (BTS)* reibungslos ebenfalls zu DGB überführten. Die Handschriftenforschung florierte am OIB dank Alya Karames bahnbrechender Forschung und Dokumentation von Koranhandschriften aus der Zeit der Ghaznawiden- und Ghuriden-Dynastien. Im April dieses Jahres erschien ihre Monografie *The Forgotten Qur’ans of the Eastern Islamic World* in der Edinburgh-Reihe zur islamischen Kunst, und ihr digitales Archiv soll im Laufe des Sommers auf unsere Website gestellt werden.



AMERICAN
UNIVERSITY^{OF} BEIRUT
PALESTINE LAND STUDIES
CENTER



Finnish Institute in the Middle East
المعهد الفنلندي في الشرق الأوسط
Suomen Lähi-idän instituutti



Orient Institut
BEIRUT
المعهد الأورنيتي
للدراسات الشرقية

You are Invited to attend an
International Symposium on:

The Land of Palestine: Early Ethnographers, Late Archives & Present Law

Featuring:

Nadia Abou El Haj

Salim Tamari

Sofia Häggman

Saqr Abu-Fakhr

Rana Barakat

Martin Greve

Sonja Mejcher

Reem Botmeh

Issam Nassar

Howayda Al-Harithy

Nahed Samour

Arnulf Becker

Falestin Naili

Zaina Jallad

Nadi Abu Saada

Susanne Dahlgren

Jens Hanssen

January 14

5:30 – 7:00 PM

Orient-Institut Beirut (OIB)

January 15

9:30 AM – 6:00 PM

Issam Fares Institute (IFI)

4th floor, Conference room - AUB

Das hundertjährige Jubiläum unserer BI-Reihe im Jahr 2028/29 steht bereits im Kalender unserer neuen Bibliotheksleiterin Monique Bellan. Monique, Alya und andere Manuskriptbegeisterte in Beirut haben im Berichtszeitraum ein internationales Netzwerk von Manuskriptexpert:innen nach Beirut gelockt: Konrad Hirschler (Universität Hamburg) und Barry Flood (NYU) nahmen im vergangenen Herbst an Treffen mit Joseph Rustom (Bibliothèque Orientale/USJ) und Emma Gannagé (Philosophie/AUB) am OIB teil. Eine überraschend große Gruppe libanesischer Studierender meldete sich für einen gemeinsamen Manuskript-Workshop an der AUB an und zeigte großes Interesse an der Kunst der (digitalen) Edition ebenso wie an der Konservierung und der Manuskriptkultur in der Region im Allgemeinen.

Ein weiterer Vorteil, den Beirut nach wie vor gegenüber allen anderen arabischen Hauptstädten hat, ist das hohe Maß an akademischer Freiheit und Meinungsfreiheit. Im Academic Freedom Index 2026 ist der Libanon aufgrund des wirtschaftlichen Zusammenbruchs 2019 zurückgefallen, doch das Land rangiert weiterhin unter den besten 40–50 % —knapp hinter dem Vereinigten Königreich. Die IFA-Bewertung des Libanon ist bei weitem nicht so alarmierend gesunken wie die der USA und Deutschlands und liegt immer noch Welten vor Ägypten und Saudi-Arabien, die das Schlusslicht bilden. Die libanesisische Regierung und das Parlament unterstützen das OIB nach wie vor, ebenso wie einst der erste Außenminister des Landes, Henri Pharaoun, der 1963 beim Erwerb der Farajallah-Villa half.

Unser Gastland leidet, weil Israel im ganzen Land Sanitäter, Journalist:innen, Frauen und Kinder tötet. Und dies geschah täglich auch während des 15-monatigen „Waffenstillstands“ vor dem 2. März 2026, dem Tag, an dem die Hisbollah die fragwürdige Entscheidung traf, sechs Raketen zurückzuschießen, worauf Israel vorhersehbar mit ethnischer Säuberung und der umfassenden Besetzung des Südlibanon reagierte. Am selben Tag hielten wir eine Sitzung der wissenschaftlichen Mitarbeiter:innen ab, um ein vielversprechendes Frühjahrsprogramm zu planen. Jahresberichte halten normalerweise nur Ereignisse fest, die tatsächlich stattgefunden haben. In diesem Jahr erwähnen wir auch jene Veranstaltungen, die wir verschieben mussten: eine DFG-Konferenz, von AFAC mitfinanzierte Workshops, eine Manuskript-Sommerschule, Gaststipendien im Rahmen des Römer-Programms sowie Vorträge von deutschen und internationalen Wissenschaftler:innen des Kalibers von Stefan Leder, Ulrike Freitag, Christoph Rauch, Nebahat Avcioğlu, Sinan Antoon, Fred Donner, Avi Shlaim, Barry Flood, Katherine Halls und Ziad Abu-Rish.

Das OIB blieb jedoch die ganze Zeit über intellektuell aktiv, auch wenn deutsche Forscher:innen in den letzten drei Monaten der Reisewarnung

der Stufe 3b Folge leisteten und widerwillig nach Deutschland abreisten. Ich verbrachte einen Monat in Kairo. Libanesischer Forscher:innen und Mitarbeiter:innen waren weiterhin vor Ort, obwohl unsere Bibliothek für externe Besucher:innen geschlossen war. Einige setzten ihre Arbeit in Deutschland, Ägypten, Frankreich und Italien fort. Unsere Zweigstelle in Kairo arbeitete mit voller Kapazität. Dank des Engagements unserer dortigen Repräsentantin Yasmin Amin und unserer DAAD-Gastgeber in Zamalek konnten wir eine Reihe von Konferenzen und Präsentationen veranstalten.

Dass wir alle Mitarbeiter:innen behalten, die Arbeitsmoral aufrechterhalten und erfolgreiche Stellenbesetzungen für eine stellvertretenden Direktorin, eine neue Bibliotheksleiterin, mehrere wissenschaftliche Mitarbeiter:innen sowie sieben Stipendiat:innen im Jahr 2025 und neun im Jahr 2026 durchführen konnten—wobei alle Erstplatzierten unsere Angebote annahmen—gehört zu den erfreulichsten Ergebnissen der letzten fünfzehn Monate. Die externe Evaluierungskommission, die uns vom 6. bis 8. Oktober 2025 in Beirut besuchte, brachte es auf den Punkt: „Es ist erstaunlich, wie gut es dem OIB gelungen ist, seine Arbeit und seine Wirkung sowohl vor Ort als auch in Deutschland aufrechtzuerhalten“, wobei sie die lokalen Mitarbeiter:innen besonders hervorhob, die „eine entscheidende Rolle dabei gespielt haben, dass das Orient-Institut alle bisherigen Krisen überstanden hat und seine Arbeit ununterbrochen fortsetzen konnte“. Wir danken der Kommission für ihre aufmerksamen Beobachtungen unserer Arbeit und ihre konstruktive Bewertung all der Veränderungen, die wir initiiert und umgesetzt haben.

Von Dezember 2024 bis Februar 2026 konnten wir eine Reihe von wissenschaftlichen Aktivitäten in Präsenz durchführen. Die Vortragsreihe *Kant and the Non-European* wurde weiterhin gemeinsam mit der AUB und der AUC veranstaltet. Unsere zweimal verschobene, von der DFG geförderte Konferenz *Catastrophe, Memory & Critique* fand schließlich im Juni 2025 statt. Sie erwies sich als wegweisendes Ereignis, zu dem einige Zuhörer eigens aus Deutschland anreisten, um das fantastische Aufgebot an Gastredner:innen zu erleben. Im Juli besuchte uns der ARD-Journalist Kilian Pfeffer, um Recherchen über seinen Onkel anzustellen, der 1979 in Beirut ermordet wurde, und um einen Abendvortrag über seine Erkenntnisse zu halten. Nach der Sommerpause hielt Beatrice Gründer in Kairo die zweite jährliche *Josef-van-Ess-Gedenkvorlesung*. Außerdem organisierten wir dort im November gemeinsam mit der Ägyptischen Gesellschaft für Geschichtswissenschaften eine zweisprachige Konferenz (Englisch/Arabisch) zum Thema arabisch-deutsche Beziehungen im Spiegel der Geschichte. Schließlich fand im Januar 2026 im Rahmen einer Modell-Kooperation mit dem Palestine Land Studies center der AUB und dem Finnischen Institut im Nahen Osten die internationale Konferenz *The Land of Palestine: Early Ethnographers, Late Archives, and Present Law* statt.

Director’s
Annual
Address,
2025–26,
Jens
Hanssen



Presence as Method

During a communications workshop at the Regionales Deutschlandzentrum in Cairo this past May, I realised how important it has become to promote our work on social media beyond already-convinced academic circles. We are duly putting in place an online communication strategy over the next few months. For now, however, and perhaps for the last time, we have doubled our efforts to also produce a beautiful print edition and showcase, old-school, just how many accomplishments we managed to pull off despite adversity since January 2025. Editor-in-Chief Zeina G. Halabi has promised an annual report for the ages, and she has kept that promise.

Work has been difficult, to be sure, especially since the resumption of war on March 2, 2026. Israeli drones have hovered treacherously above our heads, and our beloved quarter has once again become a place of refuge for thousands of displaced Lebanese whom the Israeli occupation has pushed out of their homes. And once again Zokak el-Blat’s many historical school buildings have been occupied by the destitute. Classes moved elsewhere, just as we have begun to initiate a major Swiss-funded research cooperation with our neighbourhood schools. We do hope that everyone can return as soon as possible.

This annual report has as its theme “presence as method” at a time of mass displacement and destruction. It reflects both OIB’s long-standing

raison d’être in Beirut and the way our location has shaped our research over the years. What has it meant to study in Beirut rather than Tübingen, where I began my studies in „Islamkunde“ in 1989? What opportunities are available to us by working in Beirut and Cairo rather than Damascus or Riyadh—for *Islamwissenschaft* and ethnographic fieldwork; for access to primary sources and rare journals; for collaboration with colleagues, intellectuals, politicians, and civil society leaders; and for engagement with diverse religious and ethnic communities, including Shi’a, Sunni, Druze, Maronite, Orthodox, Coptic, and Armenian? These were also the questions that drove the founding OIB-director, Hans Robert Roemer (1961–63), on his decisive 1960 fact-finding tour from Cairo through Amman, Jerusalem, Damascus, and Beirut to assess where Germany’s first Middle East research centre in the Middle East would be best placed. The report he delivered to the president of the German Oriental Society (DMG) Hans Wehr, and Wehr’s recommendation to the German Minister of the Interior in favour of Beirut, are published in this report from OIB’s in-house archives for the first time.

The arguments our predecessors made for Beirut over its rivals resonate with ours today. Being present in Beirut—in good times and bad—is a long-term strategy that builds on the legacy of generations of scholars and staff. The decision for Beirut came despite the scholarly guild’s premium on manuscript collections. Cairo and Damascus had much more to offer in this regard. In the end, moving to Beirut was a function of the high quality of academic partners and printing houses here.

OIB has carried forward its book and manuscript tradition through its publications department, which is led by Christian Thuselt, Ahmed Abd-Elsalam, Barraq Zakariyya, and Micheline Kachar Hani. The four of them ensured that the *Bibliotheca Islamica* (BI) editions thrived at De Gruyter Brill (DGB) with four volumes to appear in 2026. All the while, we migrated our *Beiruter Texte und Studien* (BTS) series smoothly to DGB, too. Manuscript studies are flourishing at OIB thanks to Research Associate Alya Karame’s groundbreaking research and documentation of Qur’an manuscripts during the Ghaznavid and Ghurid dynasties. In April this year, her monograph, *The Forgotten Qur’ans of the Eastern Islamic World* was published in the Edinburgh Studies in Islamic Art series, and her digital depository is poised to go live on our website over the summer.

The centenary of our BI series in 2028–29 is already in the calendar of our new head librarian, Monique Bellan. Monique, Alya, and other manuscript friends in Beirut have been attracting an international network of manuscript experts to Beirut. Konrad Hirschler (Hamburg) and Barry Flood (NYU) met with Beirut-based academics Joseph Rustom

OIB Director meets
Bavarian Minister President
Markus Söder on German
Unity Day at the Germany
embassy in Cairo

(Bibliothèque Orientale-USJ) and Emma Gannagé (Philosophy-AUB) at the OIB garden last fall. In addition, a large contingent of Lebanese students signed up to a joint manuscript workshop at AUB and showed a keen interest in the (digital) art of editing as well as preservation and manuscript culture in the region more generally.

Beirut still has the highest level of academic freedom and freedom of expression over all other Arab capitals. On the 2026 Academic Freedom Index, Lebanon fell slightly because of the economic collapse in 2019, but the country still hovers in the top 40–50% —just below the UK. Lebanon’s rating dropped not nearly as alarmingly as the US’s and Germany’s and is still worlds apart from Egypt and Saudi Arabia, which are at rock bottom. Importantly, the Lebanese government and parliament have continued to be as supportive of OIB as the country’s first foreign minister Henri Pharaoun who in 1963 helped with the acquisition of the Farajallah villa, where the Institute is housed today.

Our host country is hurting because Israel’s targeted assassinations across the country murder paramedics, journalists, women, and children. This also occurred during the 15-month “ceasefire” on a daily basis *before* 2 March 2026, the day Hizballah took the ill-fated decision to fire six rockets, and Israel predictably reacted with ethnic cleansing and the wholesale occupation of Southern Lebanon. On that same day, we had held a faculty meeting to plan what was promising to be a rich spring programme. While annual reports record events that actually took place, this year we must gesture to those we have postponed: a DFG-conference, AFAC-co-funded workshops, a manuscript summer school, visiting Roemer fellowships and lectures by German and international scholars of the calibre of Stefan Leder, Ulrike Freitag, Christoph Rauch, Nebahat Avcioglu, Sinan Antoon, Fred Donner, Avi Shlaim, Barry Flood, Katharine Halls, and Ziad Abu-Rish.

OIB remained intellectually active throughout the war, even though in the last three months our team has been dispersed. German researchers heeded the 3b travel advisory and reluctantly left for Germany. I spent a month in Cairo. Lebanese researchers and staff kept a continuous presence although our library was closed to external visitors. Some continued their work in Germany, Egypt, France, and Italy. Our Cairo branch operated at full capacity. Thanks to the energy of our representative Yasmin Amin and our DAAD-hosts in Zamalek, we were able to host a series of conferences and research presentations.

That we retained all staff, maintained morale, and ran successful searches for a vice director, a new head librarian, multiple research associates, seven fellows in 2025 and nine in 2026—all first choices accepting our offers—is among the most gratifying results of the last

Adrien Zakar, University of Toronto, opens the *Catastrophe, Memory & Critique* conference at the newly built terrace in the garden of OIB with a paper entitled “Clockwork on the Baghdad Bahn: Armenia, Syria, Palestine.”



fifteen months. The external evaluation commission that visited us in Beirut from 6 to 8 October 2025 put it well: “It is astonishing how well OIB has managed to maintain its work and its impact both on the ground and in Germany,” singling out the local staff for having “played a decisive role in ensuring that the Orient-Institut has weathered all crises to date and has been able to continue its work uninterrupted.” We thank the commission for its close attention to our work and its constructive review of all the positive changes we have initiated and implemented.

Previous to the latest war, from December 2024 to February 2026, we were able to carry out an array of academic activities in person. The *Kant and the Non-European* lecture series continued to run jointly with AUB and AUC. Our twice postponed DFG-funded conference *Catastrophe, Memory & Critique* finally took place in June 2025. It turned out to be a landmark event with some attendees traveling from Germany just to witness the fantastic lineup of invited speakers. In July, the ARD-journalist Kilian Pfeffer visited us to conduct research on his uncle who was assassinated in Beirut in 1979 and to give an evening lecture on his findings. After the summer break, Beatrice Gründler gave the second Josef van Ess Annual Memorial Lecture in Cairo. We also co-organised a bilingual conference at the Egyptian Society for Historical Studies there in November on *Arab-German Relations through the Mirror of History*. Finally, in January 2026, in a model of co-production with AUB’s Palestine Land Studies Center and the Finnish Institute in the Middle East, we delivered the international conference *The Land of Palestine: Early Ethnographers, Late Archives, and Present Law*.

Thanks to Zeina G. Halabi's regular Theory and Method Seminar for our cohort of fellows, and to Berenike Metzler's online lecture series on Jalal al-Din al-Suyuti every Wednesday from April to July 2026, OIB remained academically active at a time when the Institute was forced to postpone all in-person public events.

I even managed to present and publish my own research, including three articles, one on Ibn Sina, one on Ibn Khaldun, and one on Khalid Bakdash. Perhaps most consequentially for the field, OIB is active in supporting Syria's fragile academic revival. With our Syrian colleagues and friends, IFPO and other scientific partners we are participating in a series of workshops at Damascus University on *(Re-) Imagining Knowledge Production in/on Syria after Assad*. In May, a joint initiative with the University of Cologne was granted DAAD-funding to support capacity-building at Aleppo and Damascus Universities this fall. We are poised to grow our activities in Syria and look forward to more friendly co-operations to navigate difficult circumstances, especially with our French partners at IFPO.

The Directorate has continued to repair and extend OIB's network of partnerships more generally, adding memoranda of understanding with the University of Tokyo, the Kunsthistorisches Institut in Florence, the Arab Council for the Social Sciences, MESA, IFAO-Cairo, and the Creative Memory of the Syrian Revolution NGO. We have also been involved in the new graduate programme Europe after Eurocentrism: Narratives of a World Province in Transformation at the University of Constance, as well as the new Käte Hamburger Kolleg at Kassel University on raw-material cultures which takes off this year. We launched the first network of international MENA-research centres located in the region, whose inaugural meeting was postponed from March 2026 and is now rescheduled for spring 2027. The Directorate scored two DFG grants, and we launched, in partnership with Divan – The Arab Culture Centre in Berlin, our first trilingual Riwaq Book Prize competition, to be awarded in Berlin on 16 October 2026. Nine distinguished jury members, three per language category, have given generously of their time and expertise, and we thank all of them warmly.

OIB is eagerly awaiting accreditation in Egypt to grow physically and institutionally, and to put measures in place to continue our work in case travel restrictions affect our work in Lebanon again. Going forward, we are heeding the external evaluation committee's advice to enhance our presence in Cairo as much as possible without reducing our presence in Beirut. The two sites are meant to complement each other and create lasting structures for academic exchange between Lebanon, Egypt and Germany.

Last year, two of our esteemed colleagues passed away. In April, 2025, Rabiaa Omeirat, our caretaker of almost thirty years, died from complications of her leukemia treatment. Muhammad al-Hujairi succumbed to a heart attack on 18 December 2025. Just a week earlier he had received the physical copy of his final book of the eleven-volume edition of Ahmad Baladhuri's *Ansab al-Ashraf (BI28)*, a huge project whose roots date back to the 1970s. We miss them both very much, and our hearts go out to their families.

We also bid farewell to several research associates who have retired after long service at OIB. In April 2025, Sarah El Bulbeisi left for Munich, where Ludwig Maximilian University offered her a tenure-track position. Our head librarian, Peter Pökel, now works for the DAI in Bonn. In the past year, the rest of the veteran crew departed: Vice Director Thomas Würtz; Research Associates Fatih Ermiş, Ahmed Abd-Elsalam and Christian Thuselt; and Yasmin Amin, our scientific coordinator and OIB representative in Cairo. Over the summer, Carol Hakim will also retire, and Nadia von Maltzahn will move to Sapienza University of Rome, whose Storia e Istituzioni dell'Asia department has hired her as associate professor with tenure. We thank all of them for their commitment and contributions to the well-being of the Institute and wish them all the best in their next career steps. We look forward to staying in touch through the OIB Alumni & Friends Association / Ehemalige und Freunde des OIB (EFOI)!

In their stead, we welcome our new colleagues: Monique Bellan, head librarian and OIB veteran, returned to the Institute on 1 October 2025; Barbara Winckler, previously a senior lecturer of Arabic literature and culture at the University of Münster, has served as our vice director since 1 April 2026. Winckler is a leading scholar of modern Arabic literature and the arts, with a particular focus on postwar Lebanese cultural production as well as new approaches to the study of early Arabic periodicals.

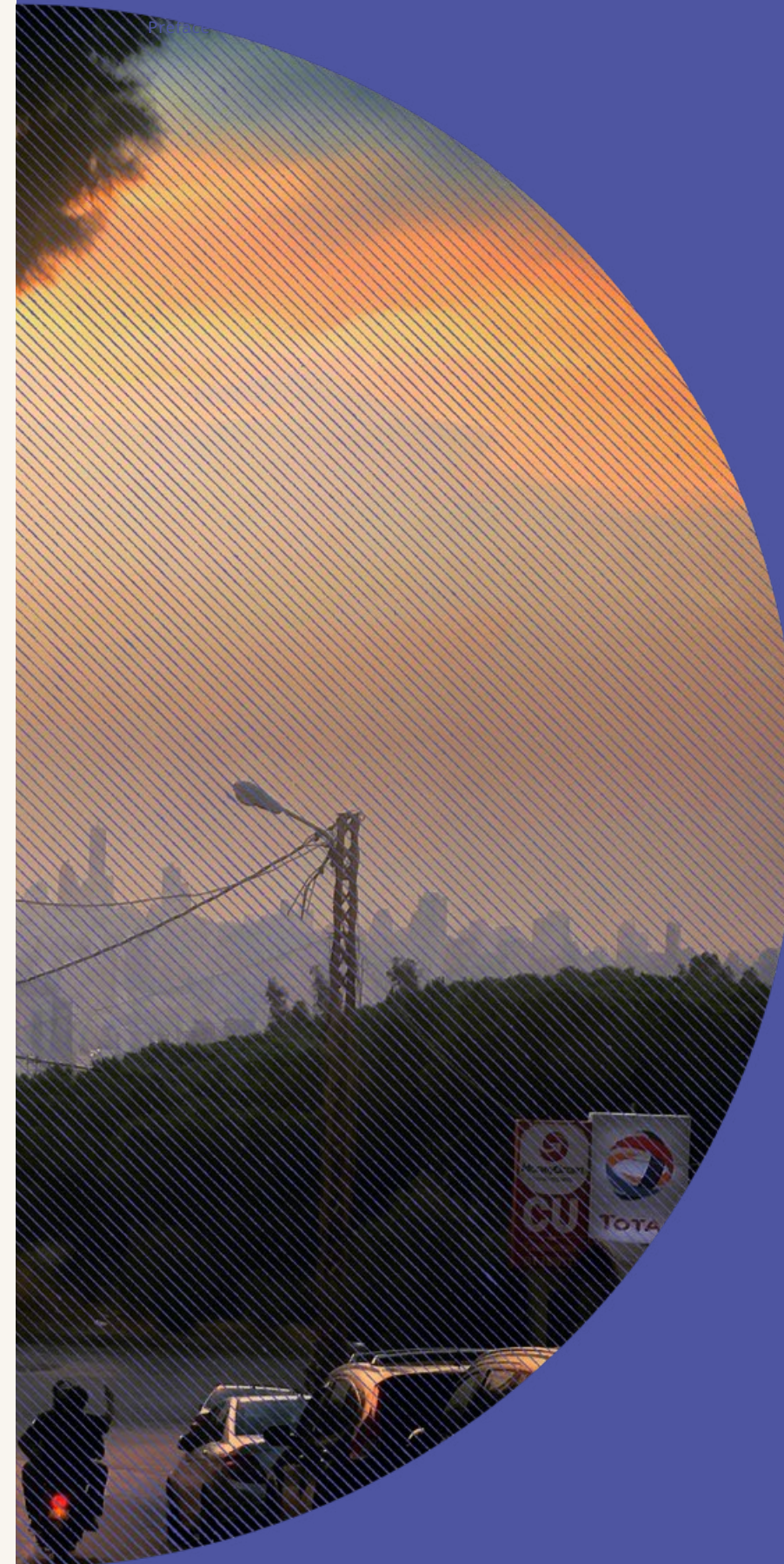
We welcome three new research associates this year. Nahed Samour, who joins us from Radboud University and the Law & Society Institute at Humboldt University Berlin, arrived on 1 January 2026. Samour works on the foundations of Islamic law as well as contemporary international law, and she is poised to complete her monograph on the legal negotiations between the *qādi* and the *mufti* in Abbasid Baghdad. On 1 July, Rosie Bsheer, a pre-eminent scholar of the Arabian Peninsula, will join our team from Harvard University, where she has been a pre-tenure professor of history. Most recently, our postdoctoral fellow Simon Conrad was appointed research associate, assuming a dual role as head of the OIB Publications Department and supervisor of the Cairo office as of 1 September.

OIB researchers have been prolific during this reporting period: I have already mentioned Alya Karame's Edinburgh monograph *The Forgotten Qur'ans*. Last year's postdoctoral fellow Benjamin Rassbach published his first monograph *Landscapes of Resistance: Narratives Around Sacred Places in Sinjar (Iraq) and the Genocide Against Yazidis* with DGB last June. Zeina G. Halabi received a major grant from the Arab Fund for Arts and Culture to develop public research activities under the theme *The Public Life of Empathy*. Moreover, her much-anticipated *Cambridge Companion to Modern Arabic Literature*, co-edited with Michael Allan, is slated for publication in July 2026. Current OIB Advisory Board member Sebastian Günther was elected an international honorary fellow of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences last year. Finally, OIB postdoc and soon-to-be research associate Simon Conrad has recently been awarded the Bayard and Cleveland Dodge Memorial Award for his dissertation at Princeton University. Congratulations to all our amazing colleagues.

Financially, we managed to stay out of the red in 2025 through careful austerity measures like delaying the start dates of our new hires, and leaving a third advertised position temporarily unfilled. It was one of the many great achievements of our administration, namely Frau Sadek and Frau Ghandour, that we passed the ministry's four-day audit in early October with flying colours.

The current OIB team is aware that we stand on the shoulders of many who worked hard to build and maintain this place. I am deeply grateful to our researchers, administrators, librarians, IT, the publications department, and caretakers who have shown extraordinary presence in this Institute. I am also indebted to the OIB Advisory Board, the Managing Director of the Max Weber Foundation, and to our growing circle of alumni, fellows, and partners in Lebanon, Egypt, Syria, Germany, and around the world. And, as ever, I salute my wife Andrea Kazzar, without whose support I would not have weathered the crises of these last three years.

This Annual Report, produced by Zeina G. Halabi together with our team of interns in Cairo—Ben Keberle, Til Reimer, and David Hertel—captures OIB's energy, international standing, and cutting-edge research.



From
the OIB
Archives:
Historical
Document

This Annual Report highlights two documents selected from the OIB's endangered administrative archives which live above the "Harry Potter Room." The references are from the University of Halle-Wittenberg Archive which also holds our records. Through correspondence, reports, photographs, memoranda, and other records, this section offers readers a glimpse into the Institute's history and its long-standing engagement with scholarship, cultural exchange, and the region.

The documents reproduced here are two letters from 1960 concerning plans to establish a German Institute for non-archaeological research in the Arab world. The following document is a translation of the report of H. Roemer's fact-finding mission to ascertain the ideal location for the planned institute in the Arab world: East-Jerusalem, Damascus, or Beirut. Prior to this trip, Roemer had proposed Damascus as the ideal city but his visit to Damascus and Beirut changed his mind, which he expressed to the president of the DMG (see Wehr's letter below). Cairo and Istanbul were excluded because they already had major German archaeological institutes, and "it contradicts German administrative thinking that there should be two institutes in one place abroad and in research areas which the lay person at home may not be able to distinguish" as quoted in a 1959 file from the DMG Archiv (Rep. 90, Nr. 580).

This exchange between Roemer and Wehr captures the moment when Beirut emerged as the preferred site for what would eventually become OIB. It records not only an institutional decision but also a broader assessment of Beirut's position as a regional centre of scholarship, intellectual exchange, and international cooperation.

Prof. Hans Roemer's exploratory mission to Jordan, Syria, and Lebanon

Title	Report of orientation journey "Arab countries"
Date	04.05.1960
Author	Prof. Hans Roemer (first OIB director)
Recipient	Deutsche Morgenländische Gesellschaft (DMG)
Archive Reference	Rep. 90, Nr. 580 (Roemer Exploratory Mission Report)
Document Type	Report / official letter
Original Language	German
Place of Origin	Münster, Germany
Historical Significance	Based on his fact finding mission from 30 March–21 April, 1960, Roemer weighed up the conditions for a German research institute for modern Oriental Studies in Jerusalem, Damascus, and Beirut. In his report, he recommended Beirut as the most promising location.

Prof. Dr. Hans RoemerMünster, 4 May 1960

To the: Deutsche Morgenländische Gesellschaft

Münster

Re: Orientation journey to 'Arab countries'

Between 30 March and 21 April 1960, I undertook the orientation journey to Jordan, Syria, and Lebanon, as discussed in detail in the preceding correspondence. The purpose of this trip was to ascertain which of the cities Jerusalem, Damascus, or Beirut would be most suitable as the seat of the planned German Institute for Oriental Studies. This question was examined on-site through discussions with the German diplomatic and consular missions, with the relevant local authorities, and with established scholars and experts on local conditions.

(1) Jerusalem
During the visit to Jerusalem, the instability of the political situation was particularly striking. This is due not only to relations with Israel but, at least at present, all the more so to the tense situation with the neighbouring United Arab Republic and Iraq. For the traveller, this situation manifests in the disproportionately high number of police checks one is subjected to

whilst on the move. As it is impossible to predict whether, when, or how these circumstances will change, they must be regarded as a particularly unfavourable precondition for a foreign scientific institute. The thoroughly unresolved status of Jerusalem further complicates the situation.

In addition, the research preconditions of the city of Jerusalem cannot be described as favourable for an institute wishing to engage scientifically with issues relating to the Arab world, and in particular the Islamic-Arab world. Admittedly, there are several research institutes in the Jordanian part of Jerusalem. However, they deal exclusively with questions of biblical history and archaeology. Neither their libraries nor the scholars working there could be of any immediate utility to the planned institute. There is a lack not only of good libraries, manuscript collections and archives, but also of distinguished local scholars who might serve as interlocutors. The only favourable factor that can be cited in Jerusalem is the Franciscans' excellent printing press, which, within certain limits, is also available for printing projects by outsiders.

All in all, the research possibilities for an institute working in Jerusalem would be very limited from the outset. Jerusalem cannot therefore be recommended for the intended purpose.

(2) Damascus

The research opportunities that Damascus offers are pre-eminent. The city is an unadulterated centre of the Arab world. It is endowed with outstanding scientific institutions, including the Arab Academy, which has been operating successfully for more than 30 years; the Zahiriyah Library, with a first-rate collection of manuscripts; the Syrian University, which is currently being established; and the Institut Français (though this is at present still under sequestration). There are also a number of local scholars, in whom the institute could find scientific interlocutors. The printing industry in Damascus is not of the highest standard, but should suffice for the institute's purposes, at least as far as Arabic texts are concerned. Any further typographical requirements could possibly be met by better-equipped printing houses in nearby Beirut.

Despite these favourable conditions, I encountered considerable reservation among the official German representations, both with the German Ambassador in Cairo and with the German Consulate-General in Damascus. This reticence, however, proved to be fully justified in light of the experiences I had during a lengthy conversation with two department directors of the regional Ministry of Culture and National Information on 12 April 1960 in Damascus. From this conversation, I gained the impression that, whilst a German institute might well be approved, such approval would certainly entail protracted, difficult, and unedifying negotiations. Presumably, however, the discordances would by no means be over once permission had been

obtained, as the Syrian government, whilst not demanding a co-director as previously feared, would certainly require a 'pensionnaire' at the Institute. Although this demand can only be based on an *arrêt ministeriel* (not on a statutory provision), it is likely to be unavoidable.

Under these circumstances, the conditions in Damascus cannot be described as favourable, and the question arises as to whether the expenditure of labour and money associated with an institute could really be justified.

(3) Beirut

The conditions in Beirut proved to be quite different. In this city, not only did the German ambassador greet our undertaking with enthusiasm, but the Under-Secretary in the Ministry of Education also welcomed our plan and assured his ministry's unrestricted support.

Although Beirut lacks a large collection of manuscripts, the research conditions must be described as particularly favourable. Beirut has humanities institutions, some with great tradition: the American University, St Joseph's University, and more recently, the Lebanese University. In addition, several European countries maintain research centres in Beirut or in Lebanon. There are good academic libraries, in which certain subject areas are even exceptionally well represented.

Beirut is distinguished not only by its central location, but also by its largely political neutrality within the Arab world. It is reasonable to assume that the upheavals to which the Near East, and particularly the Arab countries, are currently and will continue to be exposed in the future, will be felt least in Beirut.

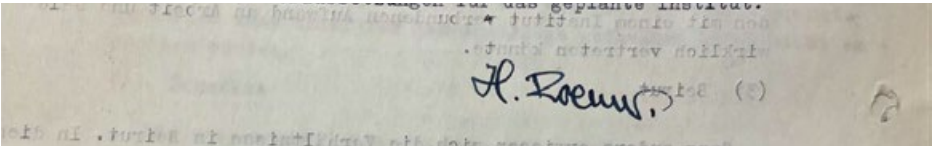
Finally, it should be noted that Beirut's printing industry is undisputedly the leading one in the entire Arab world. In Beirut, one can not only print flawless Arabic, but also in European languages, including German.

One will have to see a certain disadvantage in the form of Lebanon's rather high cost of living, but this factor does not carry much weight in view of the advantages just listed.

Of all the places I have visited, Beirut offers by far the best conditions for the planned institute.

H. Roemer

Extract of page 4 of Prof. H. Roemer's report to the DMG Rep. 90, Nr. 580, 4. May 1960.

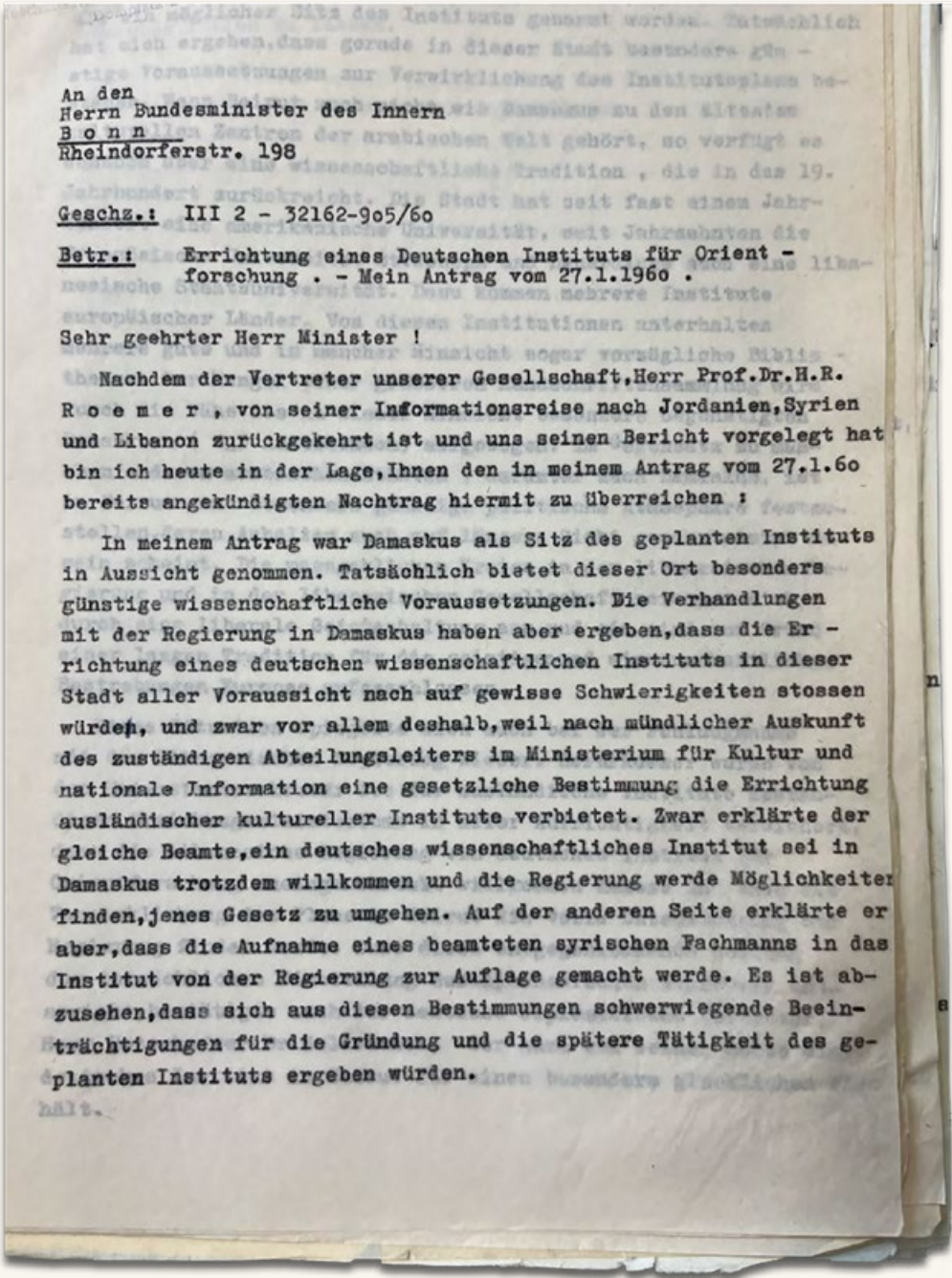


Letter of Hans Wehr to the German Minister of the Interior

The second document reproduced here is a memorandum dated 1960. Written following Prof. Hans Roemer’s exploratory mission to Syria, Jordan, and Lebanon, the following letter was addressed to the German Federal Ministry of the Interior and discusses the choice of location for the proposed institute. Damascus was initially considered the preferred location because of its proximity to important manuscript collections. However, discussions with Syrian authorities revealed legal and administrative obstacles that would likely limit the Institute’s independence and future development.

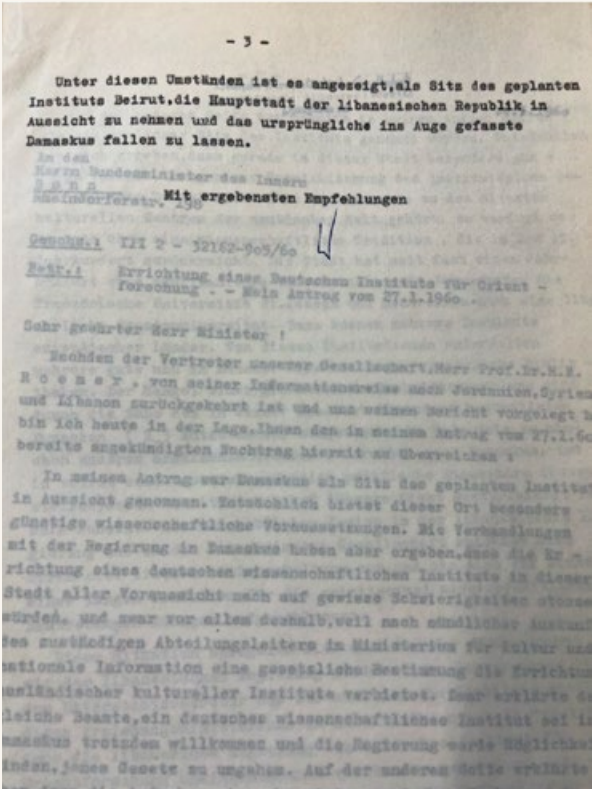
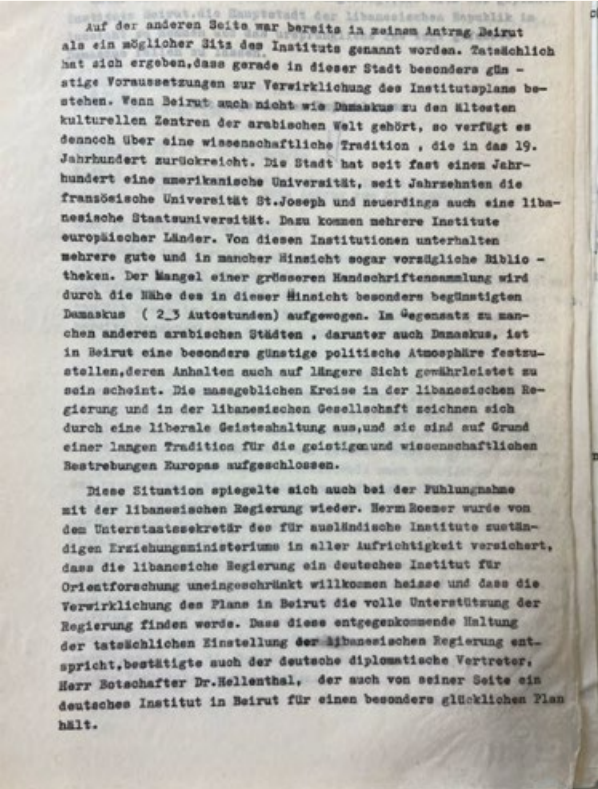
The memorandum therefore turns its attention to Beirut. It highlights the city’s established academic infrastructure, including the American University of Beirut and Université Saint-Joseph, the presence of international research institutes, strong library resources, and what the author describes as a particularly favourable intellectual and political climate. Lebanese officials expressed their full support for the project, while German diplomatic representatives also endorsed Beirut as the most promising location.

More than six decades later, the questions raised by this document remain remarkably current. It reminds us that research institutions depend on governmental non-interference, academic freedom, international exchange, and strong local partnerships. The document also speaks to Beirut’s enduring role as a place where regional and global scholarly networks meet, despite repeated periods of political upheaval and conflict. At a time when OIB continues its work under challenging circumstances, this document offers a historical perspective on the values that shaped the Institute from its inception: openness, scholarly independence, and deep engagement with the societies and cultures of the region.



Wehr’s memorandum to the German Ministry of the Interior on the Establishment of a German Institute for “Oriental Research” (Halle Universitätsbibliothek, DMG Archiv Rep. 90 Nr. 579).

Title	Memorandum on the Establishment of a German Institute for modern Oriental Research and the Selection of Beirut as its location
Date	1960 (following first OIB Director Hans Robert Roemer’s fact-finding mission; April 1960)
Author	Prof. Hans Wehr (President of the DMG at the time) and author of the famous Arabic-German dictionary
Recipient	Mr. Petersen of the Federal Minister of the Interior, Bonn
Archive Reference	Rep. 90, Nr. 579 (Wehr-Petersen Addendum, Roemer Exploratory Mission Report)
Document Type	Memorandum / Official letter
Original Language	German
Place of Origin	Federal Republic of Germany
Historical Significance	Foundational planning document recommending Beirut, rather than Damascus or East-Jerusalem, as the future location of today’s OIB



OIB by Numbers (2025–2026)

3

Books published by
OIB Researchers

7

OIB Books Series
Published

17

Major Conferences
& Symposia

16

Residential Fellows

~3000

New Library
Acquisitions

~600

Library Users

2

Major Exhibitions

8

Major Cultural
Institution
Partnerships

2

Major Archives
Digitized

1

Major Special
Collections
Acquired

6

International
Grants Awarded

2

Major Academic
Awards

In Memoriam

During the reporting period, OIB lost two long-standing members of its community whose contributions shaped the Institute in different but equally meaningful ways. We remember them with gratitude.

Mohammad al-Hujairi (1946–2025)



The following tribute was written by Stefan Leder, Director of the Orient-Institut Beirut from 2007 to 2017 and one of Germany’s leading scholars of Arabic and Islamic intellectual history. During his tenure, he worked closely with Muhammad al-Hujairi on numerous editorial and publication projects, including the long-running critical edition of Ansāb al-Ashrāf.

For more than three decades, Muhammad al-Hujairi was the editorial lector at OIB, particularly responsible for its prolific series *Bibliotheca Islamica* (BI). His work covered the entire process of publication from the revision of the editors’ texts based on Arabic manuscripts to proof-reading of the many, if not countless, flawed copies produced by way of typesetting, whether machine or computer composed.

The flourishing of the series that constitutes a significant branch of OIB’s activity was in large part due to his tireless engagement offering generous and indispensable support to the scholars who were involved. Muhammad al-Hujairi was himself an experienced editor or co-editor of premodern Arabic texts, as well as author of re-editions correcting and amending the critical apparatus of previously edited texts. The world of editing was his home.

I have known Muhammad al-Hujairi for many years as a liberal, accommodating gentle man of integrity who exhibited discretion and equanimity in complex circumstances. His patience and pleasant friendli-

A selection of volumes edited by Muhammad al-Hujairi during four decades at the Orient-Institut Beirut. His editorial work helped shape the *Bibliotheca Islamica* (BI) series and made important Arabic historical, literary, and religious texts accessible to generations of scholars.



ness, and his mental composure as an *adib* more generally, I imagine, contributed also to nurturing a wide social network, locally and beyond, of people concerned, intellectually, practically or commercially with the wealth of the Arabic literary patrimony. In this respect, he was a true ambassador of one colour of OIB’s wide and colourful spectrum of academic assignments.

When meeting Muhammad al-Hujairi, one often would encounter his characteristic smile—inviting, telling and thoughtful—indicating, as I have understood it, that there was more about the matter than could be articulated or even understood at the moment. It goes with his kind of prudent reserve that I never heard him bewail or try to explain the difficult circumstances that living in Beirut or elsewhere in Lebanon entailed—and tragically still does. When meeting him for the first time in 1982, three years after he had joined OIB, he seemed to radiate a very specific and personal form of resilience, and my memory retains this unagitated resolve.

— Stefan Leder

Rabia Omeirat (1969–2025)



A cherished member of our community, Rabiaa Omeirat dedicated nearly four decades of service to the Institute. She was a constant presence at OIB who witnessed the Institute through periods of war and peace, crisis and renewal, institutional growth and transformation. Few people knew the daily life of the Institute as intimately as she did. Through changing generations of directors, researchers, fellows, staff members, and visitors, she remained a familiar and reassuring presence whose commitment helped sustain the Institute’s daily life.

Rabiaa Omeirat’s work extended far beyond her formal responsibilities. Through her reliability and attention to detail, she helped create the welcoming environment that generations of scholars experienced upon arriving at OIB. Many fellows and colleagues remember her not only for her dedication but also for her generosity and willingness to help others.

As one of the Institute’s longest serving employees, Rabiaa Omeirat embodied a living memory of OIB. She carried with her stories, relationships, and experiences that connected the Institute’s past to its present. Her contributions were essential to the sense of community that has long defined life at OIB.

02

Presence as Method



A City that Brings Researchers Closer to Their Subjects

Despite recurring crises, Beirut remains an important site for intellectual exchange and critical inquiry, sustaining scholarly communities whose work extends well beyond the city itself. For researchers affiliated with OIB, the city is an active, vibrant context for scholarly work that continually brings into focus questions of history, memory, violence, displacement, and political life, situating research in close proximity to the contemporary realities these questions describe. The city's significance as a site of research stems from the combination of strong archival and institutional resources and the fact that these materials remain embedded in the social and intellectual histories that produced them.

Beirut functions as a regional meeting hub, where researchers, writers, artists, journalists, and cultural practitioners from across the Arab world come together to engage freely across disciplinary and national boundaries. Research in Beirut moves between archival work and present-day debates, with scholars working closely with materials while remaining attentive to the languages, communities, and histories that give them meaning. OIB serves as a point of connection, linking scholars to local resources, networks, and ongoing debates across the city and region.

Researchers on Working in Beirut

To this day, Beirut remains the key city in the Middle East that guarantees freedom of speech and publication in both social and academic spheres.
— Thomas Würtz

The city’s layered histories of war, migration, political crisis, and coexistence make it an important site for examining how large-scale historical processes are lived, negotiated, and remembered in everyday life.
— Sarah El Bulbeisi

Since no one can predict how Syria’s future will unfold, OIB, with its stable and well-functioning infrastructure, is currently and for the foreseeable future the hub to continue research in and on Syria.
— Christin Sander

There is something unquantifiably important—and perhaps even reparative—about studying Arabic manuscripts in situ here in Beirut, where a distinct archival tradition of its own has long existed.
— Allison Gibeily

For someone working on Iraq and increasingly engaging with questions emerging from Syria, Beirut remains one of the few places where researchers from different parts of the region can meet, exchange ideas, and build intellectual communities.
— Ansar Jasim

Beirut is not only a place where I access sources, but a place from which my questions become sharper.
— Joan Chaker

Researching the Ottoman 19th Century from Beirut: Peter Hill, Hans Robert Roemer Fellow



Peter Hill is a Historian of the nineteenth-century Arab world, political thought, religion, and translation. His work engages the Arab Nahda, intellectual history, and global historical approaches to the modern Middle East. Hill arrived at OIB in September 2025 to work on a book examining the politics of the Lebanese and Syrian mountains during the Egyptian occupation of Ottoman Syria in the 1830s and 1840s. His project traces a period marked by rebellion, imperial intervention, civil conflict, and the growing involvement of European powers in the affairs of Mount Lebanon, developments that would be “the start of the internationalisation of Lebanon’s politics, as different European powers as well as the central Ottoman state became directly involved.” We spoke to him about how being at the Orient-Institut in Beirut supported his research.

What conversations, encounters, archives, or experiences at OIB or in Beirut shaped your thinking most during your fellowship?

Oddly, one of the most thought-provoking encounters I had during this time was with the present-day newspapers that sit in racks in the OIB Library. I was often in the library working on my project, in which one of the main issues at stake was the control of arms. Ibrahim Pasha tried to disarm the mountaineers, sparking rebellion; the Ottomans and British then rearmed them to help expel the Egyptians. But I could then glance up at the headlines in *al-Akhbar*, *al-Nahar*, or *L’Orient Le Jour* and see how many of them were about arms control. The government argued for disarming Hezbollah, saying that the Lebanese state should have a “monopoly of arms.” Opponents argued that if the state was unable to protect its borders from Israeli invasion, residents of the South must do

it themselves. Obviously the contexts are very different, but it certainly confirmed that the issues animating my research—who gets to control armed force, whose security is protected or threatened—are very current ones.

Why did it matter for you to conduct research from Beirut specifically?

Working from Beirut was enormously important to me in a number of ways. First, the crucial archives and sources for my work are in or near Beirut. I spent most of my days working in the AUB Archives and Special Collections, the Maronite Patriarchate Archive at Bkirki, or the library at the Université du Saint-Esprit de Kaslik. Second, I could see and move through the scene of many of the events I am studying. Walking around the pine forest of Horsh Beirut, beyond the Museum, I recalled when this was the main camp of the rebels against Ibrahim Pasha in 1840. It was then well outside the walls of Beirut, and so was the hill of Achrafieh, where the rebels fought a famous battle with Egyptian soldiers. On weekends, I visited the mountains, walking part of the Lebanese Mountain Trail between Qarnayel and Baskinta: I had read accounts of how armed fighters poured down to the camp outside Beirut from these villages. Third, conversations or exchanges I had with people in or near Beirut continually challenged me to think about the



One of the former palaces of the Abillamaa family in Mtein.

significance of my research for Lebanon and the Middle East today. I was especially happy to have the chance to present on my latest book, *Prophet of Reason*, at the Near East School of Theology, the Protestant seminary in Hamra. The book is a biography of Mikha'il Mishaqa, a nineteenth-century polymath who lost his Catholic faith and later became a Protestant. It was rewarding to learn what members of today's Protestant community in Lebanon—including some in Syria, joining via Zoom—made of his story. I was pleased to see the OIB director in attendance too!

Did your time at OIB lead to new collaborations, ideas, or future projects?

It certainly led my current project to take a new turn. In the AUB special collections, I found a series of remarkable narratives of the rebellion against Ibrahim Pasha by the Druze of Hawran in 1837–1838. They are written in the style of the famous Arabic epics, of 'Antar or Abu Zayd, with much use of Syrian dialect. They are an unexpected and unique set of sources on popular experiences of the Egyptian occupation and rebellion—though also quite difficult to use! I have been working mainly on this material since September.

What image, moment, or memory from your time at OIB remains with you most vividly?

My most vivid memory is of a long conversation I had with the elderly father of one of my closest Lebanese friends (also a member of the OIB community), on the balcony of a house high in the mountains, at Barouk. This gentleman had grown up in Zahleh, and remembered the reputation enjoyed by the great antiquarian 'Isa Iskandar al-Ma'luf—whose papers and manuscripts I had been working on at the AUB library. He pointed out the road that led over to Zahleh and the Bekaa, and we discussed how different valleys and regions of the mountains connected. He was a former Communist, and gave me his thoughts on topics from Amin Rihani to the past and present politics of Zahleh. Somehow this conversation brought together many of the themes animating my current work—politics and struggle, scholarship and ideas, and the intricate geography of the Lebanese mountains.

03

OIB Provides Intellectual Leadership



Director, Jens Hanssen



Jens Hanssen is a historian of the modern Middle East whose work explores the intertwined histories of Arab thought, urban modernity, political culture, and global intellectual exchange. His scholarship has consistently challenged methodological nationalism by situating the Arab world within wider transregional and global histories, while remaining attentive to the intellectual, cultural, and social transformations that have shaped the Eastern Mediterranean since the nineteenth century. His research spans Arab intellectual history, urban studies, the history of political ideas, and the circulation of concepts across linguistic and geographic boundaries.

As Director of OIB, Hanssen has sought to position the Institute as both a centre for historical scholarship and a platform for critical engagement with contemporary questions. During the reporting period, his work focused on the relationship between catastrophe, memory, and critique in the modern Middle East, as reflected in the international conference *Catastrophe, Memory & Critique*, which revisited long-standing debates on memory studies in light of war, displacement, and political violence across the region. His writings and public interventions during the war on Lebanon similarly examined the relationship between historical understanding and civic responsibility, emphasizing the importance of scholarly engagement in times of crisis.

A recurring concern of Hanssen’s work is the production of knowledge across borders. This commitment informed initiatives such as *Why Location Matters: The Geopolitics of Knowledge Production*, a collaborative programme with the Arab Council for the Social Sciences (ACSS) and the Middle East Studies Association (MESA), which brought together doctoral researchers from the Arab world, Europe, and North America to reflect on how geography, institutions, and unequal academic infrastructures shape scholarly inquiry. Similar concerns animate his long-standing engagement with conceptual history, transregional intellectual networks, and the circulation of ideas between the Middle East, Europe, and Asia.

Under Hanssen’s leadership, OIB expanded its international partnerships, strengthened its publication programme, launched new initiatives connecting scholarship and public culture, and advanced the development of OIB Cairo as a complementary research hub. At a moment marked by war and uncertainty, he has emphasised the importance of preserving institutional continuity while fostering new forms of scholarly collaboration across the Arab world, Europe, Africa, and Asia. His vision for the Institute rests on the conviction that research institutions must serve not only as places where knowledge is produced, but also as spaces where intellectual communities are sustained and new conversations about the region’s past, present, and future can emerge.

Read More on Jens Hanssen’s academic activities in “OIB Research Associates Produce Knowledge” on page 88.

Directorate Highlights

- Successful external evaluation (October 2025)
- Publication of 3 articles and submission of 2
- Recruitment of Vice Director
- Recruitment of three Research Associates
- Selection of 15 fellows across two years
- Establishment of OIB Alumni & Friends Association
- Launching of Cairo accreditation process
- Creation of International MENA research centres network
- Financial stabilization despite wartime pressures
- Resolution of longstanding Lebanese legal-registration issue
- Establishment of new international partnerships
- Retention of staff during during periods of war and displacement
- Continuation of operations despite regional conflict

Vice Directors

Thomas Würtz, 2021-2025



Thomas Würtz joined OIB in May 2021 and served as Deputy Director during a period of exceptional challenges for Lebanon and the region. A scholar of Islamic studies, his research focuses on the Qur’an and Qur’anic exegesis, Qur’anic translations, the history of Islamic theology, and Muslim perspectives on the Crusades. Prior to joining OIB, he held research and teaching positions at the Universities of Bern and Aarhus, taught at Freie Universität Berlin, and worked as an academic advisor at the Catholic Academy in Berlin, where he specialized in Islam, the Middle East, and Christian-Muslim dialogue. During his tenure in Beirut, he played a key role in ensuring institutional continuity, helping sustain OIB’s research activities, scholarly networks, and public engagement amid profound political, economic, and social upheaval.

Read more on Thomas Würtz’s academic activities in “OIB Research Associates Produce Knowledge” on page 110.

Barbara Winckler, 2026



Our new Vice Director, Barbara Winckler, is featured in “OIB Looks Ahead” on page 239.

Advisory Board

Throughout the reporting period, the Advisory Board remained an indispensable source of intellectual guidance, institutional support, and scholarly counsel. Composed of distinguished scholars from universities across Europe and Lebanon, the board advises the Institute on its research agenda, fellowship programmes, academic appointments, and long-term strategic development.

The Advisory Board played an especially important role during the war, which posed profound challenges to academic and public life. Beyond its formal advisory functions, board members provided sustained support to the Institute’s leadership, researchers, fellows, and staff. Their guidance, solidarity, and confidence in OIB’s mission helped the Institute navigate a rapidly changing environment. At a moment when questions about continuity, academic exchange, and institutional responsibility became particularly urgent, the Advisory Board reaffirmed the importance of sustaining research and intellectual life from Beirut itself.

Tim Epkenhans (Chair)

Albert Ludwig University of Freiburg

Laura Hindelang

University of Bern

Nadia Al-Bagdadi (Vice Chair)

Central European University

Maher Jarrar

American University of Beirut

Thomas Demmelhuber

Friedrich Alexander University
Erlangen–Nuremberg

Dietrich Jung

University of Southern Denmark

Tim Epkenhans (Chair)

Albert Ludwig University of Freiburg

Birgit Krawietz

Free University of Berlin

Sebastian Günther

University of Göttingen

Isabel Toral-Niehoff

Free University of Berlin

04

OIB Builds Knowledge Infrastructure

Libraries, archives, and publications are often the least visible parts of academic life, yet they provide the foundation upon which scholarship rests. OIB's Library and Publications Department continue to acquire, preserve, organise, and disseminate knowledge across multiple languages and regions. Their work ensures that researchers retain access to essential resources, that important materials are safeguarded for future generations, and that new scholarship continues to circulate despite challenging circumstances.

OIB Library



Peter Pökel
Head Librarian
(until March 2025)



Monique Bellan
Head Librarian
(since October 2025)



Dina Banna
Deputy Head Librarian



Fatima Shaheen
Librarian



Nasma Tayara
Library Assistant



Ali Wehbe
Library Caretaker

OIB Library Highlights

- Maintained uninterrupted research support during periods of war and displacement
- Expanded the collection by approximately 3,000 new titles
- Acquired the Joseph Tarrab Collection, enriching OIB’s holdings in modern and contemporary Arab art
- Advanced preservation and digitization efforts to safeguard vulnerable materials
- Digitized the Ramez Khalil Sarkis Archive

A Research Infrastructure in Times of Crisis

During the reporting period, the OIB Library remained a rare space of continuity for researchers in Beirut and beyond. As one of the region’s leading specialized collections in Islamic and Middle Eastern Studies, the library functioned simultaneously as a research infrastructure, a scholarly community, and a stable workspace for numerous scholars whose academic work was affected by regional instability.

Under the leadership of Head Librarians Peter Pökel, and subsequently, Monique Bellan, supported by team members Dina Banna, Fatima Shaheen, and Nasma Tayara, the library maintained its commitment to collection development, preservation, digitization, and reader services while adapting to rapidly changing circumstances. Although periods of conflict occasionally affected access to the reading rooms, the library remained operational and continued to provide bibliographic assistance, digital resources, and support in locating difficult-to-obtain materials. Approximately 600 users accessed the library during the reporting period, benefiting from uninterrupted services at a time when academic work across the region was frequently disrupted.

The library’s importance was perhaps most clearly reflected in the experiences of the OIB community. For doctoral researcher Allison Gibeily, the library was “absolutely critical” during the writing phase of her dissertation, providing both a workspace and a sense of community. Affiliated researcher Charlotte Gaudreau similarly emphasised its role

as a quiet and reliable environment for maintaining research continuity during a period of instability. Doctoral Fellow Ansar Jasim highlighted the library’s dual function as a place for sustained reflection and an intellectual hub where informal conversations generated new references, comparative perspectives, and methodological insights.

Collection Development and Rare Research Resources

The value of the OIB Library lies not only in the breadth of its holdings but also in the rarity of many of its resources. Collection development remained a central priority throughout the reporting period. Between January 2025 and May 2026, the library acquired approximately 3,000 new titles through purchases, donations, exchange agreements, and electronic resources. Particular emphasis was placed on publications from across the Arab world, including books and other materials with limited circulation beyond their countries of origin. Such works often disappear quickly from the market, making their timely acquisition essential to their preservation and long-term accessibility.

The library furthered its traditional holdings in Qur’anic studies, *fiqh*, Arabic literature, linguistics, Nahda studies, and regional history, while special attention was devoted to collecting materials related to contemporary developments in Palestine and Syria. These acquisitions contribute to preserving important documentary and intellectual records of ongoing transformations across the region.

The value of these collections was reflected in the work they made possible. Researchers drew on Arabic-language scholarship, historical periodicals, institutional records, newspapers, and specialized collections that are increasingly difficult to access elsewhere. Doctoral Fellow Hratch Kestenian relied on Arabic-language scholarship on medicine and Armenian communities in the Arab world to deepen his study of Ottoman medical culture and Armenian professional life in the post-Ottoman Middle East. Affiliated Researcher Jan Altaner made extensive use of OIB’s collection of Lebanese periodicals and rare institutional publications from the 1960s and 1970s. Research Associate Nadia von Maltzahn’s work on Lebanon’s art world benefited from the Joseph Tarrab Collection, newspaper holdings, and the growing body of secondary literature on modern and contemporary art. For Affiliated Researcher Martin Greve, the library’s resources on border studies and Arab music provided an important foundation for a new research project.

Expanding Resources for Art History and Visual Culture

A major area of growth during the reporting period was the expansion of the library’s holdings in modern and contemporary art. Since October 2025, the collection has been systematically enriched in response to increasing scholarly interest in the history of art in Lebanon and the Arab world, as well as the needs of the LAWHA (Lebanon’s Art World at Home and Abroad) research project and its associated digital platform.

Among the most significant acquisitions was the book and archival collection of the late Joseph Tarrab (1943-2024), one of Lebanon’s foremost art critics. Tarrab documented Lebanon’s artistic and cultural life from the period preceding the Civil War through the early twenty-first century. The collection includes his complete corpus of published press articles—primarily appearing in *L’Orient-Le Jour* and *al-Safir*—as well as selected books from his personal library. It already constitutes an important resource for future scholarship on the history of modern and contemporary art in Lebanon and the wider region.



Exhibition cards from the Joseph Tarrab Collection.

Preservation, Digitization, and Access

Preservation remained a core priority throughout the reporting period. Efforts focused on ensuring the long-term accessibility of books, journals, archival materials, and special collections through conservation measures, climate control, and regular collection maintenance. Temperature and humidity levels were closely monitored both remotely and on site, an especially important task given infrastructural challenges experienced during the reporting period.

The library also advanced its digitization efforts as part of its broader preservation strategy. During the reporting period, the library continued to inventory and reorganise its media collections while establishing improved storage facilities as part of its long-term commitment to preserving vulnerable materials.

A particular highlight was the digitization of the Ramez Khalil Sarkis archive (1889–1955). He was the son of Khalil Ramiz Sarkis, founder of the Lebanese Arabic-language daily newspaper *Lisan al-Hal*, which was established in 1877. The archive contains photographs, letters, postcards and notes dating from the 1920s to the 1950s, which were donated to the library in the 1970s.

Several initiatives were introduced to improve the visibility and accessibility of the collection. A new acquisitions display was established in the reading room, allowing visitors to discover recently acquired titles more



New periodicals display in the reading room with QR codes leading directly to OIB’s catalogue.

easily. The journal collection was reorganised to enhance usability, QR codes were introduced to facilitate direct access to catalogue information through the Online Public Access Catalogue (OPAC), and new thematic classifications were developed to simplify navigation across both print and electronic resources.

The library's location in Beirut continues to provide unique advantages. As one of the Arab world's historic centres of publishing, intellectual exchange, and cultural production, the city offers access to materials that are often difficult to acquire elsewhere. Close relationships with local publishers, universities, scholars, and cultural institutions further strengthen the collection and facilitate scholarly exchange. As a result, the library functions not only as a repository of knowledge but also as a meeting point connecting local and international research communities.



Continuity and Institutional Memory: Dina Banna

This year, we celebrate Dina Banna’s fortieth anniversary at OIB. Dina has been one of the custodians of OIB’s intellectual memory through her work at the library. Through wars, reconstruction, political upheaval, technological transformations, and generations of researchers, she has helped build and sustain one of the most important specialized collections in the region. As she approaches half a century at the Institute, we invited her to reflect on the changes she has witnessed, the scholars she has encountered, and the place of the library within OIB’s intellectual life.

When I joined the Library of OIB in October 1986, Lebanon was still in the midst of the Civil War. The Green Line was only a short distance away, daily life was marked by uncertainty, and few could have imagined the transformations that both Beirut and the library would undergo in the decades to come. Looking back today, I feel fortunate to have witnessed these changes firsthand and to have spent nearly forty years contributing to an institution that has remained committed to scholarship, cultural exchange, and intellectual life through some of the most difficult periods in Lebanon’s modern history.

The library I entered in 1986 was very different from the one researchers know today. Most processes were entirely manual. We relied on typewriters rather than computers, correspondence traveled by post or fax, and cataloguing required handwritten cards that had to be carefully organised and filed. Journal subscriptions were tracked manually,



Dina Banna in the catalogue room in 1987.



Dina Banna in the KARDEX Journal Catalogue room in 1987.

and every stage of library work demanded patience, precision, and attention to detail. Over the years, I witnessed the gradual transition to computerized catalogues, digital databases, online communication, and electronic resources. Participating in this transformation was both challenging and rewarding. While technologies changed dramatically, the library’s core mission remained the same: preserving knowledge and making it accessible to researchers.

Throughout these decades, Beirut itself changed repeatedly. I watched the city emerge from war, rebuild, expand, and reinvent itself. It experienced periods of reconstruction, growth, political instability, economic crisis, and renewed conflict. Yet despite these challenges, Beirut never lost its role as a centre of intellectual and cultural life. What has always impressed me most is the city’s resilience—its ability to continue producing scholarship, creativity, and dialogue even under difficult circumstances.

The library reflected that same resilience. Keeping it operational during periods of conflict was never easy. Staff often faced difficulties simply reaching the Institute. Acquiring books and journals became complicated by disruptions to transportation and international shipping. Communication with publishers, libraries, and partner institutions abroad could be slow and uncertain. Yet, we remained committed to maintaining services, protecting the collections, and supporting researchers whenever possible. During times of crisis, preserving access to knowledge felt especially important.

“Scholarship does not stop when circumstances become difficult; in many ways, the need for reliable sources, critical reflection, and historical perspective becomes even greater.”

One of the greatest privileges of my career has been working with generations of scholars. Over the years, I have assisted students, fellows, visiting researchers, interns, and senior academics from around the world. It has been deeply rewarding to watch many of them develop professionally over time. Some first arrived as young researchers and later became professors, department heads, research directors, and leading scholars in their fields. Knowing that the library may have contributed, even in a small way, to their intellectual journeys has been one of the most satisfying aspects of my work.

The collections themselves have always been a source of pride. I have a particular appreciation for the library’s rare books, periodicals, historical maps, and special collections relating to the history, culture, and intellectual life of the Arab world. These materials preserve forms of knowledge that are often unavailable elsewhere. They remind us that libraries are not simply repositories of information but guardians of cultural memory.

Over time, the library became much more than my workplace. It became a second home. Many of my most meaningful professional experiences, friendships, and scholarly connections were formed within its walls. I grew professionally alongside the institution, adapting to new technologies, supporting changing research agendas, and witnessing the library’s continuous evolution. Through periods of stability and crisis alike, the library remained a constant presence in my life.

As I prepare for retirement, I know I will miss the daily routines of library work: the arrival of new books, the organization of collections, and the satisfaction of helping researchers find the materials they need. Above all, I will miss the people—colleagues, scholars, students, and visitors from around the world whose questions, conversations, and curiosity made every day different.

What remains with me most strongly is a sense of gratitude. To have spent nearly four decades supporting research, preserving knowledge, and contributing to an institution dedicated to intellectual exchange has been a privilege. The OIB Library has always been more than a collection of books. It is a place where ideas meet, where scholarship is sustained, and where generations of researchers find the resources

they need to pursue new knowledge. I am proud to have been part of that mission, and I remain confident that the library will continue to serve as a beacon of scholarship and cultural understanding for many years to come.

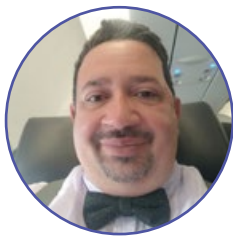
OIB celebrates Dina Banna for her four decades of service, June 2026.



OIB Publications



Christian Thuselt
Head of Publications, Editor of *Beiruter Texte und Studien (BTS)*, until September 2025



Ahmed Abd-Elsalam
Editor of *Bibliotheca Islamica (BI)*, until March 2026



Micheline Kachar Hani
Publications Assistant

Barraq Zakaria Earns a PhD in Philosophy



Barraq Zakaria
Arabic Editor

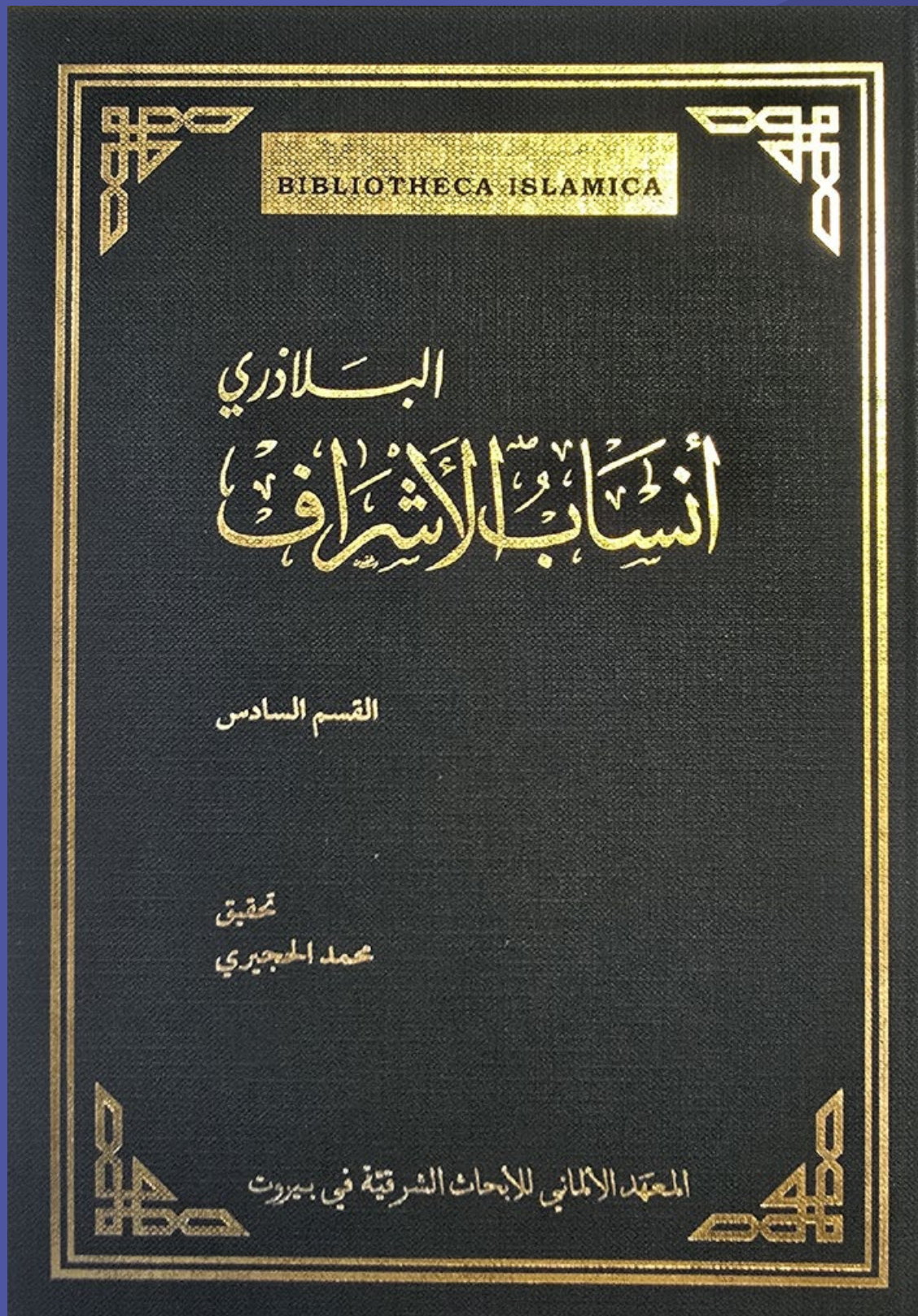
A major milestone for the OIB Publications Department was the completion of the doctoral studies of Arabic Editor Barraq Zakaria, who earned his Ph.D. in Philosophy from Université Saint-Joseph of Beirut. Zakaria has been a member of the OIB team since 2012 and plays a central role in the Institute’s Arabic-language publishing programme, overseeing the preparation and editing of scholarly publications.

His doctoral research examined contemporary religious revival movements in Christianity and Islam through a comparative study of Protestant evangelicalism in the United States and Sunni Islamism in Egypt. Engaging critically with debates on secularization, modernity, and the place of religion in public life, the dissertation challenges simplistic narratives of a “return of religion” by arguing that revivalist movements are themselves products of modern historical conditions. It explores the intellectual, political, and epistemological tensions that shape revivalist thought and asks to what extent such movements represent a challenge to secular paradigms or, conversely, embody distinct forms of modernity.

These concerns reflect Zakaria’s broader interests in Arab and Islamic political thought, Islamic movements, Arabic philology, and intellectual exchanges between the Arab world and the West. They also complement his editorial work, which bridges scholarly traditions and contributes to the dissemination of high-quality Arabic academic publishing.

OIB Publications at a Glance

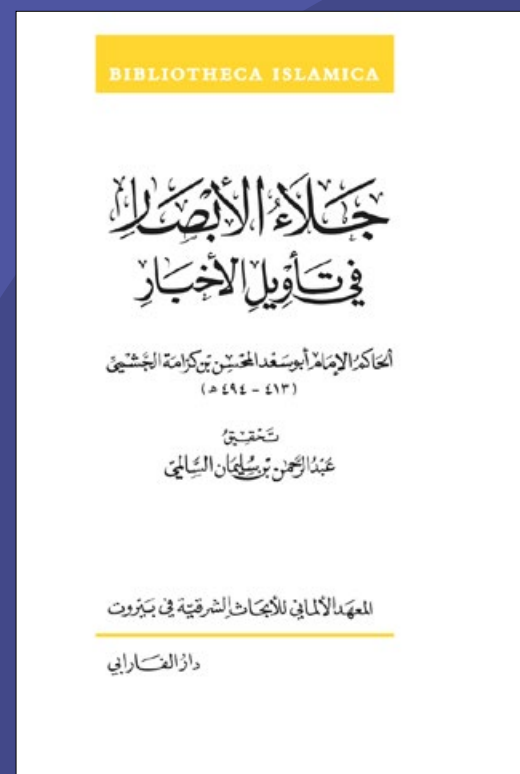
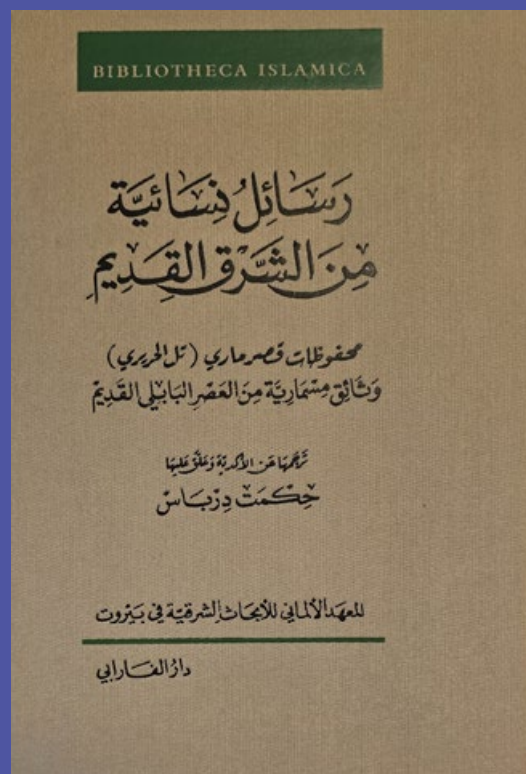




For more than half a century, the *Bibliotheca Islamica* (BI) series has been one of OIB's flagship scholarly initiatives. Dedicated to the critical editing and publication of primary sources, the series preserves important textual traditions while making them accessible to contemporary scholarship.

Among the most significant achievements was the publication of the final installment of the critical edition of Aḥmad Ibn Yaḥyā al-Balādhurī's *Anṣāb al-Aʿrāf* (BI 28h / Part 6), a monumental editorial project that began in 1978 and has now been completed across six parts and eleven volumes. Based on manuscripts preserved in Rabat and Istanbul, the edition represents one of the most important long-term scholarly undertakings associated with OIB. Its publication carries particular significance as one of the final scholarly contributions of Muhammad al-Hujairi, whose decades of editorial work helped shape OIB's publication programme.

Other volumes reflected the breadth of OIB's publishing activities, addressing topics ranging from ancient Mesopotamian correspondence and Islamic intellectual history to Sufism, Qur'anic exegesis, and manuscript traditions.



BI 64 | *Rasā'il Nisā'iyya min al-Sharq al-Qadīm*

A collection of women's correspondence from the ancient Near East, offering valuable insights into social life, communication, and gender relations in the ancient world.

BI 67 | *Ġalā' al-Abṣār fī Ta'wīl al-Akḥbār*

A critical edition of an important theological work attributed to Abū Sa'd al-Muḥsin b. Karāma al-Bushanjī (d. 494/1101), contributing to the study of Islamic thought and scriptural interpretation.

BI 68 | *al-Rasā'il al-Bakrīya fī al-Taṣawwuf wa-l-Ḥadīth*

An important source for the study of Sufism, ethics, and religious learning that sheds light on the intellectual and spiritual traditions of the Islamic world.

BI 69 | *Marwiyyāt Abī Muslim Muḥammad b. Baḥr al-Iṣfahānī fī al-Tafsīr*

The publication of *Marwiyyāt Abī Muslim Muḥammad b. Baḥr al-Iṣfahānī fī al-Tafsīr* by Wail Abbas also highlighted OIB's commitment to supporting a new generation of scholars through its publication programme. This volume gathers transmitted exegetical materials associated with Abū Muslim al-Iṣfahānī and contributes to the study of early Qur'anic interpretation and the transmission of religious knowledge.

In the *BTS* series, *Reconstructing Neighborhoods of War: Beirut, Aleppo, Homs, Warsaw, Hiroshima, Mostar, Belfast*, edited by Birgit Schäbler, examined how societies rebuild after conflict and catastrophe. Bringing together perspectives from history, architecture, urban studies, and the social sciences, the volume explores reconstruction not only as a process of physical rebuilding but also as one of social recovery, memory, and resilience.



Reconstructing Neighborhoods of War

Beirut, Aleppo, Homs, Warsaw,
Hiroshima, Mostar, Belfast

Edited by Birgit Schäßler



Orient-Institut Beirut

Beiruter Texte und Studien 144

Reaching Audiences Beyond Academia

The Publications Department also plays an important role in connecting scholarship with broader audiences. During the reporting period, OIB participated in the 57th Cairo International Book Fair, the Lebanese Book Festival in Antelias, the Lebanese University Book Bazaar, and additional outreach initiatives aimed at students, educators, and the wider public.

Participation in the Cairo International Book Fair through OIB's publishing partner Dar al-Farabi strengthened relationships with publishers, libraries, and academic institutions across the Arab world. OIB's presence at the Antelias Book Fair and other public events likewise ensured that the Institute's publications remained visible and accessible despite the disruptions caused by war.

Open-access publishing remains central to OIB's commitment to accessible scholarship. Through partnerships with De Gruyter, Martin Luther University Halle-Wittenberg, and perspectivia.net, monographs published by OIB are made freely available to readers around the world. These initiatives remove financial barriers to access while increasing the visibility, circulation, and long-term preservation of research. The volume published during the reporting period was Ahmed Abd-Elsalam's *Transformations of Religious Authorities and Religious Discourses after the Egyptian Revolution*, which examines changing forms of religious authority and public debate in post-2011 Egypt.

**Publishing
Research,
Engaging
Publics:
Insights by
Micheline
Kachar Hani**



Publishing at OIB does not end with the production of a book. Publications become exhibitions, conversations, launches, public events, and new forms of engagement with broader audiences. As Publications Assistant, Micheline Kachar Hani oversees this process, helping transform scholarly research into publications that circulate within and beyond academia.

You joined OIB relatively recently. What attracted you to the Institute and its publications programme?

What attracted me most to OIB was its combination of academic excellence and cultural engagement. I joined the Institute at a time when many publishing and media organizations in Lebanon were moving away from print toward digital platforms. Having worked in publications and media, I felt that opportunities to remain involved in book publishing were becoming increasingly rare.

Joining OIB offered the chance to continue working in a field I care deeply about while contributing to an institution with a strong scholarly mission. What I find most rewarding is accompanying a project from manuscript to printed volume and knowing that years of research will become accessible to readers.

Publishing at OIB extends well beyond producing books. How do publications connect to public engagement?

Publishing is only one stage in the life of research. Books acquire new audiences through exhibitions, launches, book fairs, university events, and conversations with readers.

One of the most rewarding projects during my time at OIB was a major archiving and inventory initiative that gave us a much clearer overview of our publication holdings. It allowed us to organize exhibitions, participate in book fairs, present publications at universities, and strengthen collaboration with distribution partners. The project showed how important dissemination is. Producing a book matters, but ensuring that it reaches readers is equally important.

Which publication from the reporting period was particularly meaningful to you?

Every publication is special, but *Ansāb al-Ashrāf*, Part 6 remains especially memorable. I had the privilege of working closely with the late Dr. Muhammad al-Hujairi throughout the publication process. We visited the printing house together, reviewed corrections on site, and witnessed the printing of the cover proof.

Those moments gave me a deeper appreciation for the care, expertise, and collaboration behind scholarly publishing. The volume remains important to me not only because of the work involved, but because it reminds me that publishing is ultimately a collective endeavor that connects authors, editors, printers, and readers across generations.

Looking back on the reporting period, that experience also captures what I value most about my work at OIB: helping ensure that important scholarship does not remain confined to manuscripts or archives, but enters broader intellectual and public conversations.



Micheline Kachar Hani at the Cairo Book Fair.

05

OIB Research Associates Produce Knowledge



The research presented in this section is organised according to the research clusters and research associates that structured OIB's scholarly activities during the reporting period. As part of an ongoing process of institutional development and strategic planning, OIB is currently revising its research framework and cluster structure. The categories used here therefore reflect the organizational landscape of the Institute during the period under review and document the intellectual work undertaken within those clusters.

During the reporting period, research at OIB was organised through four thematic clusters. Building on the work documented in this report, the Institute is currently developing a revised research framework that reflects emerging scholarly priorities, new collaborations, and evolving regional and global research agendas. The new structure will guide OIB's research activities in the coming years. A new four-dimensional *Gesamtkonzept* for the Institute will be presented at the Advisory Board meeting on 4 September 2026.

Cluster 1. Art, Material Culture, and LAWHA

OIB's Art and Material Culture cluster investigates how artistic and material production enters history. Its research situates objects, images, and cultural practices within the social worlds that produced and sustained them, placing makers, patrons, users, and audiences at the centre of analysis. Researchers examine the networks, institutions, and forms of knowledge through which art acquires meaning and value.

With a particular focus on materiality, the cluster approaches manuscripts, films, artworks, and other cultural artefacts as carriers of meaning as well as objects with their own histories of production, circulation, and preservation. Drawing on archives, collections, and other repositories, researchers trace connections among people, objects, and ideas that often transcend political, linguistic, and cultural boundaries.

Spanning the pre-modern and modern periods, the cluster brings together perspectives from art history, anthropology, and material culture studies to examine how artistic practices and cultural institutions shape historical narratives. In doing so, it challenges inherited categories and canons while developing more critical and transnational approaches to the study of art, material culture, and the Middle East.

Alya Karame

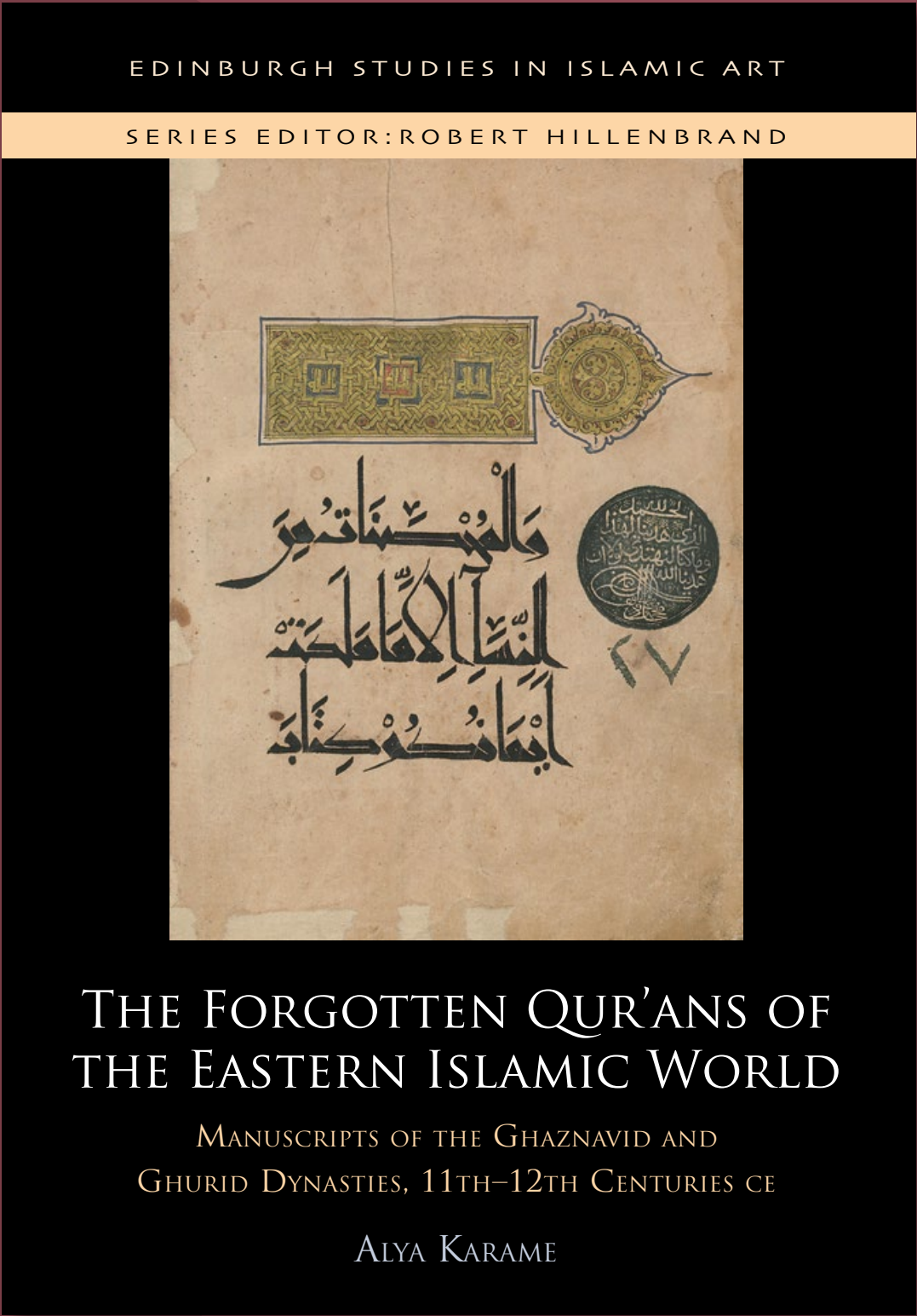


Alya Karame’s research focuses on the history of Islamic art and material culture, with particular attention to Qur’anic manuscripts produced in the eastern Islamic world between the tenth and twelfth centuries. Her work examines how the material form of the Qur’an was shaped by changing technologies, scribal practices, and patterns of cultural exchange during a pivotal period in the history of the Islamic book. Situated between two major phases of script canonization and marked by the widespread adoption of paper, this period witnessed profound transformations in the production, circulation, and use of Qur’anic manuscripts.

At the heart of Karame’s scholarship are questions of mobility, transmission, and cultural exchange. Rather than approaching manuscripts as isolated aesthetic objects, she investigates the communities that produced, commissioned, transmitted, read, and preserved them. Her research demonstrates that the eastern Islamic lands constituted a poly-centric and interconnected cultural landscape in which artistic traditions emerged through encounters among Arab, Persian, Indic, and other cultural spheres. By tracing both the production and afterlife of manuscripts, she recovers the networks of scholars, artisans, patrons, and readers who shaped these objects across centuries.

During the reporting period, Karame’s work expanded through manuscript research in Beirut, Paris, and Dublin as well as university teaching, international collaborations, editorial work, public engagement,

The Forgotten Qur’ans of the Eastern Islamic World: Manuscripts of the Ghaznavid and Ghurid Dynasties, 11th–12th Centuries CE by Alya Karame, Edinburgh University Press, 2026.



and the development of major digital research resources. Together, these activities reinforced OIB's role as a vibrant hub for scholarship in Islamic art history, manuscript studies, and the history of the book.

Published in April 2026, Karame's first monograph offers the first comprehensive study of a corpus of Qur'anic manuscripts produced during a transformative period in the history of Islamic book culture. Focusing on Qur'ans copied at the eastern frontiers of the Islamic world, the book examines the emergence of new scripts, formats, and material practices following the adoption of paper and situates these developments within a fluid transregional landscape of artistic exchange.

The study demonstrates that regions often treated as peripheral to the Islamic world were, in fact, important centers of artistic production and innovation. By tracing the movement of visual forms, scripts, and manuscript practices across a wide geographical area, the book reconstructs a connected artistic landscape that linked Arab, Persian, and Indic cultural worlds. Beyond art history, it contributes to broader discussions of mobility, identity, and cultural exchange in the pre-modern world.

Another important publication from the reporting period followed the history of a Qur'anic manuscript associated with the Sulayhid dynasty of pre-modern Yemen. Through the trajectory of a single manuscript, Karame reconstructed broader networks of political authority, gift exchange, manuscript circulation, and cultural patronage linking Yemen and Fatimid Egypt. The article also highlighted the role of Queen Arwa al-Sulayhi, one of the most influential female rulers of the pre-modern Islamic world, offering new perspectives on gender, power, and manuscript culture. Together, these publications demonstrate how manuscripts can illuminate historical processes extending far beyond the circumstances of their original production.

Research, Teaching, and Public Engagement

Karame's scholarship extends beyond academic publishing into teaching, exhibitions, public scholarship, and digital initiatives. One notable contribution during the reporting period was her essay "Fragments from Once Complete Qur'ans," published through the University of Oxford's Invisible East project. Written for a broad audience, the essay explores Qur'anic fragments preserved in the project's digital corpus and demonstrates how fragmentary manuscripts can reveal histories of production, ownership, use, and transmission that often remain invisible in conventional historical narratives.



The "Sulayhid Qur'an"
© Turkish and Islamic Art
Museum (TIAM), 431A,
ff 5v-6r, 34 × 21 cm.

Her commitment to widening access to Islamic manuscript heritage is equally reflected in the creation of a major open-access database, *The Missing Centuries: Qur’ans from the Central and Eastern Islamic Lands Copied between the 4th/10th and 6th/12th Centuries*. Supported by the Historians of Islamic Art Association, the Arab Fund for Arts and Culture, and other institutions, the project documents approximately 250 Qur’anic manuscripts and makes an important corpus available to scholars, students, and the wider public.

In Spring 2026, Karame taught the graduate seminar Writing as Making: The Material and Conceptual Practices of Arabic Calligraphy at the Lebanese American University. The seminar introduced students to the material, intellectual, and artistic dimensions of Arabic writing traditions.

Among her most visible public initiatives was the exhibition *Nothing Lasts Forever: Syria Through the Eyes of the Free*, curated at OIB following the fall of the Assad regime. Bringing together photographs submitted by individuals who witnessed this historic moment, the exhibition documented a transitional period marked by hope, uncertainty, relief, and grief. The project demonstrated how research institutions can engage with contemporary history while creating spaces for public reflection and collective memory.

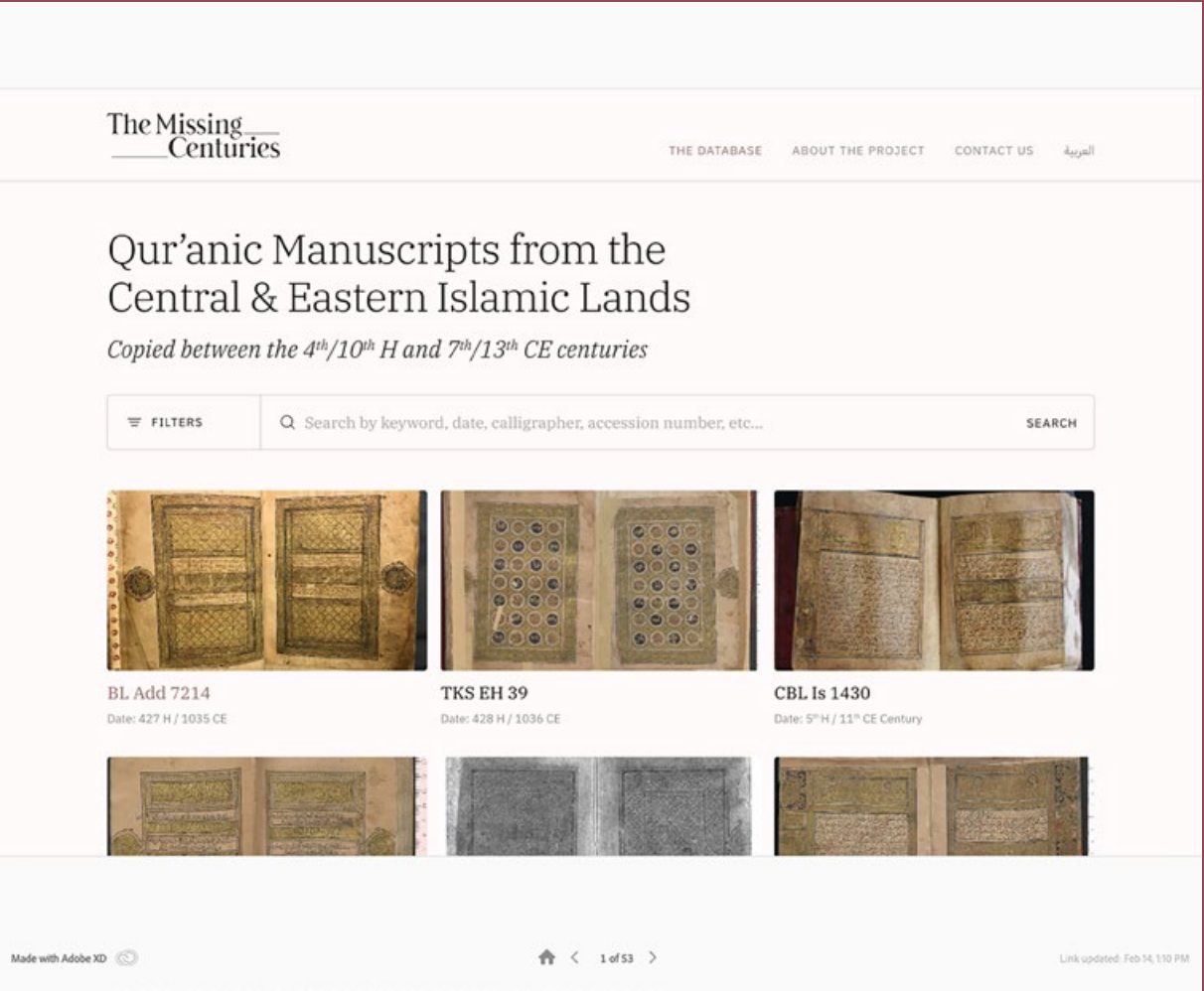
Read more about the event in the “Exhibitions” section on page 226.

Opening Access to Islamic Manuscript Heritage

Beyond her individual research, Karame has played a leading role in strengthening manuscript studies and Islamic art history at OIB and in the wider region. Through collaborations with the American University of Beirut, the Lebanese American University, the Bibliothèque Orientale, and international partners in Europe, she has expanded opportunities for research, training, and scholarly exchange in a field that remains underrepresented regionally.

A central component of this effort was the Manuscript Summer School on Editing Manuscripts, organized in collaboration with the American University of Beirut in June 2025. Drawing on manuscripts from Beirut collections, the initiative introduced participants to codicology and paleography, art history, editing, and interpretation while fostering new connections between students, researchers, and cultural institutions.

Karame also developed several major collaborative initiatives, including Decolonising Books: From Literature to the Arts and Arts and Crafts in the Late Ottoman Empire: Rethinking Practices and Concepts of



The portal of the open-access database, *The Missing Centuries: Qur’ans from the Central and Eastern Islamic Lands Copied between the 4th/10th and 6th/12th Centuries* that will be launched in August 2026.

Material Culture in Syria and Beyond. Although postponed because of the war in Lebanon, both projects generated new scholarly partnerships and expanded OIB’s institutional network.

Her scholarly service extends internationally. She serves as Associate Editor for the Islamic Art and Material Culture section of *Review of Middle East Studies (RoMES)* and as a member of the steering committee of Recherche et Patrimoine en Zones de Conflit (REPAZ) at the Institut national d’histoire de l’art in Paris.

Karame is also a member of the international project Calligraphies at the Frontiers of the Islamicate World (CallFront), which brings together scholars studying calligraphic traditions across the eastern frontiers of the Islamic world. The project seeks to move beyond conventional artistic centers and explore the networks that connected them. A digital database presenting manuscript corpora from participating scholars is currently under development.

Her work received international recognition through invited lectures in Vienna, Dublin, Paris, and Oxford and through a Cochrane Fellowship that supported a research stay at the Chester Beatty Library in Dublin.

The study of manuscripts reminds us that books are never simply containers of texts. They preserve traces of the people, communities, and networks that produced, transmitted, and transformed them. Following those traces allows us to reconstruct histories that rarely fit neatly within modern political, linguistic, or cultural boundaries.

– Alya Karame

SCHOLAR HIGHLIGHTS

Qur’anic Manuscripts, Material Culture, and the Islamic Book

- “Insights into the ‘Sulayhid Qur’an’: Manuscript Circulation, Political Power, and Queen Arwa’s Role.” *Nouvelles Chroniques Du Manuscrit Au Yémen*, 2025.
- *The Forgotten Qur’ans of the Eastern Islamic World: Manuscripts of the Ghaznavid and Ghurid Dynasties, 11th–12th Centuries CE*. Edinburgh University Press, 2026.

Manuscript Fragments and Public Scholarship

- “Fragments from Once Complete Qur’ans.” Invisible East, University of Oxford, 2 July 2025.

Digital Humanities and Open Access Resources

- Creator and Principal Investigator, *The Missing Centuries: Qur’ans from the Central and Eastern Islamic Lands Copied between the 4th/10th and 6th/12th Centuries*. Launching Aug. 2026.

Teaching Islamic Art and Calligraphy

- Instructor, Writing as Making: The Material and Conceptual Practices of Arabic Calligraphy, Lebanese American University, Spring 2026.

Exhibitions and Public History

- Curator, *Nothing Lasts Forever: Syria Through the Eyes of the Free*, OIB.

Manuscript Training and Scholarly Networks

- Organizer, Manuscript Summer School on Editing Manuscripts, American University of Beirut and OIB, June 2025.
- Associate Editor, Islamic Art and Material Culture Section, *Review of Middle East Studies (RoMES)*.
- Steering Committee Member, REPAZ (Recherche et Patrimoine en Zones de Conflit), Institut national d’histoire de l’art, Paris
- Research Member, Calligraphies at the Frontiers of the Islamicate World (CallFront).

Awards and Fellowships

- Cochrane Fellowship, Chester Beatty Library, Dublin.

Nadia Von Maltzahn, ERC Project LAWHA



As Principal Investigator of the ERC-funded project **Lebanon’s Art World at Home and Abroad (LAWHA)**, Nadia von Maltzahn has spent the past five years building one of the most significant research initiatives devoted to the study of modern visual arts in Lebanon. Situated at the intersection of art history, cultural politics, and social history, LAWHA investigates how artists’ careers develop across local, regional, and global contexts; how institutions, exhibitions, education, markets, and networks contribute to the formation of a professional artistic field; and how artists become inscribed into national, regional, and global canons. Using Lebanon as its point of departure, the project contributes to broader efforts of decentering art history and challenging frameworks long dominated by Europe and North America. By examining artistic production alongside the social, political, and institutional environments in which it emerges, LAWHA offers new ways of understanding the relationship between art, mobility, cultural infrastructure, and the socio-political environment.

The reporting period marked a decisive stage in the life of the project as LAWHA entered its final year. A major milestone was the completion of the project’s open-access Database & Digital Platform, scheduled for public launch in autumn 2026. Conceived as a central component of LAWHA, the platform brings together extensive data on artists, exhibitions, institutions, networks, and trajectories, creating an unprecedented research infrastructure for the study of Lebanon’s art world. Von Maltzahn also accompanied the successful completion of LAWHA’s doctoral research programme, supervising Flavia Malusardi to the de-

fence of her dissertation on Dar el Fan w-el Adab in March 2026, while supporting Ashraf Osman as he prepares the submission of his dissertation. Together, these achievements reflect the culmination of a project that has produced not only new scholarship but also lasting resources for future generations of researchers.

Archival research continued to play a central role in von Maltzahn’s work. She worked extensively with the Joseph Tarrab Collection housed at the OIB Library, a unique archive of writings, exhibition ephemera, correspondence, photographs, and unpublished manuscripts assembled by one of Lebanon’s most influential art critics. The collection has become indispensable for reconstructing artistic networks, exhibition histories, and debates within Lebanon’s art world since the late 1960s. She also deepened her engagement with artists’ correspondence, including letters in the collection of Paris-based painter Chafic Abboud, whose exchanges with fellow artists and cultural actors provide first-hand insight into the emergence of Lebanon’s artistic institutions during the 1950s and 1960s. Together with materials held by institutions such as the Sursock Museum, these archives have allowed LAWHA to connect individual artistic trajectories to wider histories of cultural production, mobility, and institution building.

The year also saw a substantial body of scholarly output. Von Maltzahn served as guest editor of *Manazir Journal* #7, “Defying the Violence: Lebanon’s Visual Arts in the 1980s,” published in December 2025. Bringing together contributions from scholars, artists, and curators, the issue examines how artistic production, exhibition making, and

A sneak peek of LAWHA Database & Digital Platform: Lebanon’s Art World at Home and Abroad.

LAWHA

People

Organizations

Exhibitions

Artworks

Contributions

Documents

Discover Lebanon’s art world at home and abroad through interconnected data and documents tracing artistic trajectories, institutions and cultural networks that have shaped Lebanon’s modern art in the second half of the twentieth century.

About

Views

Network

LAWHA

Lebanon’s Art World at Home and Abroad

About

Terms of Use

Blog

LAWHA © 2025

This project has received funding from the European Research Council (ERC) under the European Union’s Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme (Grant agreement No. 850780).

European Union

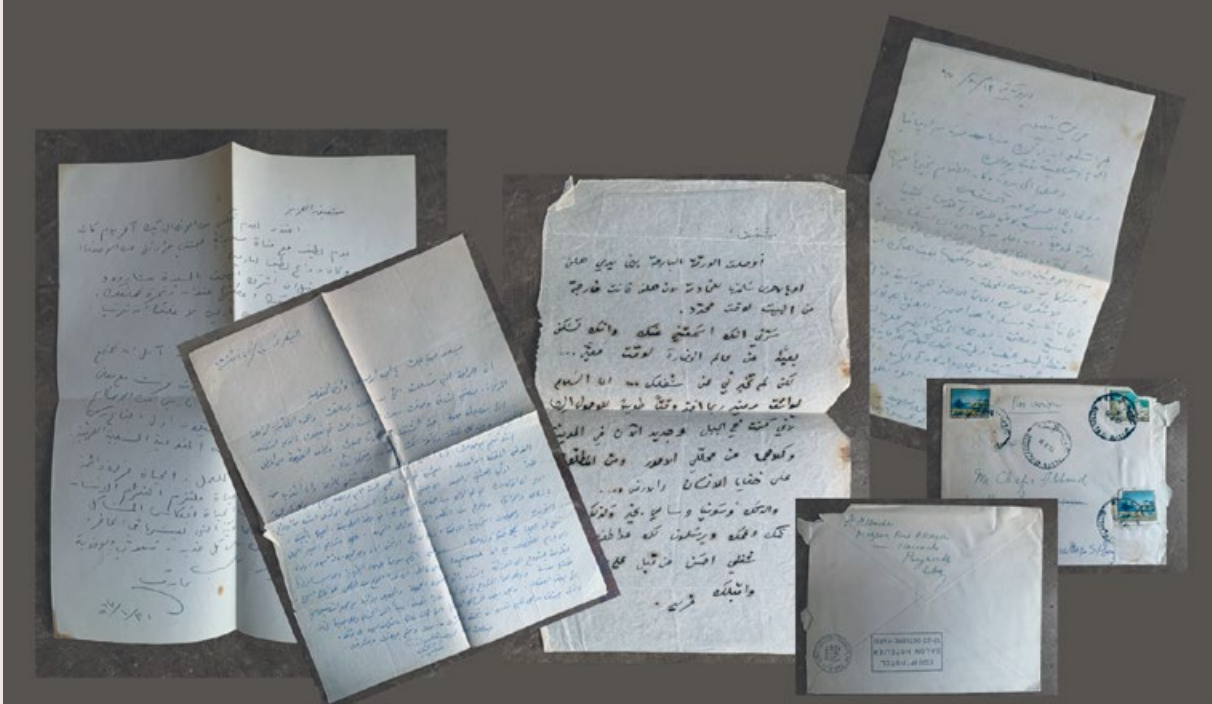
University of Venice

OIB

cultural institutions adapted to violence, displacement, and uncertainty during the Lebanese Civil War. Her own article focuses on the painter Fadi Barrage and draws on a rich archive of unpublished diaries and sketches to explore how artistic practice became a means of navigating trauma, exile, memory, and queer desire. Alongside this publication, she prepared a second major editorial project, *Cultural Dynamos: Arab Artistic Hubs since the mid-Twentieth Century*, a forthcoming volume that examines the emergence, transformation, and circulation of artistic centres across the Arab world and its diasporas. She also submitted four book chapters for forthcoming edited volumes, further expanding LAWHA's contribution to debates on art history, cultural mobility, and historiography.

International scholarly exchange formed another important dimension of her work. Over the course of the reporting period, von Maltzahn presented research in Cyprus, Paris, Munich, Poznań, Rome, Venice, Florence, and Abu Dhabi. Her presentations addressed a wide range of themes, including artists' archives, exhibition infrastructures, artistic mobility, historiography, cultural diplomacy, and the circulation of knowledge. Particularly meaningful was her participation in the workshop *Greek Myths in Arabic Literature* at Sapienza University in Rome, which opened new comparative perspectives on visual and literary cultures and formed connections that will continue into her future appointment at Sapienza. During her fellowship at the Käte Hamburger Centre global dis:connect in Munich (October 2024-April 2025), she also co-organised

Correspondence with Chafic Abboud, kindly shared by his daughter Christine Abboud.



the international workshop *Disconnected Artistic Belonging and Recognition in Global Modernity*, bringing together scholars working on artistic migration, displacement, and canon formation across all continents.

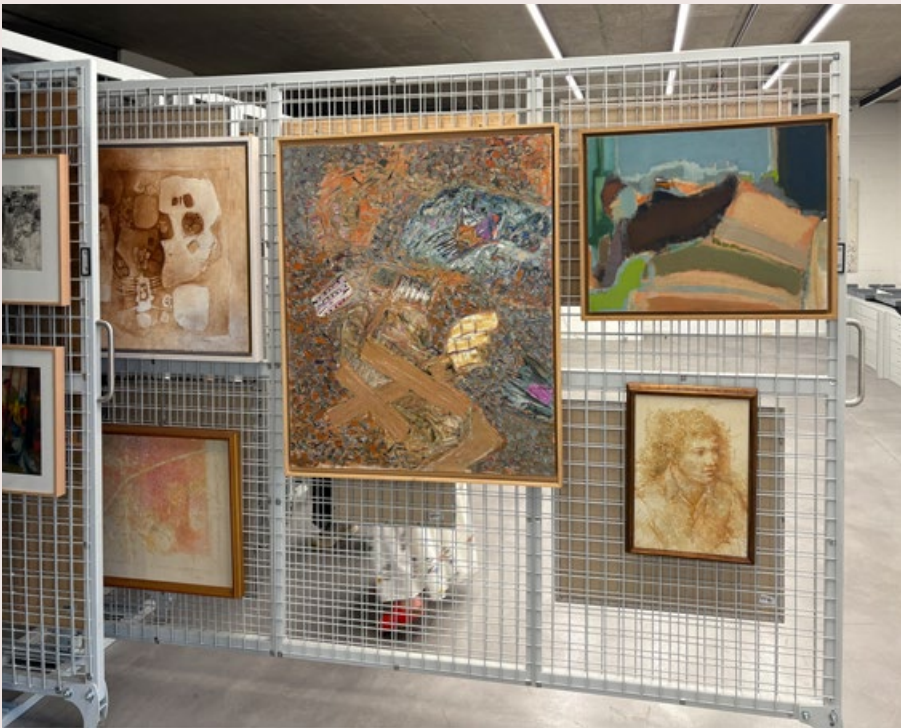
Public engagement is integral to von Maltzahn's approach to scholarship. To accompany the publication of *Manazir Journal* #7, she curated an exhibition at OIB featuring archival and audiovisual materials drawn from the Joseph Tarrab Collection alongside contributions from Galerie Damo, the Sursock Museum, Kufa Gallery, Mohammad El Rawas, Greta Naufal, and other partners. The exhibition offered visitors a rare glimpse into the artistic and institutional worlds of 1980s Lebanon while demonstrating how archives can serve as living resources for contemporary cultural reflection. Beyond the exhibition, she collaborated with AWARE (Archives of Women Artists, Research and Exhibitions) and the Beirut Museum of Art to produce a biographical essay on Lebanese artist Nadia Saikali, contributing to international efforts to make women artists more visible within art historical scholarship.

Von Maltzahn also engaged wider audiences through interviews and digital media, including a videocast produced by the research centre global dis:connect reflecting on her research and fellowship in Munich, and a radio interview with LAWHA's former intern Maria Atallah for the Italian platform RadioSound24 on artistic trajectories, networks, and mobility in Lebanon's art world. Together with LAWHA's blog and social media platforms, these initiatives have helped extend the project's research beyond academic audiences and into broader conversations about art, archives, and cultural history.

Collaboration and institution building have been defining features of LAWHA from the outset. During the reporting period, von Maltzahn maintained and expanded partnerships with key cultural institutions and collections in Beirut, including the Sursock Museum, the Beirut Museum of Art, Saradar Collection, the Bibliothèque Orientale, AUB, galleries, collectors, and artists. Internationally, she contributed a response essay to Peggy Levitt's new book *Move Over, Mona Lisa: Reimagining What We Read, Look At, and Learn*, arguing that more inclusive global art histories require a deeper engagement with local art histories. She also joined the Advisory Board of the ERC-funded project MEGAMAPS at the University of Naples L'Orientale.

Beirut forms both the empirical foundation and intellectual horizon of LAWHA. The city's museums, archives, collections, artists, galleries, and other cultural institutions have provided the sources, partnerships, and conversations that made the project possible. Conducting research amid economic collapse, displacement, and recurrent violence has also sharpened LAWHA's engagement with questions of migration, fragility,

Paintings showing works by Fadi Barrage, Chafic Abboud (centre) and Helen Khal (top right) at the Saradar Collection, Beirut, 24 June 2025.



preservation, and cultural memory. Rather than treating these themes as historical subjects alone, the project has confronted them as lived realities shaping contemporary cultural production. Through its publications, events, archival initiatives, institutional collaborations, and forthcoming digital platform, LAWHA has established a lasting research infrastructure for the study of modern visual arts in Lebanon while helping position OIB as a leading centre for scholarship on art history, archives, and cultural politics in the region.

I had to leave Beirut three times in the past two years due to war and instability, together with my two young children. This was very tiring on a personal level, but has not changed my main research questions or objectives as war, displacement, and migration as well as the preservation and documentation of fragile heritage had already been part of LAWHA’s focus. To some extent it made LAWHA’s research even more meaningful, and also allowed us to have a deeper understanding of the lived reality of artists and other cultural actors during periods of conflict such as the 1980s.

– Nadia Von Maltzahn

SCHOLAR HIGHLIGHTS

Lebanon’s Art World: Histories, Archives, and Infrastructures

- “Documenting Lebanon’s Art World at Home and Abroad: Challenges, Approaches and Tools.” Invited presentation at *Archive Poetics: Working with Artists’ Archives and Estates*, Caledon Centre for the Arts & Ecologies, Cyprus, 16 Mar. 2025.
- “What the Archives of the ENSBA Do (Not) Tell Us about Lebanon’s Art World (in Paris).” Invited presentation at *Entangled Modernisms: Artists, Mobilities and New Historiographies of Art in Paris*, Paris, 28–29 Apr. 2025.
- “Defying the Violence: Lebanon’s Visual Arts in the 1980s.” Guest editor. *Manazir Journal* #7 (Dec. 2025).
- “‘Azizi Shafiq – Why Are You Thinking of Lebanese Art?’ Letters as Site of Knowledge Production in Writing Global Art Histories.” Invited presentation at the workshop *Modern Arab Art and Transnational Exchanges*, Louvre Abu Dhabi and Al Mawrid Arab Centre for the Study of Art, Abu Dhabi, 21 May 2026.
- *LAWHA Database & Digital Platform: Lebanon’s Art World at Home and Abroad*. Open-access database documenting artists, institutions, exhibitions, and networks in Lebanon’s art world since 1943. Forthcoming autumn 2026.

Artists on the Move: Mobility, Exile, and Recognition

- “Historiography of Artists on the Move: Georges Cyr between France and Lebanon.” Paper presented at and co-organiser of *Disconnected Artistic Belonging and Recognition in Global Modernity*, KHK Global dis:connect workshop, Munich, 3–4 Apr. 2025.
- “Detour through a Landmark Exhibition in 1989 London: Writing Biographies of Lebanon’s Artists.” Invited presentation at *Beyond Binaries: Rethinking Dis:connectivity and Globalization*, Käte Hamburger Research Centre global dis:connect, Munich, 20 Oct. 2025.
- “Greek Mythology in the Work of Lebanese Artist Fadi Barrage.” Paper presented at *Greek Myths in Arabic Literature: Reception, Translation, Circulation, Re-Creation*, Sapienza University of Rome, Rome, 7 Nov. 2025.
- “Fadi Barrage, an Artist’s Diary: ‘To Think Things Out in Painting’.” *Manazir Journal* #7 (Dec. 2025): 160-89.

Cultural Hubs and Transnational Networks

- “Exhibiting Lebanon in London and Paris in 1989: The Role of Bilateral Friendship Associations in Artistic Infrastructures.” Invited presentation at *(Un)mapping Infrastructures of Modern Art*

IV: Infrastructures of Supporting Travels and Exhibiting Modernism Transnationally (1940s–1990s), Magdalena Abakanowicz University of the Arts, Poznań, 9 Oct. 2025.

- Editor. *Cultural Dynamos: Arab Artistic Hubs Since the Mid-Twentieth Century. Beirut Texte und Studien (BTS)*. Berlin: De Gruyter, forthcoming 2026.

Monique Bellan



Monique Bellan’s research, completed between March 2021 and March 2025, examines the history of modern and contemporary art in Lebanon, with particular attention to the institutions, networks, and cultural actors that shaped Beirut’s emergence as one of the leading artistic centres of the Arab world during the second half of the twentieth century. Situated at the intersection of art history, cultural history, and urban history, her work investigates how artists, galleries, critics, collectors, museums, and exhibition practices collectively contributed to the formation of Lebanon’s artistic field and to Beirut’s position as a regional hub of cultural production.

A central concern of Bellan’s scholarship is the relationship between artistic creation and the infrastructures that sustain it. Rather than focusing exclusively on individual artists or works of art, her research explores the broader ecosystems through which art circulates, acquires meaning, and enters public life. Through the study of galleries, exhi-

bitions, criticism, and collecting practices, she examines how artistic communities emerge, how cultural institutions shape intellectual and aesthetic movements, and how art responds to periods of political and social transformation.

In the first few months of the reporting period (Jan.–Mar. 2025), Bellan completed her research project on the development and professionalisation of Lebanon’s artistic field from the 1950s onward. Based primarily on archival sources, newspapers, magazines, exhibition catalogues, and interviews with individuals active in Lebanon’s art world, the project reconstructed the evolution of Beirut’s artistic landscape across three decades. By tracing both continuity and change before, during, and after the outbreak of the Lebanese Civil War, the project contributes to a broader reassessment of modern Lebanese art history and the cultural infrastructures that made artistic production possible.

Beirut and the Making of an Arab Art Centre

A major focus of Bellan’s research is Beirut’s transformation into a regional centre of artistic and intellectual exchange. Her work demonstrates that the city’s importance rested not only on the presence of artists but also on the dense networks of galleries, critics, collectors, publishers, and cultural institutions that connected artistic production to broader regional conversations.

Particular attention was devoted to two pioneering institutions: Gallery One (1963–1976) and Contact Art Gallery (1972–1975; 1977–1978). Both galleries played a formative role in shaping Beirut’s cultural landscape and in promoting a transregional vision of modern art. By exhibiting artists from Lebanon, Palestine, Syria, Iraq, Egypt, Europe, and the United States, they positioned Beirut within wider artistic and intellectual networks that extended far beyond national boundaries.

These galleries were not simply commercial spaces. Located in Hamra and the wider Ras Beirut area, they functioned as gathering places for artists, writers, intellectuals, and critics from across the Arab world. Through exhibitions, discussions, and cultural programming, they helped articulate an Arab avant-garde identity and contributed to the emergence of Beirut as one of the region’s most vibrant artistic centres.

By reconstructing the histories of these institutions, Bellan demonstrates that galleries actively shaped artistic movements rather than merely displaying them. Their directors promoted experimentation, cultivated networks of exchange, and contributed to broader debates about modernity, identity, and cultural production in the Arab world.

Ellen Stewart (1919–2011), founder and director of the La MaMa Experimental Theatre Club in New York City at Galerie Damo in 1980. Next to her, Camille Salameh, Mona Gebara, and Shakib Khoury. Paintings by Souleima Zod. © Brahim Zod Archive.



The opening of the inaugural exhibition at Galerie Damo on 17 November 1977. In the foreground: the model of Halim el-Hage's sculpture Fakhreddine. Gypsum, 155x190 cm. In the background from right to left: Jean Khalifé, Henri Zoghaib, Elias Rahbani, Halim el-Hage and his wife. Painting by Jean Khalifé in the background. © Brahim Zod Archive.



Challenging Dominant Narratives of Lebanese Art History

One of the most significant interventions of Bellan's work lies in its challenge to dominant narratives of Lebanese art history. Existing accounts often portray the outbreak of the Civil War in 1975 as a decisive rupture that brought artistic life to a halt, creating a sharp divide between a dynamic prewar period and the emergence of a new generation of artists after the war.

While Beirut's cultural landscape was reshaped by war, artistic production, exhibition-making, and institutional activity continued in important ways. Galleries adapted to changing conditions, relocated to different parts of the city, and developed new strategies for sustaining artistic life. As Hamra gradually lost its position as the primary artistic centre, exhibition activity shifted toward Ashrafieh and the coastal corridor between Beirut and Jounieh, creating new cultural geographies while maintaining significant links to earlier artistic networks. The Damo Gallery (1977–1986) in Antelias is a revealing case study of exhibition activity outside the capital. Bellan has undertaken a comprehensive reconstruction of the gallery's exhibition history, examining the continuities and changes in individual artistic approaches within this new context.

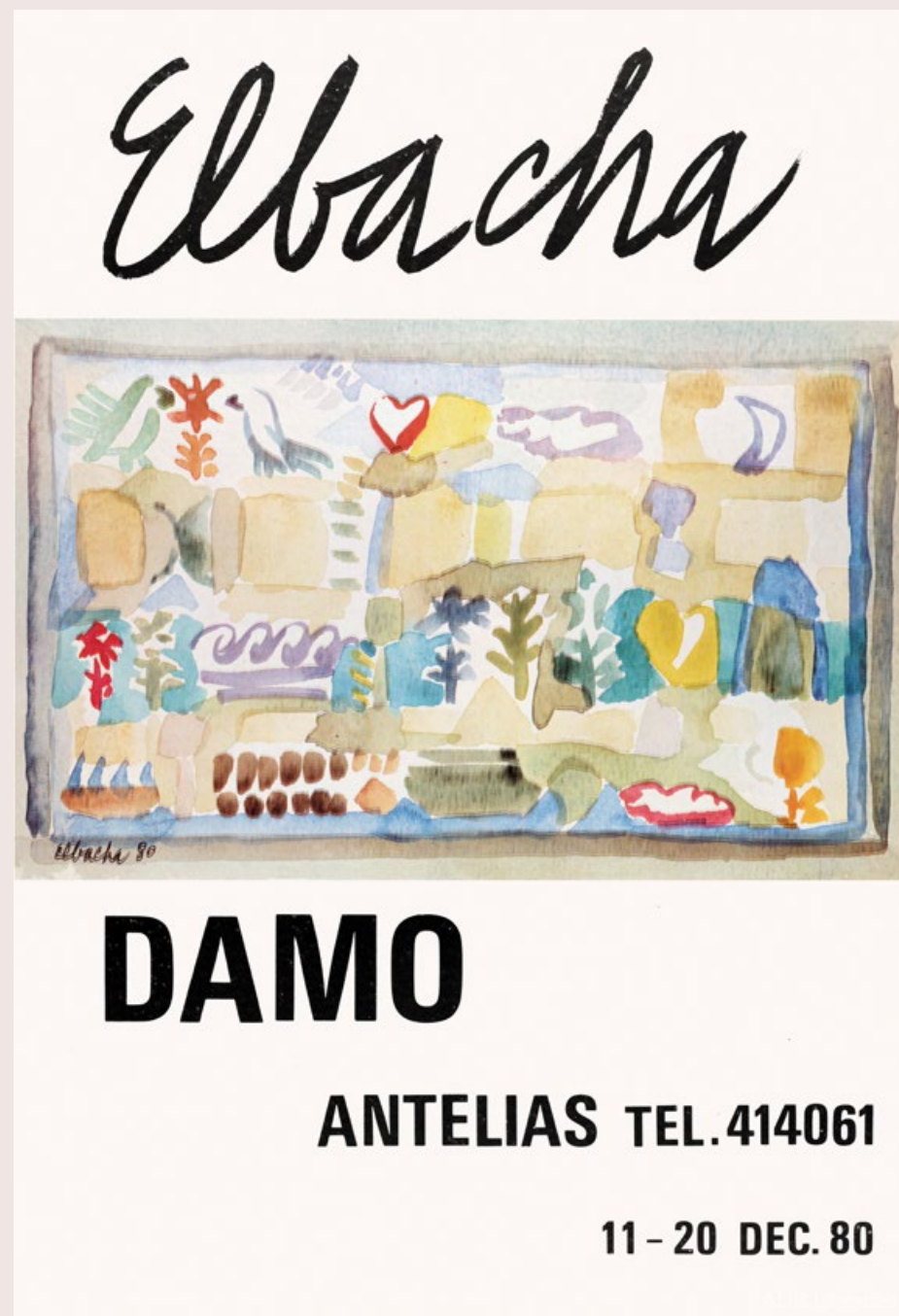
Through this analysis, Bellan demonstrates that the wartime period cannot be understood solely through absence, interruption, or decline. Rather, it was characterized by adaptation, continuity, and transformation. By tracing these developments across three decades, her work offers a more nuanced understanding of how artistic communities responded to political violence while continuing to shape Lebanon's cultural life.

This reassessment contributes not only to the history of art in Lebanon but also to broader debates about memory, cultural resilience, and the ways societies continue to produce culture during crisis.

Writing Lebanese Art History Through Archives

Archival research forms the foundation of Bellan's scholarship. Throughout her project, she relied extensively on artist archives, gallery records, museum collections, newspaper archives, and oral history interviews to reconstruct exhibition histories and artistic networks that have often remained absent from existing scholarship.

Particularly important were the archives of artists and galleries, the Sursock Museum archive, resources at the American University of Beirut



Poster of Amine El Bacha's exhibition at Galerie Damo (11–20 Dec. 1980). Cardboard, 49 x 33 cm. Brahim Zed Collection/ American University of Beirut Art Posters Collection.

and the Modern and Contemporary Art Museum (MACAM), and the collections of OIB. The OIB Library proved especially valuable due to its extensive holdings of newspapers and periodicals from the 1960s through the 1980s. These materials provided access to exhibition reviews, announcements, cultural debates, and critical commentary that made it possible to reconstruct the everyday life of Beirut's artistic scene.

Through this archival work, Bellan recovers histories that might otherwise remain fragmented or inaccessible. Her research demonstrates the importance of archives as sites through which forgotten cultural histories can be reconstructed and reinterpreted.

Public Scholarship and Expanding Access to Lebanese Art History

A defining feature of Bellan's work is her commitment to making Lebanese art history accessible beyond specialist academic audiences. During the reporting period, all of her publications appeared in open-access formats, ensuring broad accessibility for researchers, students, artists, and the wider public.

Particularly significant was her contribution to *Smarthistory*, one of the world's most widely used digital art history platforms. Her article on Farid Haddad's *Hearts and Monuments* exhibition represents the platform's first entry devoted to Lebanese art history. By introducing conceptual art from Lebanon to international audiences, the article expands the visibility of Lebanese artistic production within global narratives of modern and contemporary art.

This commitment to public scholarship reflects a broader effort to integrate Lebanese art history into international conversations while ensuring that research remains accessible to diverse audiences beyond the university.

SCHOLAR HIGHLIGHTS

Galleries, Exhibition Practices, and Cultural Infrastructures

- "Ruptures and Continuities: Lebanon's Art Galleries in the 1980s with a Focus on Galerie Damo (1977–88)." *Manazir Journal* #7 (2025): 21–56.

This article examines the transformation of Lebanon's gallery landscape during the Civil War, demonstrating how exhibition-making and artistic

activity continued despite political upheaval. By focusing on Galerie Damo, Bellan challenges narratives that frame the war years as a period of cultural absence and highlights the adaptability of Lebanon’s artistic institutions.

Conceptual Art, Experimentation, and the Arab Avant-Garde

- “Conceptual Art in Beirut: Farid Haddad’s *Hearts and Monuments*.” *Smarthistory*, 2025.
- “Vive l’expérimentation! Farid Haddad at Beirut’s Contact Art Gallery.” In Nadia von Maltzahn (ed.), *Cultural Dynamos: Arab Artistic Hubs since the Mid-Twentieth Century*. Berlin and Beirut: De Gruyter Brill/BTS (forthcoming).

Together, these publications examine the emergence of experimental and conceptual artistic practices in Beirut during the 1970s and situate Farid Haddad’s work within broader regional discussions about artistic modernism, experimentation, and cultural exchange.

Art, Memory, and Scholarly Exchange

- Presenter, Launch of *Manazir Journal* #7, “Defying the Violence: Lebanon’s Visual Arts in the 1980s,” OIB, 8 Jan. 2026.

At the launch event, Bellan presented her research on Galerie Damo and reflected on the continuities and transformations of Lebanon’s artistic landscape during the Civil War. The event brought together scholars and researchers working on Lebanese visual culture and contributed to ongoing discussions about art, memory, conflict, and cultural history.

**Cluster 2.
Intellectual
History and
Literary
Studies**

The Intellectual History and Literary Studies cluster examines the production, circulation, and reception of modern Arabic thought and literature across the Arab world and its diasporas. Bringing together approaches from intellectual history, literary studies, philosophy, sociology, visual culture, and comparative literature, researchers explore how writers and intellectuals have responded to questions of emancipation, political change, historical rupture, and cultural transformation.

A central concern of the cluster is the relationship between literature, ideas, and history. Its projects investigate how Arab intellectuals have imagined the past, interpreted the present, and articulated visions of the future, while paying particular attention to archives, counter-archives, and the movement of texts, ideas, and people across borders. The Nahda remains an important point of reference, both as a formative moment in the history of Arab modernity and as a continuing site of debate about culture, knowledge, and political possibility.

The cluster is equally interested in contemporary literary and intellectual production, examining how political critique emerges through aesthetic forms, including works that fall outside established canons of committed literature. Drawing on sources that range from essays, philosophy, fiction, and poetry to film, music, oral histories, and ephemera, its research highlights the diversity of Arabic cultural production across the Mashriq, the Gulf, and the Maghreb. By situating texts and ideas within their historical contexts, the cluster contributes to a more nuanced understanding of how Arabic literature and thought have engaged fundamental questions of knowledge, power, identity, and social change.

Jens Hanssen



Jens Hanssen is a historian of the modern Middle East whose work focuses on Arab intellectual history, urban history, and the history of knowledge. His scholarship explores how intellectuals, institutions, and public cultures have shaped the modern Arab world and examines the circulation of ideas across linguistic, political, and geographical boundaries. Long interested in the relationship between intellectual life and political transformation, his work considers how societies confront moments of rupture, violence, and historical change.

During the reporting period, questions of catastrophe, memory, war, and critique occupied a central place in Hanssen’s work. While continuing his research in modern Arab intellectual history, he increasingly turned his attention to the ongoing destruction in Lebanon and Gaza and the responsibilities of scholars and intellectuals in moments of crisis. His writing, public interventions, and academic activities reflected a sustained engagement with the relationship between historical understanding and contemporary political realities.

Public Scholarship and Intellectual Intervention

Alongside his academic work, Hanssen published a series of public interventions addressing the recent war in Lebanon and its wider implications. Writing for *Verfassungsblog* and the *OIB-UpClose* blog, he sought to bring historically informed perspectives into public debates and to draw attention to the consequences of the war for Lebanese society,

cultural life, and regional stability. These essays reflect a conviction that scholarship must remain engaged with contemporary realities and contribute to public discussions on questions of violence, responsibility, and historical memory.

Catastrophe, Memory, and Critique

These concerns also informed Hanssen’s academic activities during the reporting period. Together with Sami Khatib, he co-organised the international conference *Catastrophe, Memory & Critique*, which brought together scholars from different disciplines to examine how experiences of catastrophe shape political thought, historical consciousness, and cultural production. The conference created a space for reflection on questions that have become increasingly urgent across the region, including war, displacement, loss, and the possibilities of critique in moments of profound uncertainty.

Similar concerns informed the lecture and seminar series *Kant and the Non-European*, organised in collaboration with academic partners in Beirut, Cairo, and Berlin. The series explored how intellectual traditions travel across linguistic and geographical boundaries and examined the place of non-European perspectives within debates on philosophy, modernity, and critical thought.

SCHOLAR HIGHLIGHTS

Public Scholarship

- “Beginn eines neuen Dilemmas: Kriegsende 1945 im Nahen Osten.” *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 3 Mai 2025.
- Hanssen, Jens, and Christin Sander. “Khaled Bakdash and the Tragedy of Syrian Communism.” *Jacobin*, 8 Dec. 2025.
- “Letter from Beirut.” *Verfassungsblog*, 20 Mar. 2026.
- “Lebanon after the War.” *OIB-UpClose*, 17 Apr. 2026.

Research and Academic Writing

- “The Politics of Tarbiya.” Review of Susanna Ferguson, *Labor of Love: Gender, Capitalism and Democracy in Modern Arab Thought*. *Global Intellectual History*, vol. 11, no. 2, 2026, pp. 1–6.
- “On Marxist Discoveries of Ibn Sina/Avicenna around 1952.” In *New Perspectives on Avicenna, Avicennism, and the Later Philosophical Traditions*, edited by Peter Adamson, Fariduddin Attar, and Husayn Ibrahim, Brill, forthcoming.

- “From al-‘asabiyya to al-tadāmun: On the Quiddity of Solidarity.” *Contributions to the History of Concepts*, special issue “Concepts of Emotions and the Body in the Bengal-to-Balkans Region,” edited by Margrit Pernau and Christoph Neumann, forthcoming.

Conferences and Academic Events

- Co-organiser with the Friends of the Islamic Art Museum board. Panel discussion “On the Destruction of Cultural Heritage Sites in Gaza,” with Sherene Seikaly, Omar Qattan, and Khaldoun Bshara, Brugsch-Pascha-Saal, Berlin, 7 Feb. 2025.
- Co-organiser with Sami Khatib. *Catastrophe, Memory & Critique*. Orient-Institut Beirut, June 2025.
- Co-organiser. *Kant and the Non-European Lecture and Seminar Series*, in cooperation with the American University of Beirut, Divan Berlin, and the American University in Cairo. Lectures by Andrea Esser, Ray Brassier, and Michael Frey. Postponed.
- Co-organiser with DAVO panel and the OIB Alumni & Friends Association, “From Experiment to Model? Towards a History of the OIB, 1961–2025,” Erlangen, 9 Sept. 2025.
- *Summer School on the Entangled Histories of Concepts in the Bengal to Balkans Complex (B2B)*. Orient-Institut Istanbul, 22–26 Sept. 2025. In cooperation with Freie Universität Berlin, University of Oslo, and the Max Weber Forum for South Asian Studies, Delhi.
- Co-organiser with the Palestine Land Studies Center and the Finnish Institute in the Middle East. “Early Ethnography, Late Archives and Present Law,” Orient-Institut Beirut and American University of Beirut, 6–8 Jan. 2026.
- DFG grantee. *Working with What Is There: Cinema Research Methodologies with Non-Film Sources*, international conference, Beirut. Postponed to Sept. 2026.

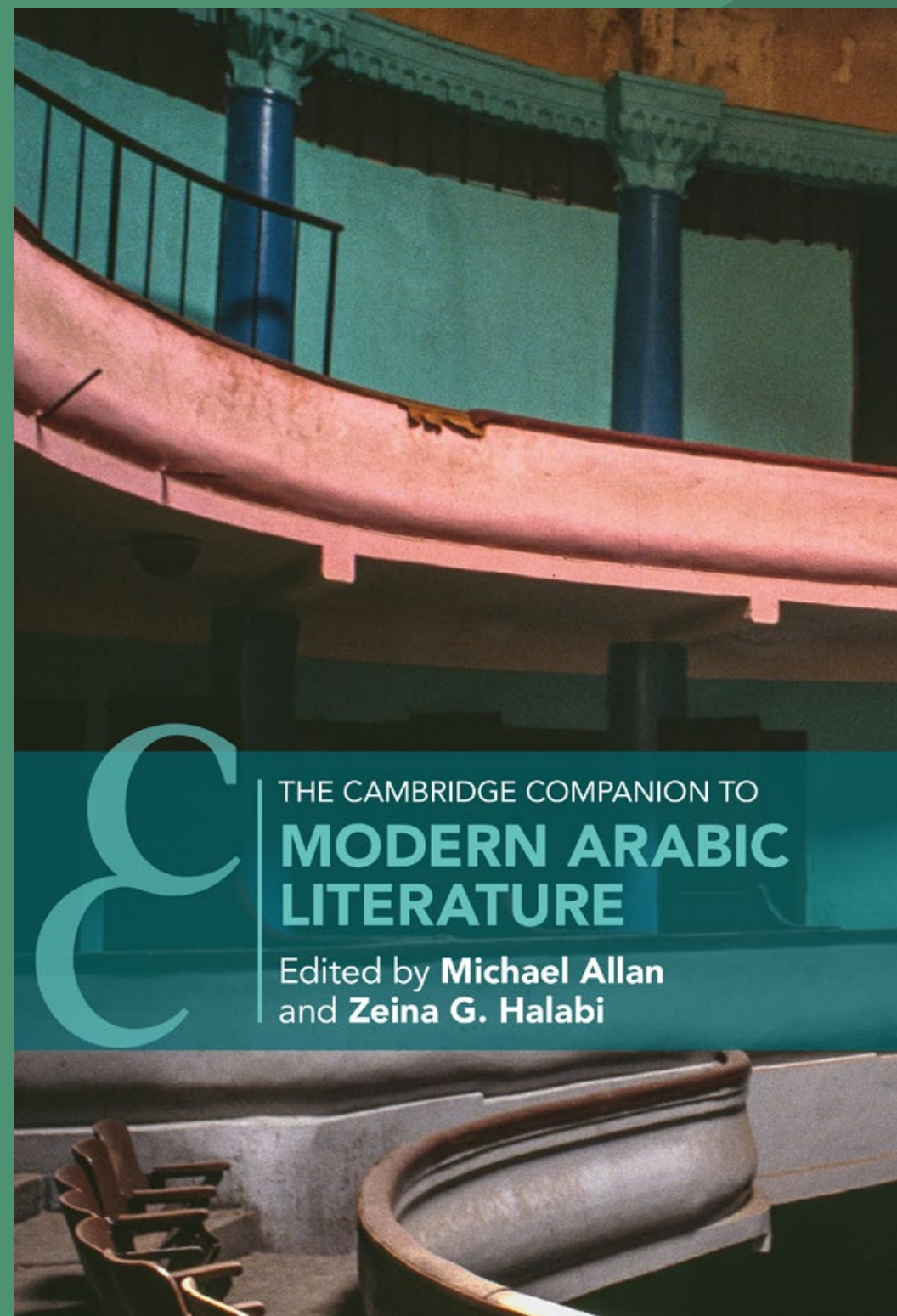
Zeina G. Halabi



Zeina G. Halabi is a scholar of modern Arabic literature, intellectual history, and cultural criticism. Her work examines how Arab writers and intellectuals have responded to moments of political and historical ruptures across the modern Arab world. Through close readings of literary texts, archival materials, and intellectual debates, she explores how literature not only reflects historical experience but also generates new ways of imagining the future.

A central concern of her scholarship is the fate of intellectual traditions after catastrophe. Her research investigates how ideas travel across generations and how writers confront the challenges of war, exile, and political transformation. This interest informs both her work on individual authors and her broader engagement with the intellectual histories of the modern Arab world.

During the reporting period, Halabi’s research focused particularly on modern Egyptian intellectual and cultural history, especially the relationship between literary experimentation and political critique. Through her work on Egyptian surrealism and figures such as Georges Henein, she examines how intellectuals responded to the upheavals of the twentieth century while remaining connected to wider transnational debates. Her research recovers alternative traditions of critique and political imagination that challenge conventional narratives of modern Arab intellectual history and remain relevant to contemporary discussions of culture and politics.



Cover of the winter 2025 issue of *Majallat al-Dirasat al-Filastiniyya* (Journal of Palestine studies) with a section dedicated to Elias Khoury.



In recognition of her contributions to the study of modern Arabic literature and intellectual history, Halabi was awarded a residency at the Civitella Ranieri Foundation, where she pursued her research and writing within an international interdisciplinary community.

Halabi co-edited, with Michael Allan, *The Cambridge Companion to Modern Arabic Literature*. Bringing together fourteen scholars from across the field, the volume advances a fundamental rethinking of modern Arabic literature and its place within contemporary humanistic inquiry. Rather than treating Arabic

literature as a regional object to which theory is applied, the collection argues for its capacity to generate theory itself. Organised around questions of temporality, geography, language, and mediation, the volume demonstrates how Arabic literary traditions illuminate broader debates on modernity, translation, ecology, and the production of knowledge. In doing so, it positions modern Arabic literature not at the margins of the humanities but as a field from which new critical vocabularies and conceptual frameworks emerge.

Questions of intellectual inheritance, memory, and historical responsibility also informed Halabi's work on the Lebanese novelist and public intellectual Elias Khoury. Published shortly after his death in *Majallat al-Dirasat al-Filastiniyya* (Journal of Palestine studies), her article examines a largely overlooked dimension of Khoury's oeuvre: his obituaries and elegies for fellow writers, artists, and intellectuals. Reading mourning not as a private gesture but as an intellectual and political practice, Halabi argues that Khoury transformed elegy into a mode of critical reflection on friendship, loss, and collective struggle. Through these texts, she traces how acts of remembrance became a means of confronting historical defeat while preserving the ethical and political horizons of unfinished projects of liberation. The article thus offers a new perspective on Khoury's intellectual legacy and on the role of mourning within modern Arab thought more broadly.

The cover of *The Cambridge Companion to Modern Arabic Literature* with a detail from "The Grand Theatre, Beirut 1982" by Fouad Elkoury.

Scholarship between Languages

A distinguishing feature of Halabi’s work is her engagement with multiple linguistic publics. While much academic scholarship on the Arab world circulates primarily in English, her work moves between English and Arabic, bringing research, criticism, and intellectual debate into conversation with broader reading publics. For Halabi, language is not simply a medium of communication; it shapes the audiences that scholarship reaches, the conversations in which it participates, and the forms of knowledge that become publicly available.

This concern has informed a decade-long effort to make scholarly debates accessible beyond the university. Rather than viewing translation as a secondary activity, Halabi approaches it as a mode of intellectual mediation that enables ideas to travel across linguistic and institutional boundaries. At stake is not merely access, but the possibility that scholarship acquires new meanings when it enters different interpretive communities and public conversations.

During the reporting period, this work took the form of essays, reviews, and translations published in Arabic-language platforms such as Cairo based *Mada Masr* and *Akhbar al-Adab*, and Beirut based *Megaphone* and *Rusted Radishes: Beirut Literary and Art Journal*. Addressing questions of

literature, intellectual history, translation, and cultural memory, these writings extended conversations often confined to academic spaces and brought them into wider public debate.

This interest in circulation and exchange also informs Halabi’s work as Arabic Editor of *Rusted Radishes*. During the reporting period, she co-edited the journal’s 2025 print issue on the theme of “Pain,” bringing together twenty-three Arabic literary texts and translations by emerging and established writers from across the Arab world. Moving between creative writing, criticism, and art, the issue explores pain not only as an individual experience but also as a historical, social, and political condition. In doing so, it creates a space where literary production, artistic practice, and critical reflection can speak to one another beyond conventional disciplinary boundaries.

Literature, Critique, and Public Culture

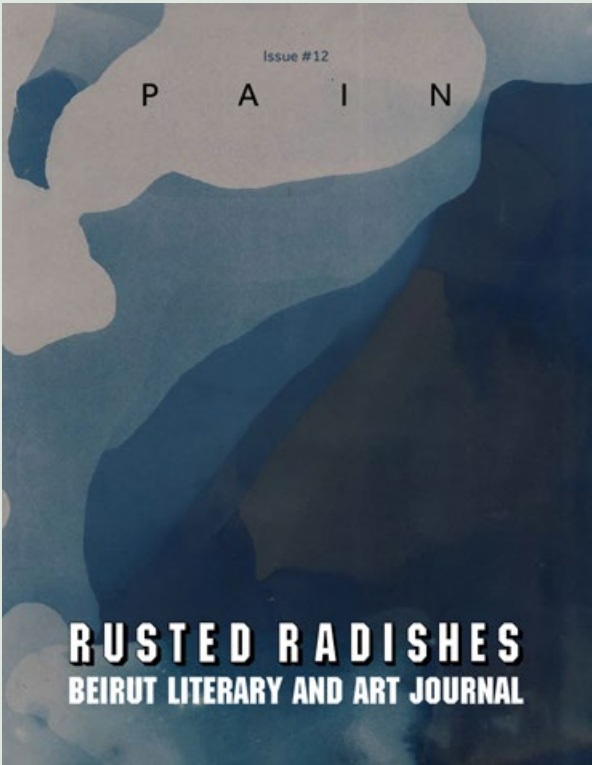
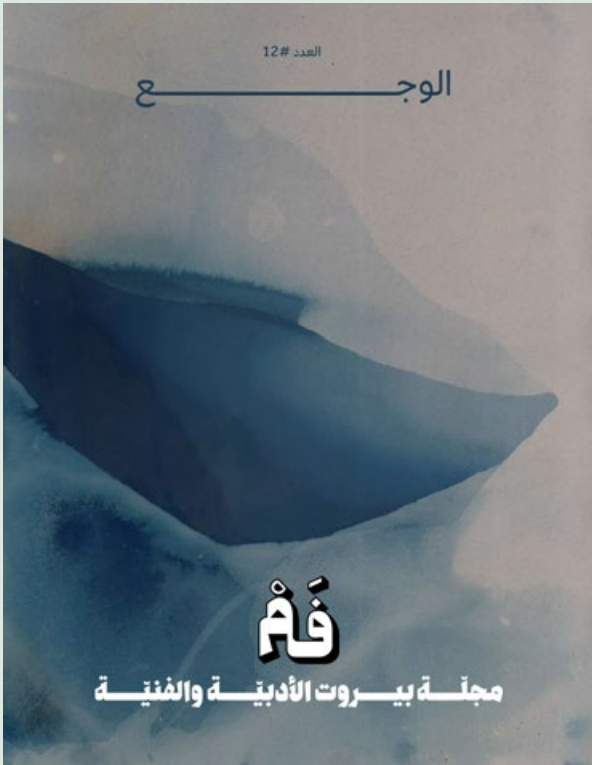
For Halabi, intellectual work does not end with publication. A recurring concern of her scholarship is the relationship between critical inquiry and the spaces through which it circulates. Literature, cinema, translation, and public discussion are not merely objects of study; they are sites where societies negotiate questions of memory, historical responsibility, and political possibility.

This perspective informed a series of collaborations with cultural institutions during the reporting period. Particularly significant were her conversations at Metropolis Cinema in Beirut, where discussions of the films of Syrian filmmaker Omar Amiralay and the writings of playwright Saadallah Wannous became occasions for reflecting on catastrophe, political critique, and the imagination of the future. By placing scholarship in dialogue with cinema and cultural programming, these events opened questions often confined to academic settings to broader publics and demonstrated how intellectual history continues to resonate through contemporary cultural forms.

Similar concerns animated her public talks on Egyptian surrealism and her contributions to discussions on translation and literary criticism. Across these interventions, Halabi explored how intellectual traditions are transmitted, transformed, and reactivated beyond the university, emphasizing the role of cultural institutions in sustaining spaces for critical reflection at a time when such spaces are increasingly under pressure.

This commitment to building intellectual conversations across institutional boundaries found further expression in *The Public Life of Empathy*, a multi-year initiative awarded an Arab Fund for Arts and Culture (AFAC)

The 2025 print issue of *Rusted Radishes: Beirut Literary and Art Journal*, devoted to the theme of “Pain,” featured 23 original Arabic literary works and Arabic translations by emerging and established writers from across the Arab world, spanning Tunisia, Egypt, Lebanon, Syria, Palestine, Jordan, Iraq, and Saudi Arabia.



Regional Events Grant. Bringing together scholars, translators, writers, and artists from across the Arab world, the project investigates empathy not as a private sentiment but as a literary, ethical, and political practice. By examining how empathy is produced, narrated, translated, and contested, the initiative extends Halabi’s long-standing interest in the relationship between literature and public life while creating new frameworks for interdisciplinary exchange across the region.

Building Scholarly Communities

Alongside her research, Halabi has played a central role in shaping OIB’s intellectual life. During the reporting period, she coordinated the Theory and Method Seminar and the Professionalisation Seminar for residential fellows, two initiatives that approached scholarship not as an individual pursuit but as a collective practice sustained through discussion, critique, and mentorship.

The Theory and Method Seminar provided a forum in which fellows could test ideas, circulate works in progress, and reflect on the conceptual and methodological foundations of their research. Bringing together scholars working across disciplines, regions, and historical periods, the seminar encouraged participants to engage questions beyond the immediate scope of their projects and to situate their work within broader intellectual conversations. Regular contributions from invited scholars further expanded these discussions and exposed fellows to a wide range of scholarly approaches.

Complementing these conversations, the Professionalisation Seminar addressed the institutional realities of academic life. Rather than treating research as separate from the structures through which it circulates, the seminar examined the practical dimensions of scholarly careers, including academic publishing, grant writing, conference participation, and professional development. In doing so, it equipped fellows with tools necessary not only to produce knowledge but also to navigate the institutions through which knowledge is disseminated and evaluated.

Halabi’s interest in the conditions of knowledge production extended beyond OIB through her role as PhD Student Mentor for *Why Location Matters: The Geopolitics of Knowledge Production*, a collaborative initiative of the Arab Council for the Social Sciences (ACSS), OIB, and the Middle East Studies Association (MESA). Bringing together doctoral researchers from across the Arab world, Europe, and North America, the programme examined how geography, institutions, language, and access shape scholarly inquiry. At its core was a simple but far-reaching ques-

tion: How does research change when it is produced from within the region under study rather than from distant academic centres?

The availability of scholarship in Arabic is central to challenging the uneven geographies of knowledge production that continue to structure contemporary academia. Research about the region often circulates primarily within English-speaking institutions, creating a disconnect between scholarly debates and the intellectual communities most directly implicated in them. Producing research in Arabic and translating scholarship to Arabic is therefore not merely a matter of widening access, but an effort to cultivate a more reciprocal intellectual ecology in which knowledge moves across languages, publics, and institutions.

– Zeina G. Halabi

SCHOLAR HIGHLIGHTS

Arabic Literary Modernity, Mourning, and Critique

- «الرائي الأخير: إلياس خوري وسياسة الرثاء». مجلة الدراسات الفلسطينية 141 (ربيع 2025): 41-65.
- “After Hiroshima: Georges Henein’s Polemics and Exile.” Lecture, *Forum Transregionale Studien*, Berlin, 9 Apr. 2025.
- “The Prestige of Terror: Georges Henein and Critique Post-Hiroshima.” Paper presented at *Catastrophe, Memory & Critique*, Orient-Institut Beirut, 3–5 June 2025.
- Allan, Michael and Zeina G. Halabi, editors. *The Cambridge Companion to Modern Arabic Literature*. Cambridge University Press, 2026.

Translation, Literature, and Public Criticism

- «هزمتم التّين فماذا عن مار جرجس؟ أن نقرأ غزّة في هيروشيما جورج حنين». مدى مصر. آب/أغسطس 2025.
- “*Night Is Day* by Ghassan Salhab: To Linger in Seasons of Pain.” *Rusted Radishes: Beirut Literary and Art Journal*, 9 Sept. 2025.
- «الزوجة» (قصيدة لكونشيتينا كرون). قَم: مجلة بيروت الأدبية والفنية. كانون الثاني/يناير 2026.
- «أشباح بيروت: ما بعد الكارثة. مرة أخرى». ميغافون. 16 شباط/فبراير 2026.
- «كازينو الملائكة لهدى عمران. أو ماذا لو تخيلنا الرحم خلاصاً؟». أخبار الأدب. 1 آذار/مارس 2026.

- «لا تسألوني ما اسمه حبيبي» (مقالة لمحمد شوقي حسن). قَم: مجلة بيروت الأدبية والفنية، أيار/مايو 2026.
- «إيمان مرسال المترجمة وقيمة الأدب المربك». قَم: مجلة بيروت الأدبية والفنية، 4 حزيران/يونيو 2026.

Knowledge Production, Pedagogy, and Scholarly Communities

- PhD Student Mentor. *Why Location Matters: The Geopolitics of Knowledge Production*. Collaborative initiative of the Arab Council for the Social Sciences, the Orient-Institut Beirut, and the Middle East Studies Association, Beirut, 2025–2026.
- Coordinator. Theory and Method Seminar and Professionalisation Seminar for Residential Fellows. Orient-Institut Beirut, 2025–2026.
- Organiser. “Empathy and Voice in Translation.” With Katharine Halls. Orient-Institut Beirut, 5 Mar. 2026. Postponed.
- Moderator. “New Perspectives on South Asian and Middle Eastern Connections in the Twentieth Century.” Institut français d’archéologie orientale (IFAO), Cairo, 9–10 May 2026.

Literature, Film, and Public Culture

- «استعدادات السريالية المصرية». بهنا الوكالة، الإسكندرية، تشرين الأول/أكتوبر 2025.
- «حواران على أهبة الموت». سينما متروبوليس، بيروت، تشرين الثاني/نوفمبر 2025.
- «الحلم خطاباً والمخيم مستودعاً: عرض ونقاش لفيلم المنام لمحمد ملص مع علي العدوي». سينماتيك متروبوليس، بيروت، 15 كانون الأول/ديسمبر 2025.

Awards and Honors

- Civitella Ranieri Foundation Writing Residency, 2025.
- Regional Events Grant for “*The Public Life of Empathy*.” Arab Fund for Arts and Culture (AFAC), 2025.

Cluster 3. Islamic Studies

The Islamic Studies cluster explores Islamic civilization from its formative period to the present, bringing together research on theology, law, Qur’anic exegesis, *Ḥadīth*, philosophy, ethics, Sufism, and historiography. Its projects are united by an interdisciplinary approach that examines the development of Islamic thought within broader social, cultural, and intellectual contexts, while also tracing the circulation of ideas across religious, linguistic, and geographic boundaries.

Researchers in the cluster investigate questions of legal interpretation, ethics, gender, interreligious relations, and the transmission of knowledge. Their work examines how Islamic traditions have engaged with other intellectual and religious traditions, how concepts of the “religious other” have been articulated, and how contemporary scholars and theologians address challenges facing Muslim societies today. Particular attention is given to the relationship between normative texts and lived realities, drawing on sources that range from legal manuals, court records, and Qur’anic commentaries to literature, material culture, and artistic production.

The cluster also addresses contemporary debates on social justice, gender, family life, and environmental ethics, exploring how Islamic thought informs discussions of resource use, sustainability, and human relationships with the natural world. Spanning regions from Morocco to South Asia and periods from early Islam to the present, its research contributes to a deeper understanding of the diversity of Islamic traditions and their continuing relevance. A central aim of the cluster is to foster critical scholarship that builds bridges across religious traditions and offers historically grounded perspectives on contemporary questions.

Ahmed Abd-Elsalam



Ahmed Abd-Elsalam joined the Orient-Institut Beirut in October 2021 as a Research Associate in the Islamic Studies cluster. He received his PhD in Islamic Studies from Martin Luther University Halle-Wittenberg with a dissertation examining the relationship between Bedouin customary law and Islamic law in its social and historical contexts. His research explores the intersections of Islamic legal thought, social history, and interreligious exchange, with particular attention to the formation of legal and ethical norms in Muslim societies.

Abd-Elsalam previously worked as a research assistant in the field of Islamic theology at the Centre for Islamic Theology at the University of Münster from 2012 to 2021. He held the position of visiting professor of comparative religious studies at the Humboldt University of Berlin from 2019 to 2020. He was also a lecturer at Al-Azhar University from 2011 to 2012 and at the University of Innsbruck from 2018 to 2022.

Islamic Law, Marriage, and Abrahamic Interdependence

During the reporting period, Abd-Elsalam continued his project *Abrahamic Interdependence: The Relations of Jewish to Islamic Law concerning Marriage and Divorce*. The project examines the historical formation of Islamic marital norms and the ways in which legal ideas circulated between Jewish and Islamic traditions. It argues that Islamic marriage law developed through the interaction of pre-Islamic custom-

ary practice, Qur’anic revelation, and Prophetic practice, with particular attention to the Qur’an’s engagement with existing legal and ethical traditions, including debates that can be traced to Jewish legal thought.

By treating marriage and divorce as sites of legal and social transformation, the project contributes to broader discussions on the shared intellectual histories of the Abrahamic traditions and the development of Islamic legal institutions. It also highlights the role of women in the formative period of Islam and explores how early Muslim communities negotiated questions of ethics, family life, and social reform.

Religion, Law, and Social Transformation in Islamic Thought

Alongside this work, Abd-Elsalam advanced research on the emergence and development of Islamic environmental theology. This project investigates how Muslim communities, particularly in diasporic contexts, have developed new theological approaches to questions of nature, environmental responsibility, and the relationship between human beings and the natural world.

Across both projects, his scholarship is concerned with how religious norms are formed and transformed through the interaction of scripture, legal tradition, and lived social practice. By integrating Islamic legal studies, social history, and comparative religious perspectives, his work contributes to wider debates on the historical development of Muslim societies and the interconnected histories of Jewish, Christian, and Islamic traditions.

Academic Programming and Institutional Leadership

Alongside his research, Abd-Elsalam has played a central role in shaping the academic life of OIB’s Cairo Office. Through the coordination of lectures, workshops, and scholarly exchanges, he has helped foster intellectual dialogue among researchers working in Islamic studies, religious studies, and Middle Eastern history. His work has strengthened Cairo as a site of exchange between scholars from diverse disciplinary, methodological, and institutional backgrounds, extending OIB’s reach beyond Beirut and contributing to regional collaboration.

Beyond programmatic activities, he also contributes to the Institute’s institutional life through his service on the Staff Council. Elected by the research staff in 2023 and reconfirmed in 2024, he has taken an active role in supporting the governance and academic community of the Institute.

Scholarly Publishing and Knowledge Production

As editorial manager of *Bibliotheca Islamica (BI)* and *Orient-Institut Studies (OIS)*, Abd-Elsalam plays a key role in OIB’s publication activities. He supports the development, review, and production of scholarly volumes in Islamic studies and related fields, helping to guide research from manuscript to publication. His editorial work forms a crucial link between research and dissemination, bringing new scholarship to academic audiences and reinforcing OIB’s position as a platform for innovative research on the Middle East and the Islamic world.

SCHOLAR HIGHLIGHTS

Edited Volumes

- Editor. *Transformation of Religious Authorities and Discourses after the Egyptian Revolution 2011*. *Orient-Institut Studies*, vol. 10, Orient-Institut Beirut & Red Sea Press, 2025.
- Abd-Elsalam, Ahmed M. F. and Yasmin Amin, editors. *Discussing Interdependencies: Women and Families across Religions*. *Orient-Institut Studies*, vol. 9, Orient-Institut Beirut & Red Sea Press, 2025.

Book Chapters and Articles

- “Al-Muwāṭana Ka-Mafhūm Dīnī” [Citizenship as a religious concept]. *Al-Dīnī wa-l-Hijrah: Ḥarakiyyāt wa-Taḳāṭu’āt*, edited by Abdalkarīm Marzūq and Abdalraḥīm al-‘Aṭrī, Ibn Khaldun Centre for Migration Studies, 2025, pp. 5–16.
- “Waṭīqat al-Madīna wa-Mashrū’ al-Ta’āyush fī Muḵtama’ Ta’addudī” [The Constitution of Medina and the Project of Coexistence in a Plural Society]. *Ṣinā’at al-Silm al-Dawlī: Istilhām al-Siyāqāt al-Mushtaraka*, edited by Samīr Būdīnār, Markaz al-Ḥukamā’ li-Buḥūth al-Salām, 2025.
- “Takrīs al-‘Unf Ḍid al-Nisā’ Bayna al-Naṣṣ wa-l-Ta’wīl” [Violence Against Women Between Text and Interpretation]. *Discussing Interdependencies – Women and Families across Religions*, edited by Ahmed Abd-Elsalam and Yasmin Amin, *Orient-Institut Studies*, vol. 9, Orient-Institut Beirut and Red Sea Press, 2025.
- “The Khadījah Project or the Concept Behind Marriage Law in Early Islam.” *Discussing Interdependencies – Women and Families across Religions*, edited by Ahmed Abd-Elsalam and Yasmin Amin, *Orient-Institut Studies*, vol. 9, Orient-Institut Beirut and Red Sea Press, 2025.

Yasmin Amin



Yasmin Amin’s research examines the intersections of *Ḥadīth* studies, gender, and Islamic intellectual history. Her work investigates how historical sources, heritage literature, and prophetic traditions continue to shape contemporary debates on women, family, authority, and religious interpretation. A central concern of her scholarship is the critical examination of inherited narratives that have influenced Muslim societies for centuries, particularly those rooted in erroneous interpretations of *tafsīr* and *Ḥadīth* literature. By combining rigorous engagement with classical sources and contemporary gender scholarship, Amin seeks to demonstrate how historical research can contribute to addressing present-day social and intellectual challenges.

Particularly significant during the reporting period was her research project on *Ḥadīth al-Ifk (The Affair of the Lie)*, one of the contested narratives in Islamic historiography. The project traces the evolution of Shi’i interpretations of the Qur’anic verses traditionally associated with the episode, following exegetical developments from the early works of *al-Qummī* to contemporary Twelver Shi’i scholarship. While Sunni traditions generally identify ‘Ā’isha as the victim of slander, Shi’i interpretations have variously associated the narrative with Māriyya al-Qibṭiyya, implicated ‘Ā’isha as an instigator, or ultimately reframed the verses as a broader Qur’anic condemnation of slander against women. Through the analysis of more than thirty *tafsīr* works, Amin explores how sectarian identities, communal memory, and changing intellectual priorities shaped these shifting interpretations. By bringing Sunni and Shi’i sourc-

es into conversation, the project highlights possibilities for overcoming inherited divisions through shared scholarly inquiry.

Gender, Authority, and Islamic Reform

Questions of gender and religious authority remained central to Amin’s scholarship throughout the reporting period. Her publications examined issues ranging from women’s participation in knowledge production and early Muslim women’s migration to emotional expression in Twelver Shi’i *Ḥadīth* and the historical development of patriarchal interpretations within Islamic traditions. Several contributions addressed widely debated public questions, including gender equality, polygamy, and the diversity of Islamic thought.

Her chapter “Pay It Forward – Educationally: Or How to Procure Jihadists for Reform” revisits the intellectual legacy of Muḥammad ‘Abduh by tracing successive generations of students and reformers influenced by his thought. The study evaluates the long-term impact of Islamic reform movements and asks whether efforts to transform entrenched religious perceptions succeeded in reshaping modern Muslim intellectual life.

Amin also completed the translation of Nazira Zeineddine’s pioneering feminist work, forthcoming with Edinburgh University Press. By making available the writings of a thinker who challenged prevailing gender norms in 1928, the project contributes to recovering overlooked histories of Muslim feminism and restoring Zeineddine’s place within global debates on gender and Islam.

Creating Spaces for Intellectual Dialogue

Alongside her research, Amin played a leading role in developing scholarly exchange through the Cairo branch of OIB. During the reporting period, she organised two editions of the OIB/COSIMENA Research Colloquium and convened two international workshops devoted to *Ḥadīth* studies.

Particularly significant were the workshops *The Ḥadīth: Its Authority and Critique in Gender Issues* (July 2025) and *The Ḥadīth: Its Relationship with the Qur’an* (June 2026). These events brought together an unusually diverse group of participants, including scholars from al-Azhar, Dar al-Ifta, Cairo and Tanta Universities, international researchers from Europe and North America, feminist scholars, and specialists from across the Arab world. The workshops created a rare environment in which participants from very different intellectual, disciplinary, and ideological backgrounds engaged in sustained dialogue on controversial questions surrounding *Ḥadīth* authority, authenticity, gender, and Qur’anic

interpretation. Amin regards these conversations as among the most important achievements of the reporting period, demonstrating the possibility of rigorous and respectful debate across institutional and intellectual divides.

Scholarship Beyond Academia

A defining feature of Amin’s work is her commitment to connecting academic research with wider public audiences. Her research on child marriage, gender, and Islamic legal traditions has informed discussions beyond the university and contributed to policy and advocacy initiatives. During previous phases of her work, her scholarship was consulted by organizations including UNICEF, Musawah, and other international actors engaged in legal reform and public education.

This commitment to public engagement continued during the reporting period through media appearances, public lectures, and collaborations with educational and research institutions. She appeared on BBC Radio to discuss women’s Qur’anic recitation and participated in public broadcasts in Tunisia, while continuing to deliver lectures and conference presentations across Europe, North Africa, and the Middle East.

Building OIB Cairo

As Representative of the Cairo Branch, Amin combined research, public engagement, and institutional development. Through partnerships



From the second day of the *Ḥadīth* workshop organised at the OIB office in Cairo.

with DAAD, Al-Akhawayn University, Carthage University, the University of Tunis, and the Library of Djerba, she expanded OIB Cairo’s scholarly networks and strengthened its regional presence. The OIB/COSIMENA Research Colloquium series, supported through collaboration with DAAD and the German Embassy in Cairo, has developed a loyal audience and become an important platform for intellectual exchange in Cairo.

Reflecting on the reporting period, Amin emphasises that her work in Cairo has been closely intertwined with the development of the Institute itself. Through research activities, public programming, and institutional partnerships, she contributed to increasing the visibility of OIB Cairo and supporting the branch’s ongoing accreditation process, helping strengthen its role as a hub for scholarship on Islam, gender, and intellectual history.

The translation of Nazira Zeineddine is important in that it gives Zeineddine her voice back, after she has been overlooked as the first Muslim Feminist, writing in 1928, whereas the articulation of Muslim Feminism was credited to Fatima Mernissi and Leila Ahmed more than fifty years later.

– Yasmin Amin

SCHOLAR HIGHLIGHTS

Gender, Authority, and Religious Interpretation

- “Are Men and Women Equal?” *Islam in Five Minutes*, edited by Edith Szanto, 2025.
- “Did Islam Introduce Patriarchy?” *Islam in Five Minutes*, edited by Edith Szanto, 2025.
- “Is Islam a Monolith?” *Islam in Five Minutes*, edited by Edith Szanto, 2025.
- “Is Polygamy Recommended?” *Islam in Five Minutes*, edited by Edith Szanto, 2025.
- “Early Muslim Muhājirāt and Their Impact.” *Le Religieux, la Migration et le Genre*, 2025.

Ḥadīth, Emotion, and Islamic Intellectual Traditions

- “Embracing Tears and Laughter: A Study of Emotional Balance in Twelver Shi’a Ḥadīth.” *Shi’i Ḥadīth: History and Methodology*, 2026, forthcoming.

- “Pay It Forward—Educationally: Or How to Procure Jihadists for Reform.” *Muhammad ‘Abduh and the Ongoing Project of Islamic Reform*, edited by Walid Ghali, Gerlach Press, forthcoming.

Women, Family, and Interreligious Perspectives

- *Discussing Interdependencies: Women and Families across Religions: Narratives, Norms, Ethics. Orient-Institut Studies*, vol. 9, Orient-Institut Beirut & Red Sea Press, 2025.

Recovering Forgotten Voices in Islamic Thought

- Amin, Yasmin, translator. Author, Nazira Zeineddine, Edinburgh University Press, forthcoming.

Debating Ḥadīth, History, Gender, and Knowledge Production

- Organiser, OIB/COSIMENA Research Colloquium III: *History: Concepts, Conflicts & Solutions*. 2025.
- Organiser, OIB/COSIMENA Research Colloquium VI: *Diverse Islamic Sciences in the Service of Knowledge*. 2025.
- Organiser. *The Ḥadīth: Its Authority and Critique in Gender Issues*. Workshop organised by the OIB Regional Office Cairo, 8–9 July 2025.
- Organiser. *The Ḥadīth: Its Relationship with the Qur’an*. Workshop organised by the OIB Regional Office Cairo, June 2026.
- Lectures and conference presentations in Cairo; Zurich; Sousse; Tunis; Kraków; Toronto; Ifrane; and Oujda on *Ḥadīth* studies, gender, Islamic reform, manuscript cultures, and women’s knowledge production.

Scholarship in Public Conversation

- BBC Radio 4, BBC Radio 2, and BBC World Service. “Interview on Female Qur’an Reciters.” BBC, 2025.
- Radio interviews in Sousse and Sfax, Tunisia, 2026.

Fatih Ermiş



Fatih Ermiş's research focuses on Ottoman intellectual history, moral philosophy, and the transmission of knowledge across linguistic and cultural traditions. During the reporting period, he worked on the preparation of the first modern Arabic edition and translation of *Ahlāk-ı 'Alāʾī*, the celebrated sixteenth-century work of the Ottoman scholar and moral philosopher Kınālîzâde 'Alî Çelebî (1510–1572). Widely regarded as the most influential contribution to practical philosophy in the Ottoman tradition, the work brings together ethics, household governance, and political thought in a comprehensive vision of individual and collective flourishing.

Prepared for publication in the *Bibliotheca Islamica (BI)* series, the project involved reviewing and editing the Arabic translation, preparing the scholarly apparatus, and writing an extensive introduction situating the text within Ottoman intellectual history. Ermiş examines Kınālîzâde's life and scholarly career, the place of *Ahlāk-ı 'Alāʾī* within traditions of Islamic practical philosophy, its relationship to earlier ethical works such as Naşîr al-Dîn al-Ṭūsî's *Akhlâq-i Nâşirî* and Jalâl al-Dîn al-Dawwânî's *Akhlâq-i Jalâlî*, and its subsequent reception across the Ottoman world.

Beyond its contribution to Ottoman studies, the project seeks to make a foundational text of Ottoman moral and political thought accessible to Arabic-speaking audiences. In doing so, it addresses broader questions of translation, intellectual transmission, and the movement of ideas across linguistic and cultural boundaries. The project reflects OIB's com-

mitment to recovering and disseminating key texts that have shaped intellectual traditions across the Middle East.

The reporting period coincided with a particularly challenging moment in Lebanon. Working on a text devoted to justice, balance, ethical self-cultivation, and social order while living through a period marked by war and uncertainty gave renewed contemporary resonance to questions that might otherwise appear purely historical. Kınālîzâde's conception of justice as a principle that begins with the cultivation of balance within the individual before extending to society and political life offered a particularly meaningful framework through which to reflect on questions of coexistence, responsibility, and resilience.

The interdisciplinary environment of OIB played an important role in the development of the project. Exchanges with colleagues working across history, Islamic studies, anthropology, literature, and the social sciences encouraged broader reflections on authority, ethics, and communal life, situating Ottoman moral philosophy within conversations that remain relevant well beyond its original historical context. The project thus developed simultaneously as a work of textual scholarship and as a contribution to contemporary debates about the ethical foundations of social and political life.

At a time when Lebanon continues to face profound challenges, Ermiş's work illustrates how historical scholarship can illuminate enduring questions of justice, responsibility, and collective life while contributing to the preservation and accessibility of the region's intellectual heritage.

Thomas Würtz



Thomas Würtz's research focuses on Islamic intellectual history, Qur'anic exegesis, theology, and the transmission of religious knowledge across the Islamic world. His work examines how Muslim scholars negotiated questions of interpretation, and intellectual exchange, with particular attention to the intersections between theology, philosophy, and scriptural commentary. Through close engagement with classical Arabic texts, Würtz explores the mobility of ideas across regions, languages, and scholarly traditions, as well as the enduring influence of premodern intellectual debates on later Islamic thought.

During the reporting period, his research concentrated on two interconnected areas: the study of classical Islamic theology and the historical relationship between Germany and the Arab world. Alongside his ongoing work on Qur'anic exegesis, he also investigated questions of memory and commemoration surrounding the Second World War in Egypt, examining how local and transnational perspectives can contribute to more inclusive forms of historical remembrance.

Islamic Theology and Intellectual Traditions

During the reporting period, Würtz published an article on the fifteenth-century Qur'anic commentator Ibrāhīm al-Biqā'ī in a special issue of *MIDÉO* devoted to "The Religious Other in Qur'anic Tafsīr." The article examines al-Biqā'ī's hermeneutical approach and his engage-

ment with biblical materials, contributing to broader debates on inter-religious interpretation and intellectual exchange in Islamic thought.

Würtz also continued his long-standing engagement with the history of Islamic theology through his work on the influential fourteenth-century scholar Sa'd al-Dīn al-Taftāzānī. In February 2025, he co-organised the international conference *The Multifaceted Thought of Sa'd ad-Dīn al-Taftāzānī (d. 1390): Perspectives on his Life, Work and Impact* in co-operation with the Institute of Islamic Theology at the University of Osnabrück. Bringing together scholars from Germany, Turkey, Jordan, and Morocco, the conference explored Taftāzānī's contributions to theology, philosophy, and intellectual history while fostering new international collaborations across disciplinary and institutional boundaries.

His ongoing engagement with the history of Islamic thought also found expression in the co-edited Festschrift *Mobilität des Denkens (Mobility of thought)*, dedicated to the distinguished scholar of Islamic philosophy Ulrich Rudolph. The volume reflects on the movement of ideas across intellectual traditions and historical periods, themes that have long shaped Würtz's own scholarly interests.

At the *Deutscher Orientalistentag* in Erlangen, Würtz presented new research on Ibrāhīm al-Biqā'ī under the title "A Qur'anic Commentator in Isolation."

Religion, Identity, and the Contemporary Arab World

Alongside his work on classical Islamic thought, Würtz continued to engage questions of religion and identity in the modern Middle East. His chapter "Identität und Religion" in the handbook *Die Arabische Halbinsel: Geographie und Politik* examines the role of religious traditions in shaping identities across the Arabian Peninsula. By highlighting the diversity of Islamic traditions—including Ibadi and Zaydi communities—the chapter challenges reductive portrayals of the region and contributes to a broader public understanding of its social, cultural, and religious complexity.

These themes also informed several invited lectures and conference contributions. At the *Spring of Social Sciences* conference organised by Al Akhawayn University and the Ibn Khaldoun Center in Morocco in collaboration with OIB researcher associates Ahmed Abd-Elsalam and Yasmin Amin, Würtz presented a paper titled "German Islam Perception: From Mufakkirūn to Muhājirūn," exploring changing representations of Islam and Muslims in German public discourse. He also participated in academic events at Mohammed I University in Oujda and continued

to cultivate scholarly exchange with Notre Dame University-Louaize in Lebanon.

Memory, War, and German-Arab Relations

Another significant dimension of Würtz's work during the reporting period concerned the relationship between historical research and public memory. His research on the Battle of El Alamein revisits the role of Egyptian actors in one of the decisive military confrontations of the Second World War. While conventional narratives have largely focused on British and German forces, Würtz's work, drawing on Egyptian scholarship, highlights the contributions of the Egyptian army to logistics, intelligence, and security operations.

Building on this research, he explored how contemporary commemorative practices might move beyond national narratives toward more inclusive forms of shared remembrance. Particular attention was given to the German war memorial at El Alamein and its place within a rapidly transforming Egyptian landscape. These reflections formed part of the conference *German-Arab Relations*, organised jointly by OIB and the Egyptian Historical Society in Cairo in November 2025, marking the first formal collaboration between the two institutions.

Scholarship, Public Engagement, and Intellectual Exchange

Würtz regards scholarly research as inseparable from broader public conversations. In January 2026, he published an article on churches in Lebanon in *Kunst und Kirche*, drawing on observations and experiences accumulated during his years in Beirut. The essay sought to introduce German-speaking audiences to Lebanon's religious and architectural heritage while reflecting on the country's complex cultural landscape.

He also contributed to public and interdisciplinary discussions through the Cairo Lecture Series, where he welcomed philosopher Michael Hampe (ETH Zürich) for a lecture on artificial intelligence and contemporary society. Such initiatives reflect his broader commitment to fostering dialogue between academic research and wider publics.

Research, Exchange, and Institutional Life

Throughout the reporting period, Würtz continued to contribute to the intellectual life of OIB and its regional networks (mainly Cairo Office).

Drawing extensively on the collections of the OIB Library, AUB's Jafet Library, and libraries in Germany, he pursued research while strength-




WORKSHOP

The Multifaceted Thought of Sa'd ad-Dīn at-Taftāzānī (d. 1390): Perspectives on his life, work and impact

February 20–21, 2025

Kamp 46/47, Room 51/218 · 49074 Osnabrück

Participants: ■ Prof. Heidrun Eichner ■ Prof. Asad Ahmed ■ Prof. Merdan Günes ■ Asst. Prof. Hamza Elbekri ■ Dr. Thomas Würtz ■ Dr. Diyaa Alkalesh ■ Dr. Des. Abdurrahman Ali Mihirig ■ Dr. Des. Ibrahim Safri ■ John Ropoulos, M.A. ■ Taha Tarik Yavuz, M.A.	Topics: ■ Logic ■ Theology ■ Philosophy ■ Law ■ Rhetoric
---	--

Contact and Registration:
Taha Tarik Yavuz
Email: taha.tarik.yavuz@uni-osnabrueck.de



ORIENT INSTITUTE
BEIRUT
المعهد الأورباني
للأبحاث الشرقية



INSTITUT FÜR
ISLAMISCHE
THEOLOGIE

www.iit.uni-osnabrueck.de

© Taha Tarik Yavuz

ening collaborations with universities and scholarly institutions across Lebanon, Egypt, Morocco, and Europe.

For Würtz, Beirut remains a uniquely important intellectual centre in the Arab world. Its traditions of academic freedom, public debate, and scholarly exchange continue to make it a vital location for research and dialogue across disciplinary, linguistic, and national boundaries. Even amid political uncertainty, these conditions have enabled the Institute to sustain research, expand regional partnerships, and create new opportunities for scholarly collaboration.

SCHOLAR HIGHLIGHTS

Qur’anic Exegesis and Islamic Intellectual Traditions

- “The Known and the Unknown in the Bible: The Hermeneutics of Ibrāhīm al-Biqā’ī in His *Tafsīr Naẓm al-Durar*.” *MIDÉO*, no. 40, *The Religious Other in Quranic Tafsīr*, 2025, pp. 145–68.
- “Ibrāhīm al-Biqā’ī.” *Deutscher Orientalistentag* (DOT), Deutsche Morgenländische Gesellschaft (DMG), Erlangen, Germany.
- Conference organiser and participant. “The Multifaceted Thought of Sa’d ad-Dīn al-Taftāzānī (d. 1390): Perspectives on His Life, Work and Impact.” *The Life and Work of Ṣa’d ad-Dīn at-Taftāzānī (d. 1390)*. University of Osnabrück, 20–21 Feb. 2025.

Religion, Identity, and Society in the Arab World

- “Identität und Religion,” *Die Arabische Halbinsel: Geographie und Politik*, edited by Thomas Demmelhuber and Nadine Scharfenort. Berlin: Springer Nature, 2025, pp. 113–21.
- “German Islam Perception: From *Mufakkirūn* to *Muhājirūn*.” *Spring of Social Sciences*, Al Akhawayn University and Ibn Khaldoun centre, Ifrane, Morocco.
- Participant. *Study Days*, Mohammed I University, Oujda.

Memory, War, and German-Arab Entanglements

- “The Battle of El Alamein and Contemporary Memory Culture.” Paper presented at *Arab-German Relations in the Mirror of History*, conference jointly organised by the Orient-Institut Beirut and the Egyptian Historical Society, Cairo, 8–10 Nov. 2025. Lead organiser of the first OIB–Egyptian Historical Society collaboration.
- Research Project on the Battle of El Alamein and Its Place in Contemporary Memory Culture. 2025–2026.

Research project on the Battle of El Alamein and its place in contemporary memory culture, and advocating for more inclusive forms of remembrance that acknowledge Egyptian as well as German and Allied perspectives.

- “Im Schatten der Zedern.” *Kunst und Kirche*, Jan. 2026.

Publication of “Im Schatten der Zedern” in the journal *kunst und kirche* (2026) reflecting on churches in Lebanon and insights gained during his years of research and institutional engagement in the country.

Intellectual Mobility and Scholarly Heritage

- Gösken Urs, Schaerer Patric O, Seidel Roman, Weaver James and Würtz Thomas. *Mobilität des Denkens*. Leiden: Brill. 2025.

The volume honors one of the leading scholars of Islamic philosophy and explores the movement of ideas across intellectual, linguistic, and historical boundaries, a theme reflected in Würtz’s own work on Islamic thought and intellectual exchange.

Berenike Metzler



How did scholars in sixteenth-century Egypt understand the relationship between letters, language, and knowledge? This question stands at the centre of Berenike Metzler's research on Arabic letter semiotics and early Ottoman intellectual history. Through the study of manuscripts, scholarly networks, and theories of language, her work investigates how Arabic letters functioned not merely as graphic signs but as meaningful units within broader systems of knowledge and intellectual inquiry.

Metzler's research addresses a field that remains largely unexplored. While individual aspects of Arabic letters have attracted scholarly attention, there has been no comprehensive study of how letters themselves were conceptualized and how they operated within premodern Islamic systems of thought. By bringing together philological analysis, manuscript studies, and modern semiotic theory, she seeks to develop new approaches to understanding the intellectual history of language in the Arabic-speaking world.

At the heart of her project is the largely unstudied work *Ḥilyat ahl al-kamāl bi-ajwibat as'ilat al-Jalāl* by the Egyptian scholar Abū Bakr al-Shanawānī (d. 1610). Written in response to a set of scholarly questions posed by the renowned polymath Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī (d. 1505), the text offers a rare window onto debates concerning scholarship, authority, language, and intellectual practice in early Ottoman Egypt. Through the critical editing, translation, and analysis of this work, Met-

zler explores both the conceptual world of Arabic letters and the scholarly environment in which such ideas circulated.

Her project pursues three interconnected objectives. First, it seeks to prepare the first critical edition and English translation of al-Shanawānī's text. Second, it analyses the conception of Arabic letters presented in the work through the lens of modern semiotic theory. Third, it situates the text within broader intellectual developments of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries through the study of manuscripts, paratexts, and scholarly networks. In doing so, the project contributes simultaneously to the emerging field of Arabic letter semiotics and to a reassessment of Islamic intellectual history in the early modern period.

One of the principal goals of Metzler's research is the preparation of a critical bilingual edition of *Ḥilyat ahl al-kamāl bi-ajwibat as'ilat al-Jalāl* by Abū Bakr al-Shanawānī. Proposed for publication in OIB's *Bibliotheca Islamica (BI)* series, the volume would constitute the first bilingual edition in the history of the series.

The text occupies a unique position within Islamic intellectual history. As a response to seven scholarly questions posed by al-Suyūṭī, it provides rare insight into how subsequent generations engaged with one of the most influential scholars of the late Mamluk period. At the same time, it offers an exceptionally rich source for understanding theories of language, learning, and scholarly authority in sixteenth-century Egypt. By making this text available in a critically edited and translated form, the project will provide scholars with access to an important but previously inaccessible source for the study of early modern Islamic scholarship.

Reconsidering the Intellectual History of the Early Modern Islamic World

A major intervention of Metzler's work is its challenge to long-standing assumptions that portray the centuries following al-Suyūṭī as a period of intellectual decline. Her research instead highlights the continued vitality, creativity, and geographical breadth of scholarly production during the sixteenth to nineteenth centuries.

This commitment is reflected in the international webinar series *The Heirs of Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī (d. 1505): The Persistence of Islamic Scholarship in the Early Modern Period*, organised on behalf of OIB in collaboration with the Universities of Göttingen and Bamberg. Bringing together scholars from regions stretching from West Africa and Arabia to South Asia and Indonesia, the series explores the circulation of ideas, texts, and scholarly traditions across the Islamic world. By highlighting figures

and intellectual networks that have often remained outside dominant narratives, the project contributes to a growing reassessment of the so-called “Middle Period” of Islamic intellectual history.

Reading Manuscripts as Intellectual Archives

A defining feature of Metzler’s scholarship is her attention to manuscripts and their paratexts as sources for intellectual history. Ownership notes, marginal annotations, corrections, reading certificates, and colophons provide evidence not only for the transmission of texts but also for the communities of scholars who produced, circulated, and interpreted them.

During the reporting period, Metzler conducted research at the Library of Congress in Washington, D.C., where she consulted an additional manuscript witness of the text currently under preparation. She also participated in the advanced training seminar Reading Arabic Manuscripts, led by Luke Yarbrough, which further strengthened the methodological foundations of her work. These experiences reinforced her conviction that manuscripts are not merely repositories of texts but archives of scholarly practice that reveal how knowledge was created, transmitted, and transformed across generations.

Building Scholarly Networks Across Regions

Beyond her individual research, Metzler has contributed to strengthening international conversations on Islamic intellectual history. Through the organization of workshops, conference panels, and the ongoing Suyūṭī webinar series, she has helped create spaces in which scholars working on different regions and traditions can exchange ideas and identify unexpected connections between their research.

Particularly significant has been the online format of these initiatives, which has enabled participation from researchers located across multiple continents. By bringing together scholars from California to Indonesia, the series has demonstrated how digital platforms can foster new forms of intellectual collaboration and sustain scholarly exchange across geographical and institutional boundaries.

Scholarship and Public Engagement

Although her research focuses on highly specialized sources, Metzler regards public engagement as an important dimension of academic work. During the reporting period, she contributed a public essay to the Max Weber Stiftung’s online platform introducing broader audiences to Arabic letter semiotics and the ways in which letters were understood as systems for organizing knowledge and making sense of the world.

Looking beyond university audiences, she is also developing initiatives aimed at introducing younger learners to the cultural and intellectual history of writing. Planned workshops on the significance and symbolism of letters will bring aspects of her research into conversation with students and non-specialist audiences. Through such activities, she seeks to demonstrate how the study of manuscripts, language, and intellectual history can contribute to broader reflections on communication, learning, and human creativity.

The history of scholarship is often told through a small number of celebrated figures. My research asks what happens when we look beyond those canonical names and examine the scholars, manuscripts, and intellectual networks that continued to shape knowledge after them. By studying how Arabic letters were understood and how texts were transmitted, annotated, and preserved, I seek to contribute to a richer understanding of Islamic intellectual history and to recover forms of scholarly creativity that have too often remained overlooked.

– Berenike Metzler

SCHOLAR HIGHLIGHTS

Manuscript Studies and Textual Scholarship

- *Kollation als Detektivarbeit*. Online workshop, 5 Feb. 2025.
- Participant. Reading Arabic Manuscripts Summer Skills Seminar, led by Luke Yarbrough, June 2025.
- Al-Shanawānī, Abū Bakr (d. 1610). *Ḥilyat Ahl al-Kamāl bi-Ajwibat As’ilat al-Jalāl*. Critical edition and English translation. Proposed for publication in the *Bibliotheca Islamica* series, Orient-Institut Beirut.

Arabic Letter Semiotics and Intellectual History

- “Arabic Letter Semiotics and Early Ottoman Scholarship.” *Annual Fellows Symposium*, German Historical Institute (GHI), Jan. 2025.
- Panel organiser and presenter (with Petra Schmidl). “How Letters Arrange the World.” *Deutscher Orientalistentag* (DOT), 9 Sept. 2025.
- “Arabic Letter Semiotics and Early Ottoman Scholarship.” *Middle East Studies Association (MESA) Annual Meeting*, Washington, DC, 22–25 Nov. 2025.

- Arabic Letter Semiotics and Early Ottoman Scholarship.” *Annual Fellows Symposium*, German Historical Institute (GHI), Dec. 2025.
- “Als Buchstaben die Welt ordneten: Arabische Buchstabensemiotik an der Schwelle zur Neuzeit.” *Max Weber Stiftung Themenportal*, 2025.

Cultivating a Global Conversation on Early Modern Islamic Scholarship

- Organiser. The Heirs of Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī (d. 1505): The Persistence of Islamic Scholarship in the Early Modern Period. International webinar series organised on behalf of the Orient-Institut Beirut in cooperation with the Universities of Göttingen and Bamberg, Apr.-July 2026.

A volume containing the proceedings of this series is planned for publication in OIB’s *Beiruter Texte und Studien* (BTS) series.

Cluster 4.
Social
Sciences

The Social Sciences cluster examines the social as a dynamic and contested field of relations. Its research draws on qualitative and quantitative methods—including ethnography, oral history, discourse analysis, participant observation, and digital approaches—to explore how individuals and communities navigate social, political, economic, and cultural structures, and how forms of cooperation, conflict, and meaning-making emerge within them.

Bringing together scholars from across sociology, anthropology, political science, economics, history, geography, gender studies, critical race studies, and urban studies, the cluster is attentive both to social practices and to the ways in which people interpret and shape their worlds. It places particular emphasis on transnational connections, comparative perspectives, and theory grounded in regional realities.

The cluster is guided by the principle of studying the Middle East with the Middle East through close engagement of its scholarly communities rather than merely studying it from within the region. In doing so, it promotes more reciprocal forms of knowledge production and reflects critically on the methods and assumptions that shape the social sciences.

Sarah El Bulbeisi



Sarah El Bulbeisi's research examines how violence shapes relationships, emotional life, and forms of subjectivity. Drawing on interdisciplinary approaches from anthropology, psychoanalysis, and critical social theory, she investigates the ways war, displacement, and political uncertainty transform everyday experiences and social worlds in contemporary Lebanon.

Her work is guided by a concern with how violence exceeds the moment of its occurrence. Rather than approaching violence solely as a political or historical event, El Bulbeisi investigates the traces it leaves in intimate relationships, family dynamics, collective identities, and everyday forms of belonging. By bringing psychoanalytic perspectives into dialogue with anthropological inquiry, she seeks to understand how individuals and communities live with unresolved histories while navigating uncertain futures.

Situated in Lebanon, her research examines the social and emotional consequences of prolonged violence, displacement, and political uncertainty. Her work contributes to wider debates on memory, intimacy, subjectivity, and social transformation in the contemporary Middle East.

At the centre of El Bulbeisi's current work is the project *Living in Limbo*, which investigates the interrelations between violence, trauma, intimacy, and subjectivity in contemporary Lebanon. Drawing on narrative-biographical interviews, long-term ethnographic engagement, and psychoanalytically informed anthropological approaches, the project

explores how experiences of violence shape both interpersonal relationships and individual self-understandings.

El Bulbeisi draws particular attention to the nexus between intimacy and violence across multiple relational domains, including family and intergenerational relationships, romantic partnerships, and attachments to confessional communities. The project begins from the premise that experiences of loss, displacement, and conflict leave psychological and social traces that extend beyond individuals and become embedded within wider networks of relationships.

The research situates these questions within the continuing aftermath of the Lebanese Civil War and subsequent crises, including repeated wars, the financial collapse, and the Beirut port explosion. Against this backdrop, *Living in Limbo* examines how individuals make sense of an unresolved past and an uncertain present, and how experiences of precarity, alienation, and disconnection shape everyday life across generations.

By bringing the concept of trauma into conversation with historical, social, and political processes, the project contributes to a deeper understanding of how systemic violence becomes embedded within intimate relations and forms of subjectivity. Particular attention is paid to questions of gender, generational change, and the transmission of memories and affects across time.

Creating Spaces for Difficult Histories

Beyond her individual research, El Bulbeisi contributed to OIB's public programming through initiatives that brought academic inquiry into dialogue with artistic and cultural practice.

Among the most significant was the screening of *The Soil and the Sea* at OIB, followed by a discussion with filmmaker Daniele Rugo (University of Oxford) and producer Carmen Abou-Jaoude (Université Saint-Joseph). Organised and moderated by El Bulbeisi, the event explored the question of unmarked mass graves from the Lebanese Civil War and the broader afterlives of violence in contemporary Lebanon.

The discussion addressed the challenges of representing violence without reproducing it, the absence of official processes of reckoning with the Civil War, and the role of artistic and visual practices in making silenced histories visible. By bringing together scholars, filmmakers, artists, and members of the public, the event created a space for reflection on memory, justice, and historical responsibility.

Research, Public Debate, and Critical Engagement

El Bulbeisi views engagement beyond academia as an important dimension of scholarly work. She argues that research can contribute to public understanding of complex social and political issues, particularly in contexts where public debates are shaped by polarisation, misinformation, or the marginalisation of particular voices and experiences.

This commitment informed her participation in several scholarly forums during the reporting period. Particularly significant was her contribution to the conference *Talking about (the Silencing of) Palestine: On its Epistemological and Political Challenges* at Goethe University Frankfurt. Bringing together scholars from multiple disciplines, the conference examined the political, institutional, and epistemological conditions shaping public debate on Palestine and provided an important platform for interdisciplinary exchange. Her participation in discussions on war, violence, memory, and Palestine reflects a broader commitment to connecting theoretical scholarship with contemporary social and political questions.

The renewed escalation of war in Lebanon during the reporting period further underscored the relevance of the questions that animate her work. As violence, insecurity, displacement, and uncertainty once again became part of everyday life, issues that had long informed her research acquired renewed immediacy. The experience reinforced her interest in how individuals and communities navigate loss, precarity, and the fragility of social life under conditions of prolonged crisis.

Beirut remains central to my research and intellectual practice because it offers a unique vantage point from which to think about violence, memory, displacement, and social transformation. The city’s layered histories of war, migration, political crisis, and coexistence make it an important site for examining how large-scale historical processes are lived, negotiated, and remembered in everyday life.

–Sarah El Bulbeisi

SCHOLAR HIGHLIGHTS

Violence, Silence, and the Politics of Knowledge

- Speaker. *Talking about (the Silencing of) Palestine: On Its Epistemological and Political Challenges*. Goethe University Frankfurt, 16–17 Jan. 2025.
- “Krieg und Frieden.” *Neue Gesellschaft für Psychologie Conference*, Berlin, 10–11 Apr. 2025.

Public Engagement and Critical Dialogue

- Organiser and moderator. Screening of *The Soil and the Sea* and discussion with Daniele Rugo (University of Oxford) and Carmen Abou-Jaoude (Université Saint-Joseph). Orient-Institut Beirut, 28 Feb. 2025.

Carol Hakim

Carol Hakim joined OIB as a Research Associate in September 2023. A historian of the modern Middle East, her work examines the political transformations that accompanied decolonization, state formation, and the emergence of authoritarian rule in the twentieth century. Before joining OIB, she taught modern Middle Eastern history and politics at the University of Minnesota and held research and teaching positions at the American University of Beirut’s Center for Arab and Middle East Studies (CAMES). Her professional experience also includes work in journalism, policy analysis, and international organizations, including Agence France-Presse (AFP), Oxford Analytica, and ESCWA.

At OIB, Hakim has been developing a research project on the rise of durable authoritarian regimes in the Middle East in the context of decolonization and the Cold War. Focusing on Egypt and Syria, the project investigates how the intertwined processes of national independence, regional political realignment, and superpower competition shaped state formation and political authority in the decades following World War II. By tracing the parallel yet distinct trajectories of both countries, the research seeks to illuminate broader patterns of political development in the modern Middle East and to contribute to ongoing debates on authoritarianism, state-building, and the legacies of the postcolonial order.

This project forms part of OIB’s broader engagement with the modern history of the Middle East and the political, intellectual, and social transformations that have shaped the region since the twentieth century.

Christian Thuselt



Christian Thuselt's research examines how political communities imagine and construct statehood. Working at the intersection of political theory, political sociology, and Middle East studies, he investigates the narratives, symbols, and conceptual frameworks through which political actors understand authority, sovereignty, and collective belonging. During the reporting period, his work focused on the political thought of the Iraqi Shi'i cleric Muqtada al-Sadr and the ways in which statehood is conceptualized within contemporary Islamist and nationalist discourses. Drawing on al-Sadr's writings, the project explores how statehood is articulated not only as an institutional arrangement but as the material expression of a narrated social order.

Rather than treating the state primarily as a set of institutions or power relations, the research shows how political authority is legitimated through stories, symbols, and competing visions of social life. These include religious and secular political imaginaries, notions of citizenship and sovereignty, and broader understandings of collective identity within contemporary Islamo-nationalist thought.

By foregrounding these narrative dimensions, the project contributes to debates on sovereignty, representation, secularism, and the symbolic foundations of political authority in the modern Middle East. It highlights how political communities are held together through shared understandings of legitimacy, belonging, and representation, rather than governance alone.

Political Representation and the Paradox of the State

A recurring theme throughout Thuselt's scholarship is the relationship between political institutions and representation. His work asks how political structures come to embody collective identities and why political authority continues to depend on symbolic claims that can never be fully resolved.

These questions informed a co-authored article "And It Is Still About the State: Centralist and Federalist Normative Orders in Syria and Lebanon" with Benjamin Heidrich and published in *Ethnopolitics* during the reporting period. Using the examples of the Syrian movement Ahrar al-Sham and debates on federalism in Lebanon, the article challenges assumptions that federal arrangements necessarily offer a more pluralistic alternative to centralized political systems. Instead, the authors argue that all territorial political orders remain bound by the paradox of representation: Political institutions must claim to stand for a collective while simultaneously remaining separate from it.

This broader concern with the symbolic foundations of political life links Thuselt's work on statehood, nationalism, federalism, and political theology and reflects his interest in the conceptual assumptions that underpin contemporary political systems.

Research, Conflict, and Public Understanding

Alongside his academic research, Thuselt contributed to public discussions on Lebanon and the wider region through interviews with Austrian and German media outlets, including ORF and several German newspapers.

For Thuselt, public engagement serves an important purpose even when scholarship cannot provide immediate political solutions. Academic research, he argues, can help illuminate the dilemmas, contradictions, and competing perspectives that shape conflicts and political crises. By clarifying the historical and conceptual dimensions of contemporary events, scholars can contribute to more informed public debate and a deeper understanding of political realities.

Scholarship Under Conditions of War

The reporting period was marked by the escalation of war in Lebanon, which affected both Thuselt's research activities and his institutional responsibilities at the Orient-Institut Beirut.

Plans to organise a conference in cooperation with the Arab Council for the Social Sciences (ACSS) ultimately proved impossible to realise. Travel restrictions, difficulties securing funding, political sensitivities, and the broader uncertainty created by the war, significantly limited opportunities for international academic exchange.

As a member of the Institute’s publications team, Thuselt also experienced firsthand the practical consequences of conflict for scholarly work. Local publishers were forced to suspend operations, logistical networks collapsed, production costs increased dramatically, and many staff members had to prioritize the safety and wellbeing of their families. These conditions delayed or prevented the publication of several projects that had been under preparation.

These experiences underscored the often invisible infrastructures that make academic research possible and highlighted the challenges of sustaining scholarly activity during periods of profound political and social disruption.

At the very least, we can help people understand a conflict and identify the various dilemmas and concerns inherent in it.

– Christian Thuselt

SCHOLAR HIGHLIGHTS

Publications and Academic Collaborations

- Heidrich, Benjamin, and Christian Thuselt. “And It Is Still About the State: Centralist and Federalist Normative Orders in Syria and Lebanon.” *Ethnopolitics*, vol. 24, 12 Mar. 2025.
- Conference initiative developed with the Arab Council for the Social Sciences (ACSS) (cancelled due to the war in Lebanon).

Media and Public Engagement

- Interviews for ORF on the war in Lebanon.
- Interviews and commentary for German newspapers on Lebanon and regional politics.

New Directions in Law, Religion, and Governance: A Conversation with Nahed Samour



OIB is pleased to welcome Dr. Nahed Samour as a research associate. Trained in both law and Islamic studies, Samour studied at the Universities of Bonn, Damascus, and Humboldt University Berlin, as well as at Birzeit University in Ramallah, the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS) in London, and Harvard University.

She was a doctoral fellow at the Max Planck Institute for European Legal History in Frankfurt am Main and completed her legal clerkship at the Berlin Court of Appeals. Following her doctorate, she held a postdoctoral position at the Eric Castrén Institute of International Law and Human Rights at the University of Helsinki and served as an Early Career Fellow at the Lichtenberg-Kolleg, Göttingen Institute for Advanced Study. Between 2014 and 2018, she taught as Junior Faculty at the Harvard Law School Institute for Global Law and Policy.

From 2019 to 2022, Samour was a Core Emerging Investigator at the Law & Society Institute of Humboldt University Berlin’s Faculty of Law. During this time, she also served as Principal Investigator of co2libri (conceptual collaboration – living borderless research interaction), a collaborative initiative of the Berlin University Alliance involving Humboldt University and the

Free University of Berlin. She joins OIB from Radboud University Nijmegen and remains actively involved in the Race-Religion Constellation research network.

To mark her arrival, we asked Samour about her academic journey, current research interests, and her vision for the future of Islamic Studies.

Your research brings together questions of law, religion, constitutionalism, and political authority. What are the central questions that currently drive your work?

With my background in law and Islamic studies, I am interested in how law comes into being, acquires authority, and is shaped through processes of interpretation, contestation, and practice. Rather than treating law as a fixed set of rules only, I examine how legal concepts emerge, gain acceptance, or are rejected over time, and how different actors and communities contribute to the making of legal norms. A significant part of my research focuses on early Islamic legal history. I explore how judges (*qāḍīs*), *muftī*, scholars, political authorities, litigants, and witnesses collectively shaped Islamic law, both in its substantive doctrines and procedural practices. Courts become particularly important sites of analysis because they reveal law not merely as doctrine but as a practice involving competing interests, evidentiary procedures, and institutional constraints. By studying early court proceedings, I seek to understand how legal authority was negotiated and exercised in different regions of the early Abbasid Empire.

Alongside my historical work, I also engage with contemporary questions of international law and violence as they shape and structure the lived realities of many people in the Middle East. I examine how violence in the region is interpreted both by scholars based in and from the region and within international legal institutions such as the International Court of Justice and the International Criminal Court, and how these legal framings, in turn, circulate into and reshape debates and institutional practices within Europe. Rather than treating these sites as separate analytical spheres, I am interested in how they are deeply entangled: how experiences of violence are translated into legal categories, how those categories travel across institutional and geographical contexts, and how international legal discourse both reflects and refracts the unequal conditions under which claims to justice are made.

My scholarship contributes to debates in Islamic legal history, legal theory, constitutionalism, and international law by showing that law is a site of ongoing contestation. I am particularly interested in how the uni-

versal claims of liberal international law are challenged by the realities of violence and inequality in the Middle East, and how legal institutions can both advance and frustrate the pursuit of justice.

What makes Beirut and the wider Middle East an important place from which to think about these questions?

Beirut and the wider Middle East are important places from which I think about these questions because the region has become a central site for understanding the relationship between law, violence, and political authority. Ongoing catastrophes, erasure, and killings raise fundamental questions about how law responds to violence and how legal institutions as well as scholarship frame and interpret these processes. I am particularly interested in how developments in the Middle East increasingly shape legal reasoning at the international level. Catastrophic developments emerging in the region are becoming part of the jurisprudence and debates of international courts, influencing how legal concepts such as protection, accountability and responsibility are understood and applied, or fail and give rise to new understandings of law. In this sense, it is becoming impossible to think about contemporary international law without considering the Middle East. At the same time, legal institutions—especially the International Court of Justice—have become deeply intertwined with the region’s political and legal realities, making the relationship between the two an important focus of my research.

As you begin your work at OIB, what research themes, collaborations, or conversations are you most interested in developing in the coming years?

I bring ongoing projects with the Arab Council for the Social Sciences (ACSS), funded via the Arab-German Young Academy, as well as collaborations with the American University of Beirut on questions of land, law, and dispossession. I am also part of an international network of scholars working within and alongside Third World Approaches to International Law (TWAIL), a body of scholarship that interrogates how international law has historically been implicated in projects of empire, extraction, and the management of racialized inequalities. As an incoming researcher at OIB, I am particularly interested in developing conversations that connect Islamic legal traditions, legal history, law and society, political theology, and contemporary questions of international law. Bringing early Islamic legal history into dialogue with contemporary legal debates allows me to explore alternative genealogies of law

and authority that challenge dominant narratives centred on Europe and the modern state.

I am eager to collaborate with scholars across disciplines who are interested in critically examining the production of legal knowledge and the relationship between law, power, and violence. OIB offers a particularly important space from which to investigate how legal and political orders are constituted, contested, and legitimized, both within the Middle East and globally. In the coming years, I hope to deepen my research on the relationship between the Middle East and international legal institutions. I am interested not only in how developments in the region shape international legal doctrine, but also in how the Middle East exposes the limits and contradictions of the contemporary international legal order. The region raises pressing questions about selective enforcement, unequal recognition of suffering, and the gap between the liberal promises of international law and its operation within a profoundly unequal global system.

What do you hope your work will contribute to OIB's intellectual profile?

My academic background has been shaped by Arab, German, British, and American scholarly traditions, as well as by interdisciplinary engagements across Islamic studies, law, history, and political theory. I hope to contribute these diverse intellectual perspectives to OIB and to foster conversations that move across linguistic, disciplinary, and geographical boundaries. In particular, I am interested in exploring how German scholarly traditions can be brought into productive dialogue with international and regional approaches to the study of Islam, law, and the Middle East. At a time when the region is increasingly central to global debates on violence and accountability, I hope to rethink perspectives on how we study and engage with its histories, intellectual traditions, and contemporary realities. More broadly, I hope my work will help strengthen OIB as a space for critical and internationally connected scholarship—one that not only studies the region but also takes seriously the intellectual contributions emerging from it, and reflects on how its past, present, and future shape broader global conversations.



06

OIB Supports Early Career Scholars



Residential Programme

The Residential Fellows programme at OIB brings together doctoral and postdoctoral researchers from universities across Europe, North America, and Lebanon whose work spanned history, anthropology, political thought, economics, comparative literature, religious studies, and cultural studies. Their projects examined questions of intellectual exchange, migration, political transformation, social justice, heritage, and memory across the Middle East and beyond. Despite their diverse disciplinary backgrounds, the fellows shared a commitment to historically grounded and regionally embedded scholarship shaped by Beirut's archives, libraries, intellectual communities, and ongoing political and social transformations.

The doctoral and postdoctoral fellows actively contributed to OIB's intellectual life through seminars, workshops, collaborative projects, and public engagement activities, reinforcing the Institute's role as a space for critical scholarly exchange and interdisciplinary dialogue.

For many fellows, OIB represented far more than a host institution. It provided the time, stability, and collegial environment necessary for sustained research during a period marked by war and regional uncertainty. Fellows consistently emphasised the value of belonging to a diverse cohort whose members shared a commitment to rigorous scholarship and mutual support. Informal conversations, shared meals, friendships, and everyday encounters often proved as important as formal academic activities, fostering intellectual exchange and reducing the isolation frequently associated with doctoral and postdoctoral research.

Many fellows noted that their time at OIB led to lasting professional relationships, new collaborations, and networks that will continue well beyond the fellowship period. The Institute's welcoming atmosphere, dedicated staff, and commitment to sustaining scholarly life under difficult circumstances were repeatedly cited as central to both the advancement of individual research projects and the strengthening of a broader community of scholars working across the Middle East and beyond.

Intellectual Histories, Political Thought, and Knowledge Production

These fellows examined how ideas, texts, institutions, and political movements shape intellectual life across the Middle East and the Mediterranean and its diaspora. Their work explored critical theory, state formation, archives, political opposition, translation, literary production, and the circulation of knowledge across time and space.

The 2025–2026 Fellows in Numbers

12	4	1
Doctoral Fellows	Postdoctoral Fellows	Monograph
2	3	2
Publication Awards	Research Grants	Postdoctoral Offers
2	13	9
Dissertations Defended	Research Presentations	Research Publications
2	1	2
Conferences Co-organised	Journal Special Issue	Exhibition Curated

Susan Abraham



Susan Abraham was a doctoral fellow from the Department of Spanish, Italian, and Portuguese at the University of Virginia. Her research examined the history and culture of early modern Spain in connection with North Africa and the wider Mediterranean. Her dissertation focused on the textual production of Moriscos—Muslims forcibly converted to Christianity and later expelled from Iberia—in seventeenth-century Tunisia. Drawing on Arabic and Spanish sources, including didactic miscellanies, doctrinal treatises, polemical

poetry, Qur’anic exegesis, and Islamic legal writings, her work explored how displaced communities used literature, language, and translation to negotiate religious identity, cultural continuity, and belonging across the Mediterranean.

During her fellowship at OIB, Abraham completed the final stages of her dissertation, *Narrating Faith Across the Straits: Morisco Manuals of Faith in Tunis and the Early Modern Mediterranean*. The project examined how Morisco authors adapted and transformed literary and religious traditions from both Iberian and North African contexts to articulate new forms of communal identity in exile. By bringing Morisco writings into conversation with Arabic literary and intellectual traditions as well as early modern Spanish literature, her research challenged approaches that treat these texts solely within a Spanish literary framework and instead highlighted the complex networks of exchange that shaped Mediterranean intellectual life.

The fellowship period proved especially productive for the development of her research. During her residency, Abraham completed two dissertation chapters and drafted substantial portions of both the introduction and conclusion. She also presented her work at international scholarly gatherings, including symposia organised by the Iberian History Seminar at Oxford University and the Mediterranean Seminar in Tunis. These exchanges helped refine key arguments of the dissertation and contributed to the development of a chapter exploring connections between Morisco writings and Andalusian *qaṣīda* traditions. The OIB Library’s strong holdings in Islamic studies and Arabic intellectual history provided important resources that supported the completion of the project.

Beyond her dissertation, Abraham’s work contributes to broader efforts to rethink the intellectual and literary history of the early modern

Mediterranean through multilingual and transregional perspectives. Her research foregrounds the movement of texts, ideas, and religious traditions across linguistic and political boundaries while illuminating the creative strategies through which displaced communities negotiated exile and belonging. Shortly after completing her fellowship and successfully defending her dissertation, she joined the Europe in the Middle East – The Middle East in Europe (EUME) programme in Berlin as a postdoctoral fellow, where she continues to develop her research on Mediterranean intellectual and literary histories.

Jan Altaner

Jan Altaner is featured in “OIB Connects Scholars” on page 186.

Xena Amro



Xena Amro is a scholar of classical Arabic literature whose research examines the intellectual, literary, and material histories of Arabic epistolary writing. Her dissertation explores Arabic literary letters from the classical to the early modern period, investigating how knowledge was produced, concealed, transmitted, and preserved through epistolary practices. At the centre of her work is the concept of *kitmān*—the deliberate withholding of knowledge—which she uses to examine how letters regulate access to

meaning through implication, selective disclosure, rhetorical indirection, and audience-specific forms of communication. Through this lens, Amro analyses the ways epistles operated across courtly, bureaucratic, and scholarly environments, revealing how the management of knowledge depended not only on what was communicated but also on what remained unsaid.

A second dimension of her research focuses on the porous boundaries between administrative and literary writing and on the afterlives of epistolary texts in manuscript and print culture. By tracing how letters were recopied, excerpted, reorganised, and reframed over time, she explores the role of compilers, copyists, editors, and readers in shaping the transmission of intellectual traditions. Through this *longue durée* approach, her work situates epistolary writing within broader histories of knowledge production, literary culture, and manuscript transmission in the Islamic world.

During the reporting period, Amro completed two dissertation chapters and made a significant archival discovery: a collection of letters by Islamic revivalists that expanded the chronological scope of her project and opened new avenues for studying epistolary practices within later intellectual and religious networks. Her research drew on extensive work in libraries, archives, and book collections, including the American University of Beirut Archives and Special Collections, where she examined rare printed materials, newspapers, and epistolary sources relevant to Arabic intellectual and literary history. She also identified important materials through research in independent bookstores and private collections, highlighting the continued circulation of texts beyond formal archival repositories.

Amro shared her work in a range of international scholarly settings. She presented “Between Private and Public: An Epistemology of *Kitmān* in Early Islamic *Risālah*” at the Arab-German Young Academy at the University of Aberdeen and participated in the NYU Abu Dhabi *Graduate Student Research Workshop*. In addition, her papers were accepted for presentation at the *DAVO Annual Conference*, the *Middle East Studies Association (MESA) Annual Meeting*, the *Arabic Pasts Conference*, and the *Modern Language Association (MLA) Convention*.

Her research received significant recognition during the reporting period. Amro was awarded the John Hunwick Research Fund Award through Northwestern University’s Institute for the Study of Islamic Thought in Africa and received the competitive MENA Graduate Assistantship for the 2026–2027 academic year. These awards support the continued development of her research while enabling new teaching and scholarly opportunities. Through her work on literary epistles, manuscript cultures, and intellectual history, Amro contributes to ongoing discussions about the circulation of knowledge, textual transmission, and the enduring significance of Arabic literary traditions.

Simon Conrad

Simon Conrad is featured in “OIB Looks Ahead” on page 248.

Angela Haddad



Angela Haddad was a doctoral fellow in the Department of Comparative Literature at New York University. Her research explores migration, representation, and social formation between the Eastern Mediterranean and the Caribbean Basin from the late nineteenth to the mid-twentieth century. She examines how Arab migration to Cuba, Haiti, and the Dominican Republic generated new social, cultural, and ethno-racial imaginaries across interconnected imperial, national, and diasporic contexts. Drawing on travel

writing, novels, cultural journals, newspapers, lectures, and translation practices, she investigated how intellectual currents associated with the Nahda circulated between Beirut, Cairo, and the Caribbean, shaping local debates on authenticity, identity, and belonging. More broadly, her research examined how ideas, texts, and literary forms traveled across linguistic and geographic boundaries, and how processes of translation mediated cultural exchange and social transformation.

During her fellowship at OIB, Haddad completed the final stages of her dissertation, *Migration, Representation, and Social Formation between the Eastern Mediterranean and the Caribbean Basin, 1870–1950*. The project traced how Arab migrants mobilized literary and translational practices emerging from Beirut- and Cairo-based intellectual circles and from Arabic-language print cultures in the Americas to engage with local Caribbean thought and debates on nationhood, race, and culture. A particular focus of her research during the fellowship was the work of Salim Aun, a migrant writer from Beirut to Port-au-Prince, whose translations offered a unique lens through which to examine the intersections between Syro-Lebanese diasporic thought, late Nahda discourses of authenticity, and Haitian Indigenist intellectual currents.

The fellowship period represented a decisive stage in the completion of her doctoral project. Through sustained engagement with Arabic-language periodicals, émigré writings, and transregional print networks, Haddad refined key arguments of the dissertation and expanded her analysis of translation as a mode of intellectual and cultural mediation. Feedback received through OIB's scholarly environment contributed significantly to the development of her work, helping her sharpen the conceptual links between migration, diaspora, literary production, and social formation across the Mediterranean and Caribbean worlds. At the conclusion of her fellowship, and before the end of the reporting

period, she successfully defended her dissertation, marking a major milestone in the development of her research.

During her residency, Haddad also presented her work at international scholarly gatherings, including symposia organised by the Iberian History Seminar at Oxford University and the Mediterranean Seminar in Tunis. These engagements enabled her to place her research in conversation with broader discussions on Mediterranean studies, migration, diaspora, and comparative literary history, while further developing dissertation chapters that emerged from her fellowship research.

Beyond her dissertation, Haddad is a literary translator from Arabic into English and has published scholarship on Arab diasporic literature in Latin America. During the fellowship period, she also served as an editorial assistant to Zeina G. Halabi and Michael Allan on *The Cambridge Companion to Modern Arabic Literature*, contributing to a major reference work in the field of modern Arab intellectual and literary history.

Ansar Jasim



Ansar Jasim is a doctoral researcher whose work examines the relationship between urban infrastructure, state formation, and everyday political life in modern Iraq. Her dissertation focuses on Sadr City, one of Baghdad's largest and most politically significant districts, tracing how housing, roads, water systems, electricity networks, and flood-control infrastructures have shaped relations between the state and urban populations since the 1950s. Drawing on ethnographic fieldwork, oral histories, Iraqi

literature, and archival research, she investigates how infrastructures become sites through which political authority is exercised, negotiated, and transformed. Central to her project is the concept of *subaltern statecraft*, which highlights the infrastructural labour through which marginalised communities repair, extend, and reshape the material arrangements of urban life.

During her fellowship at OIB, Jasim made significant progress on her dissertation, including the development of a major chapter examining the urban grid of Sadr City as a socio-material infrastructure through which state authority is assembled and contested across successive political regimes. She also further developed her conceptual work on infrastructural politics and subaltern statecraft, resulting in an article



Inside the private storage room of a Mutanabbi Street bookseller in Baghdad. Access to these decades-old collections is based on trust, revealing archival practices that exist beyond the boundaries of both state institutions and private ownership.

manuscript currently being prepared for submission to the *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*.

The fellowship enabled archival and field research in Beirut and Damascus. Through work with the Rifat Chadirji Archive at the Arab Image Foundation and engagement with research communities at the American University of Beirut, particularly the Beirut Urban Lab and the Gender and Oral History Archive, Jasim situated her research on Iraq within broader regional debates on urbanisation, reconstruction, infrastructure, and state formation.

Beyond her dissertation, Jasim contributed actively to regional scholarly exchange. She presented her research and moderated an Arabic-language panel at the annual conference of *The Academic Research Institute in Iraq (TARII)*, participated in the workshop *Seeing the State Through the City* at the American University of Beirut, and took part in the *Re-Imagining Knowledge Production in/on Syria (RISE)* conference at Damascus University. Participation in the Beirut Urban Lab Winter School also contributed to the development of an emerging SWANA urban research network and collaborative initiatives among early-career scholars working on urban questions across the region.

Committed to multilingual public scholarship, Jasim published essays in English and German addressing food sovereignty, environmental justice, reconstruction, and social transformation in Iraq and Syria. Her article “Syria’s Seeds and the Politics of Care: A Materialist Feminist Perspective,” published by the Arab Reform Initiative, examined collective forms of care and agricultural self-organisation beyond state-centred approaches to food security. She also contributed to Arabic-language public debate through a podcast produced by the Syrian Center for Policy Research on environmental sustainability, political economy, and social justice in contexts affected by conflict and displacement.

Ziad Kiblawi



Ziad Kiblawi is a doctoral fellow from St Antony's College, University of Oxford, whose research examines modern Arab social and political thought. His work focuses on the history of Arabic social theory and the intellectual conditions that shaped the emergence of critical theoretical discourses in the Arab world during the mid-twentieth century. Situated at the intersection of intellectual history, political thought, and critical theory, his dissertation investigates the transformation of analytic categories of critique between

the 1950s and 1980s, tracing shifts from existentialist and culturalist currents within Arab nationalism to Marxist, psychoanalytic, and historical-materialist approaches to social and political analysis.

Kiblawi's doctoral project seeks to historicize Arabic social theory by situating its dominant intellectual traditions within broader social, political, and historical contexts. His research explores how Arab intellectuals responded to the crisis of 1967 and the renewed imperative of national liberation by rethinking the relationship between philosophy, science, and politics. Particular attention is given to debates surrounding enlightenment, the Nahda, and the status of critical concepts in Arabic, examining how these categories were reformulated through engagement with both local intellectual traditions and global theoretical currents.

During his fellowship at OIB, Kiblawi continued developing his dissertation on Arab intellectual history while remaining closely engaged with Beirut's scholarly and cultural communities. His work built on earlier research on Arab Marxism and critical theory, including his master's thesis on Mahdi Amil's theoretical practice. In addition to his academic research, he contributed to public engagement with intellectual and cultural history through curatorial work, most notably as co-curator of the exhibition *Je suis inculte! The Salon d'Automne and the National Canon* at the Sursock Museum, which explored questions of canon formation, cultural institutions, and artistic legitimacy in Lebanon.

The fellowship provided an important environment for advancing his research during a particularly difficult period marked by war and instability in Lebanon. As educational and cultural institutions across the country faced significant disruptions, OIB remained an important space for scholarly work and intellectual exchange. Kiblawi highlighted the Institute's academic community and library as particularly valuable resources, offering continuity, access to research materials, and

a supportive environment for sustained intellectual work. His research contributes to broader efforts to rethink modern Arab intellectual history through close engagement with the theoretical traditions, political debates, and conceptual vocabularies that shaped twentieth-century Arab thought.

Christin Sander



Christin Sander is a historian of modern Syria whose research examines the intellectual and social history of the Arab Left under Ba'thist authoritarianism. Her doctoral project, *Localizing the Global Arab Left: Communist Perspectives on Oppositional Unrests in Syria, 1976–1982*, focuses on the Syrian Communist Labour League/Party (CLL/CLP), a largely overlooked component of Syrian opposition politics. Through close engagement with clandestine party publications, archival materials, and oral history interviews,

she reconstructs how Syrian Marxists understood political opposition, revolutionary agency, and social transformation in the aftermath of the 1967 defeat and amid the consolidation of authoritarian rule. Her work contributes to a broader historiography of the Arab New Left by recovering intellectual traditions and political experiences that have often been marginalised in narratives of modern Syrian history.

During her fellowship at OIB, Sander reached a decisive stage in her doctoral research. She completed the first drafts of three dissertation chapters and moved from archival collection and translation toward developing the project's broader conceptual and analytical framework. This transition enabled her to situate the history of the CLL/CLP within wider debates on opposition politics, authoritarianism, and the intellectual history of the Arab Left.

A central component of her research involved extensive oral-history fieldwork with former members of the CLL/CLP. Through more than ten interviews conducted in Syria, Germany, and online, Sander gained access to personal recollections, political experiences, and previously unknown archival materials. These conversations enriched her understanding of the social worlds, intellectual debates, and political trajectories that shaped the Syrian Left under conditions of repression. The fellowship also enabled regular research trips to Syria, where she visited the National Library in Damascus and established direct contact with former activists, intellectuals, and scholars working on Syrian history.



The apartment of one of Sander's interlocutors in Damascus. It continues to be a gathering place for Syrian communists.



Christin Sander interviews a former member of the Communist Labour League (*Rābiṭat al-'Amal al-Shuyūʿī*) in Damascus, Oct. 2025. Conducted over several meetings, during which the interlocutor shared memories of her past and reflections on the present.

Sander remained actively engaged in scholarly exchange throughout the reporting period. She participated in the conference *Re-Imagining Knowledge Production in/on Syria (RISE)* at Damascus University, where she joined discussions on the future of Syrian studies and met many of the scholars whose work have shaped her own research. Within the OIB community, participation in the Theory and Method Seminar and a reading group on Marxist thought beyond the West played an important role in refining her methodological and theoretical approach.

Beyond academic research, Sander contributed to public discussions on Syrian political history through the co-authored article “Khalid Bakdash and the Tragedy of Syrian Communism,” published in *Jacobin* magazine together with Jens Hanssen. The article introduced wider audiences to the history of Syrian communism and highlighted the diversity of leftist political traditions that developed under increasingly restrictive political conditions. Through her dissertation, archival research, and oral-history work, Sander is helping to recover neglected histories of political dissent, intellectual production, and revolutionary thought in modern Syria.



“Why the Communist Labour League [*Limādhā Rābiṭat al-'Amal al-Shuyūʿī*]” of the Communist Labour League [*Rābiṭat al-'Amal al-Shuyūʿī*], brochure published 1977 in Syria, documenting its foundation. Through a recent interview, Sander learned that the brochure was printed in Beirut and secretly smuggled into Syria to be distributed there.

December 08,
2025

Syria

History / Party Politics

Subscribe

Khalid Bakdash and the
Tragedy of Syrian
Communism

BY
[JENS HANSSEN](#) / [CHRISTIN SANDER](#)

Khalid Bakdash became the first communist MP in any Arab country when he was elected to the Syrian parliament in the 1950s. Bakdash's party was once a major political force, but it faded into irrelevance after forming a coalition with the ruling Ba'athists.



Khalid Bakdash became the most significant communist leader not merely in Syria but throughout the Arab world.
([Syrian Modern History](#) / Wikimedia)

Co-written by Christin Sander and Jens Hanssen, the article revisits the legacy of Khalid Bakdash, arguing that he should be understood not simply as a loyal Soviet-style communist or later ally of Ba'athist rule, but as a central figure in the formation of modern Syrian mass politics whose career reflected the tensions between anti-colonial nationalism, class struggle, and authoritarian state-building.

Janina Santer



Janina Santer is a historian of the modern Middle East whose research focuses on the history of the Lebanese state, welfare, and citizenship in the Eastern Mediterranean during the first half of the twentieth century. Her work examines how Lebanese citizens and political actors imagined the role of the state between the 1920s and the 1950s, paying particular attention to questions of social responsibility, welfare provision, and statecraft. By combining conceptual, intellectual, and social history, she seeks to recover

alternative political futures that were once envisioned in Bilad al-Sham and to understand how ordinary people articulated claims on the state and imagined its obligations toward society.

During the reporting period, Santer continued her research remotely due to travel restrictions, drawing on archival materials collected during previous research stays in Lebanon and France. Her most significant achievement was the completion and workshop of a draft article on the history of the Lebanese National Archives in Beirut. The article explores how the fragmented preservation of state records has shaped both historical knowledge and the writing of Lebanese history, arguing that the state's truncated paper trail is one reason why the Lebanese state itself often appears elusive in historical scholarship. Currently undergoing revision, the article represents an important contribution to debates on archives, state formation, and historical methodology in the modern Middle East.

Her research relied on extensive archival collections gathered over several years, including materials from the Lebanese National Archives as well as holdings at the INALCO and Cujas libraries in Paris. Through these sources, Santer continues to investigate the relationship between state institutions, welfare policies, and public expectations in twentieth-century Lebanon, contributing to a growing body of scholarship on governance and citizenship in the Eastern Mediterranean.

Despite working remotely, Santer remained actively engaged in the intellectual life of OIB through regular participation in the Theory and Method Seminar. The seminar provided an important forum for discussing work in progress, receiving specialized feedback from scholars working on Lebanon, Syria, and the wider region, and refining the conceptual foundations of her research. This sustained engagement

allowed her to remain connected to ongoing scholarly conversations while advancing her own project.

Santer’s work received additional recognition through a research grant from the Institute of Religion, Culture, and Public Life at Columbia University, awarded in support of her ongoing research on state formation, welfare, and archival history in modern Lebanon. As she continues revising her article for publication, her research offers new perspectives on the historical development of the Lebanese state and on the challenges of reconstructing state histories through fragmented archival records.

Mobility, Networks, and Social Transformation

These fellows investigated the movement of people, knowledge, labour, and institutions across local, regional, and transnational contexts. Their research explored medicine, migration, infrastructure, political economy, development, environmental change, and the social transformations produced by mobility and exchange.

Joan Chaker



Joan Chaker is a historian of the Ottoman Empire whose research examines the intersections of capitalism, labour, mobility, and environmental change in nineteenth-century rural Lebanon. Her doctoral dissertation, *A Muleteers’ History of Global Capitalism: Social, Environmental, and Cultural Transformation in Nineteenth-Century Lebanon*, investigates how rural societies experienced and reshaped global commercial integration through struggles over labour, transport, and the environment. centring on the collective

biography of muleteers—peasants who earned their livelihoods by transporting goods, people, and money across the countryside—the project offers a new perspective on how global capitalism transformed local economies and social hierarchies.

Drawing on Ottoman, ecclesiastical, legal, and oral-historical sources, Chaker demonstrates that muleteers played a pivotal role in peasant revolts during the first half of the nineteenth century and later became central actors in the informal economies that emerged alongside new systems of taxation and border-making. By situating Mount Lebanon within expanding global commodity chains, the dissertation also highlights the ecological and infrastructural constraints that shaped com-

mercial circulation. More broadly, the project argues that integration into global markets did not necessarily produce greater efficiency or prosperity; rather, it intensified tensions between accumulation, social reproduction, and environmental sustainability.

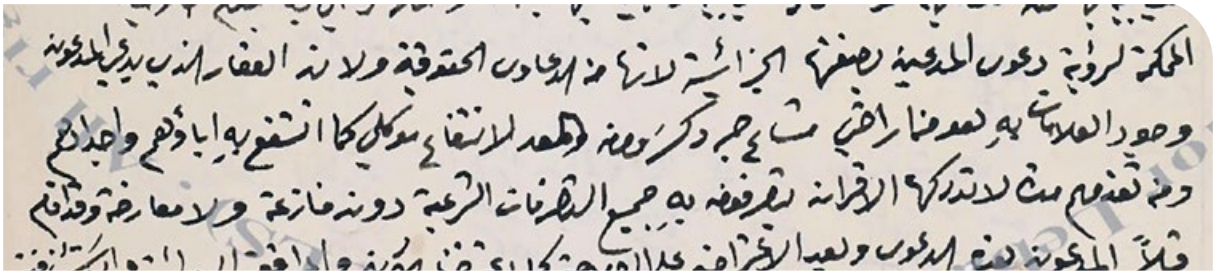
During her fellowship at OIB, Chaker made substantial progress on a major dissertation chapter, tentatively titled “Capital on Four Hooves: Material Life, Mobility, and Social Hierarchy in Nineteenth-Century Mount Lebanon.” The chapter explores mobility as a form of capital and examines how access to animals, roads, clothing, bedding, and provisions shaped social hierarchy in rural society. In developing this work, Chaker refined the dissertation’s broader conceptual framework and sharpened its engagement with questions of infrastructure, ecology, and the material conditions of movement.

Chaker’s research drew on extensive archival work in Lebanon. At the Holy Spirit University of Kaslik, she consulted local state and court records documenting contracts, debts, disputes, and property arrangements that reveal the workings of rural economic life. Research at the Maronite Patriarchate in Bkerke provided access to monastic archives that illuminate the role of monasteries as major landholders, creditors, and employers. She also worked with special collections at the American University of Beirut and incorporated oral-historical and folkloric materials to better understand how mobility, labour, hardship, and landscape were remembered in rural communities.

Beyond her dissertation research, Chaker remained actively involved in scholarly and public-facing initiatives. She presented her work at the *Fourth Annual Ottoman Political Economies Meeting* in Istanbul, where she delivered a paper on muleteers and capitalist transformation in nineteenth-century Mount Lebanon. She also contributed to the planning of a Beirut meeting within the *Ottoman Political Economy Workshop*, a collaborative initiative bringing together scholars working on empire, capitalism, and political economy across the Ottoman world.

Alongside her academic work, Chaker collaborated with Public Works Studio on research and policy discussions concerning Lebanon’s old

“Proceedings Register of the Court of First Instance of the District of Kisrawān, within the Illustrious Mutasarrifiyya of Mount Lebanon,” 19 Nov. 1908. Held at the Phoenix Center for Lebanese Studies, Holy Spirit University of Kaslik, on behalf of the Directorate General of Antiquities, Lebanese Ministry of Culture.



rent laws. Drawing on her expertise in political economy, property relations, and social inequality, she contributed to efforts aimed at developing more equitable approaches to housing legislation and loss distribution. This collaboration reflects her broader commitment to connecting historical research with contemporary debates on housing, debt, property, and social justice.

Throughout the fellowship, Chaker emphasised the importance of public scholarship and interdisciplinary engagement. Her participation in the OIB Theory and Method Seminar provided a sustained space for intellectual exchange across disciplines, helping to refine the theoretical and methodological foundations of her dissertation. More broadly, her work contributes to emerging efforts to write histories of capitalism from the perspective of rural societies, infrastructures, environments, and the ordinary actors whose labour sustained global economic transformation.

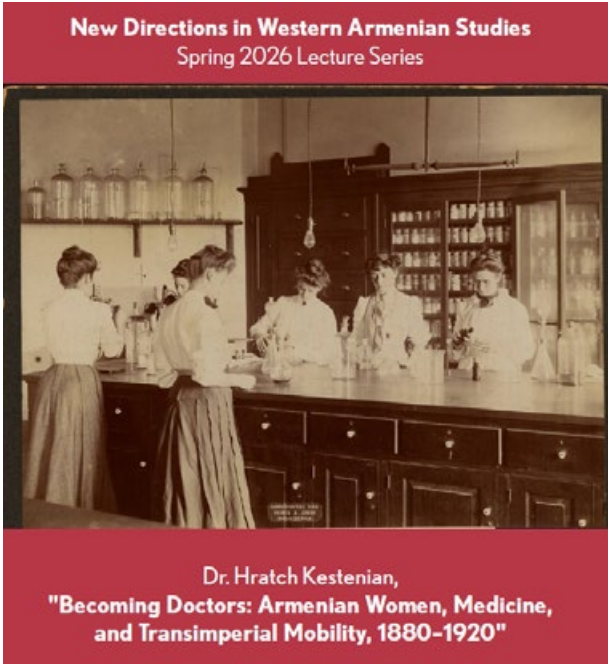
Hratch Kestonian



Hratch Kestonian is a historian of medicine whose research explores the intersections of public health, empire, migration, and knowledge production in the nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Middle East. Drawing on Ottoman Turkish, Armenian, French, and Arabic sources, his work examines how medical knowledge circulated across imperial boundaries and how disease became a site through which questions of governance, professionalisation, identity, and social belonging were negotiated. During his fellow-

ship year, Kestonian advanced two major book projects. The first, *TB or Not to Be: Empire and Medicalization*, builds on his doctoral research and investigates how tuberculosis shaped Ottoman governance, social hierarchies, and medical knowledge production. The second examines the emergence of a transnational Armenian medical network between 1816 and 1926 through a corpus of more than 250 medical dissertations produced by Armenian students at French and Swiss universities. These projects illuminate the movement of ideas, people, and institutions across imperial and national boundaries and recover neglected histories of medical expertise in the late Ottoman empire.

During the reporting period, Kestonian made substantial progress on both projects through archival research, publication, and scholarly exchange. A major milestone was the acceptance of his article, “Becoming Doctors: Armenian Women, Medicine, and Transimperial



Mobility, 1880–1920,” for publication in the *Journal of the Society for Armenian Studies*. The article examines how Armenian women navigated Ottoman, Russian, and European imperial systems in pursuit of medical education and professional careers, while highlighting the institutional and social networks that enabled their mobility. It represents the first major publication to emerge from his broader research on the Armenian medical diaspora.

Kestonian also presented new research at international academic venues. At the UCLA History Department Workshop on Armenian Early Modernity, he presented “Making Medicine Legible: Mik’ayēl Résten Ter-Petrossian and Early Modern Armenian Medical Print,” introducing a new dimension of his project focused on the relationship between medical print culture, language, and professional community formation. He further shared his work through invited lectures at the American University of Beirut and the Centre for Western Armenian Studies in London, presenting research on tuberculosis, Ottoman medical culture, and Armenian transimperial mobility to specialist and public audiences alike.

A central component of the fellowship was extensive archival research in Beirut. At the American University of Beirut, Kestonian consulted nineteenth-century Arabic medical journals and institutional collections documenting the history of medicine in the region. Research at the National Library of Lebanon uncovered Arabic hygiene manuals and medical publications that shed light on public health discourse and

vernacular medical knowledge. Additional work at the Bibliothèque Orientale at Université Saint-Joseph, including engagement with newly accessible collections on Armenian community history and folk medicine, expanded the comparative dimensions of both book projects. The OIB Library further supported his research through its holdings on Ottoman medical culture, Armenian communities in the Arab world, and Arabic-language scholarship on medicine and public health.

His research received additional recognition through a research grant from the National Association for Armenian Studies and Research (NAASR), supporting forthcoming archival work in Switzerland and France on the medical dissertation corpus at the centre of his second book project. Through collaborations with institutions including the Centre for Western Armenian Studies, the American University of Beirut, Université Saint-Joseph, and NAASR, Kestonian's scholarship has forged strong connections between Middle Eastern history, Armenian studies, and the history of medicine and has contributed new perspectives on mobility, expertise, and knowledge production across the late Ottoman world.

Zeead Yaghi



Zeead Yaghi is a historian of development, planning, and political economy whose research examines how the Lebanese countryside was transformed through state modernisation projects, capitalist integration, and shifting visions of rural life. His current book manuscript, *Planning National Disunity: State Modernization and Development in Rural Lebanon, 1958–1970*, explores the paradoxes of post-independence development policies in Lebanon. Drawing on extensive archival research, the project argues that state

efforts to stimulate agricultural production, tourism, and rural prosperity often accelerated rural displacement and contributed to the rapid urbanisation of Beirut and its peripheries. Situating Lebanon within broader histories of postcolonial development, Yaghi highlights the tensions between modernisation schemes and enduring pastoral visions of the countryside that shaped both planning practices and national imaginaries.

Alongside the development of his book manuscript, Yaghi began a new research agenda on the political economy of culture, tourism, and aesthetics in the Eastern Mediterranean. Building on the work of scholars such as Fernand Braudel, Jairus Banaji, and Raymond Williams, this

project examines how urban and cultural landscapes were transformed during the transition from imperial to colonial and postcolonial rule. By tracing the relationship between political-economic change and cultural production, the project explores how nostalgic representations of the Mediterranean emerged from processes of urban transformation, commodification, and tourism development.

During the reporting period, Yaghi continued advancing his monograph while developing new scholarly interventions on the history of planning and development in Lebanon. His article, "Third Way Developmentalism: Franco-Catholic Social Thought at the Altar of Lebanese State Planning, 1959–1964," successfully progressed through a second round of review at *Planning Perspectives*. The article examines the intellectual foundations of Lebanese state planning and the influence of Franco-Catholic social thought on development strategies during the post-independence period, offering new perspectives on the ideological dimensions of modernisation in Lebanon.

Yaghi also remained actively engaged in public scholarship and contemporary debates on food sovereignty, urban transformation, and economic crisis. Through essays published with the Arab Reform Initiative, *The Drift*, *The Point Magazine*, and the Sustainable Food Trust, he connected historical research on development and political economy to present-day discussions of food systems, urban change, and social inequality in Lebanon. These contributions reflect his broader commitment to making historical scholarship relevant to public debates on economic and environmental futures in the region.

His archival research drew on a wide range of collections in Beirut, including the Beirut Museum of Art (BeMA), the Nuhad Es-Said Pavilion for Culture at the National Museum of Beirut, the Bibliothèque Orientale at Université Saint-Joseph, the Special Collections and Archives at the American University of Beirut, the Sursock Museum, the Arab Center for Architecture, the Institute for Palestine Studies, and the OIB Library. These collections provided critical sources on development planning, rural transformation, landscape representation, and cultural production in modern Lebanon.

Yaghi also contributed to international scholarly exchange through conference participation and academic organisation. At the *Historical Materialism Twenty-Second Annual Conference* in London, he presented research on state planning and the making of Beirut's suburbs and co-organised a two-panel series on "The Making of the Lebanese Working Class, 1950–1970," bringing together scholars working on class formation, labour, migration, development, and urbanisation in modern Lebanon. Following his fellowship year, he was awarded a Postdoctoral

Fellowship in Development Studies at the American University of Beirut, where he will continue developing his research on political economy, development, and social transformation in the modern Middle East.

Art, Heritage, Memory, and Communities

These fellows examined how societies remember, represent, and negotiate histories of conflict, displacement, cultural production, and social change. Working across art history, anthropology, heritage studies, and memory studies, they explored museums, archives, artistic institutions, incarceration, sacred spaces, and community formation.

Flavia Elena Malusardi



Flavia Elena Malusardi is an art historian whose research focuses on modern and contemporary art, cultural institutions, and artistic networks in the modern Middle East. Her doctoral research, conducted within the framework of the ERC-funded project Lebanon’s Art World at Home and Abroad (LAWHA), examines the history of Dar el Fan, one of Beirut’s most influential artistic and cultural institutions during the 1960s and 1970s. Through the study of exhibitions, cultural diplomacy, artistic networks, and intellectual exchange, her work explores how cultural institutions shaped debates on modernity, artistic production, and transnational cultural connections in Lebanon and the wider Arab world.

During the reporting period, Malusardi successfully completed and defended her doctoral dissertation, marking the culmination of several years of archival research, fieldwork, and scholarly engagement in Beirut. The dissertation reconstructs the history of Dar el Fan and examines its role as a key site of artistic experimentation, cultural exchange, and institution-building during a formative period in Lebanon’s cultural history. By situating the institution within local, regional, and international networks, the project contributes to broader efforts to de-centre art history and to better understand the social and institutional foundations of artistic production in the Arab world.

Building on the expertise developed through LAWHA and her affiliation with OIB, Malusardi began a new position as a postdoctoral researcher within the ERC-funded project MEGAMAPS (Mapping Emerging Gender Activism in the Mediterranean Arab Public Sphere) at the University of

Naples L’Orientale. Her current work investigates questions of activism, gender, and public space across the Arab Mediterranean while drawing on the methodological and regional expertise she developed through her research on Lebanon’s cultural institutions and artistic networks.

A central component of Malusardi’s research has been the reconstruction of the largely inaccessible archive of Dar el Fan. Since much of the institution’s documentation remains unavailable to researchers, she has combined materials reproduced in published sources with newspapers, exhibition catalogues, personal papers, and oral histories to recover the institution’s history and significance. This work has helped illuminate Dar el Fan’s role not only within Beirut’s artistic and intellectual life but also within broader regional and international cultural circuits.

During the reporting period, Malusardi published several important scholarly contributions. She authored the biographical entry on Cici Tommaseo Sursock for the platform *AWARE: Archives of Women Artists, Research and Exhibitions*, contributing to ongoing efforts to expand the visibility of women artists and cultural figures. She also contributed the article “The House Stands Tall: Janine Rubeiz and Dar el Fan during the Civil War in Lebanon” to *Manazir Journal’s* special issue “Defying the Violence: Lebanon’s Visual Arts in the 1980s,” examining the institution’s continued cultural role during a period of conflict and instability.

Beirut remains central to Malusardi’s research and intellectual practice. As both a historical and contemporary centre of cultural production, the city provides an essential vantage point for understanding artistic exchange, cultural institutions, and intellectual networks in the Arab world. Her work on Beirut has also deepened and expanded her earlier research on Cairo, allowing her to situate both cities within broader regional histories of artistic experimentation, knowledge production, and cultural circulation. Looking ahead, she hopes to bring these strands of research together through future projects exploring the interconnected histories of Beirut and Cairo and their shared roles in shaping modern Arab cultural life.

Through her doctoral research, publications, and ongoing engagement with regional cultural histories, Malusardi contributes to a growing body of scholarship that examines artistic production through the institutions, networks, and individuals that sustain it. Her work highlights the importance of Beirut as a site of cultural innovation and demonstrates how local histories can inform broader understandings of modern art and cultural life across the Middle East.

Ashraf Osman



Ashraf Osman is an art historian whose research examines museums, canon formation, and the politics of representation in modern Lebanon. His doctoral dissertation, *The Only Truly Living Museum in Beirut: Artistic Coexistence and Representation at the Sursock Museum*, investigates how Beirut's principal art museum shaped artistic recognition, institutional legitimacy, and the writing of Lebanese art history from the 1950s onward. By treating the museum not simply as an exhibition venue but as a site where artistic

value is produced through salons, juries, prizes, archives, collecting practices, and institutional narratives, the project explores broader questions of cultural power, inclusion, exclusion, and coexistence.

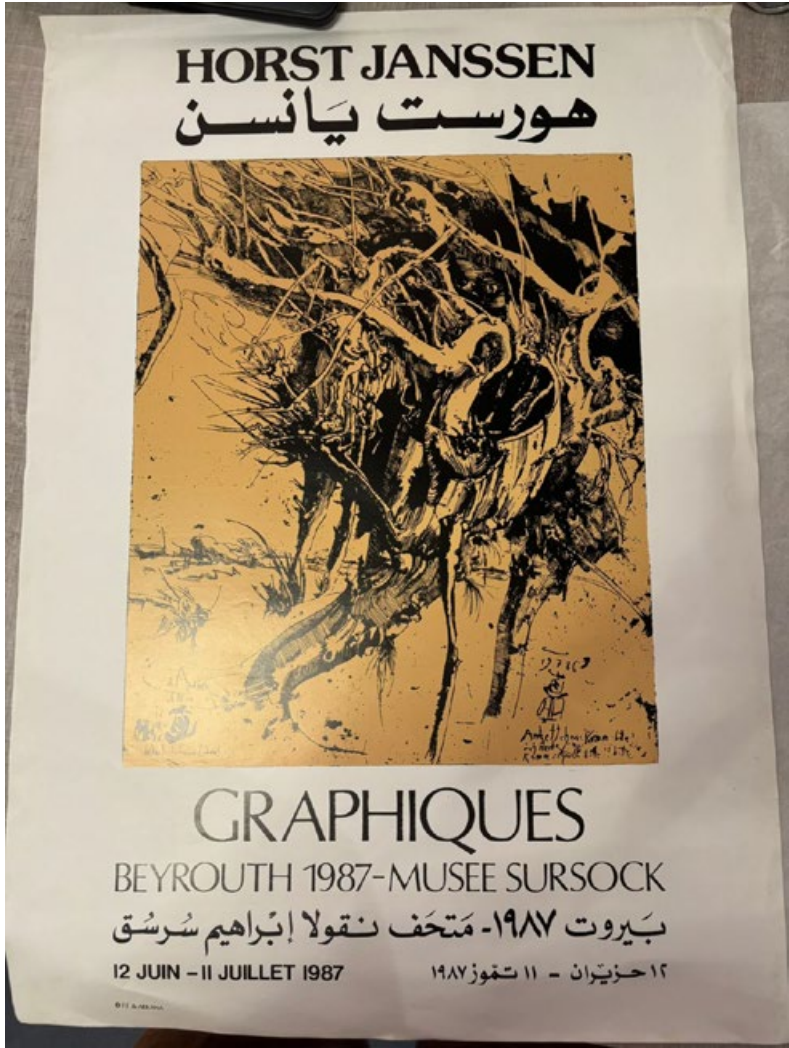
The dissertation reconstructs the development of Lebanon's artistic field through a detailed study of the Sursock Museum and the wider ecosystem of artists, galleries, associations, schools, and cultural institutions that preceded and surrounded it. It examines how artists entered—or failed to enter—the canon, how institutional authority was established, and how aesthetic and social hierarchies were reproduced under the banner of modern art. More broadly, the project uses the museum as a lens through which to investigate memory, legitimacy, and the relationship between cultural institutions and political life in Lebanon.

During the reporting period, Osman made substantial progress on his dissertation, completing draft chapters covering the mapping of the Lebanese art canon, the development of Beirut's artistic infrastructure before the establishment of the museum, and the institutional structures and individuals responsible for shaping the Sursock Museum. These chapters draw on extensive archival and oral-historical research conducted across Beirut.

His research relied primarily on collections held at the Sursock Museum Library and Archive, including exhibition catalogues, institutional records, press files, correspondence, and the Richard Chahine and Galerie Épreuve d'Artiste archives. He also worked extensively with materials held at MACAM, the Beirut Museum of Art (BeMA), the Saradar Collection, and the Dalloul Art Foundation. Complementing this archival work, Osman conducted in-depth oral-history interviews with Sylvia Agémian, a key figure in the museum's history whose experiences offered valuable insight into exhibition-making, jury processes, and museum administration during the Lebanese Civil War.

A major scholarly achievement during the fellowship was the publication of his peer-reviewed article, "Beirut's Sursock Museum in the 1980s: Inclusion and Exclusion in a Decade of Conflict," in *Manazir Journal*. Based on extensive archival research, the article examines the museum's wartime exhibitions and demonstrates how institutional judgments and aesthetic preferences shaped visibility and exclusion during a period of conflict. The publication contributes to ongoing debates about cultural production, memory, and institutional resilience in Lebanon.

Osman also played an active role in the ERC-funded project Lebanon's Art World at Home and Abroad (LAWHA), contributing to the development of a major digital research infrastructure documenting artists, exhibitions, and institutions in Lebanon. His work focused particularly on compiling and structuring data related to the Sursock Museum's ex-



Poster for the 1987 *Horst Janssen Graphiques* exhibition at the Sursock Museum, Beirut (produced with the support of the Embassy of the Federal Republic of Germany). Donated by the museum to OIB for display at the launch of *Manazir Journal* #7.

hibitions and the Salon d'Automne, creating resources that will support future scholarship on Lebanon's art history.

Beyond academia, Osman remained deeply engaged with public scholarship and cultural programming. He co-organised the launch of *Manazir Journal's* special issue "Defying the Violence: Lebanon's Visual Arts in the 1980s" at OIB, curating an accompanying archival display based on materials from the Joseph Tarrab Archive. He also contributed interpretive texts for the Sursock Museum's exhibition *Becoming Icon*, participated in public discussions on art and cultural memory, published the essay "Memory for Forgetfulness" in *Agenda Culturel*, and appeared in exhibition-based audio interviews addressing questions of artistic recognition, institutional authority, and war memory.

Through his research, publications, exhibitions, and collaborations with institutions such as the Sursock Museum, BeMA, and LAWHA, Osman has contributed to expanding critical scholarship on Lebanon's visual arts and cultural institutions. His work highlights the importance of archives, museums, and public history in understanding how artistic canons are constructed and how cultural memory is negotiated in societies marked by conflict and ongoing transformation.

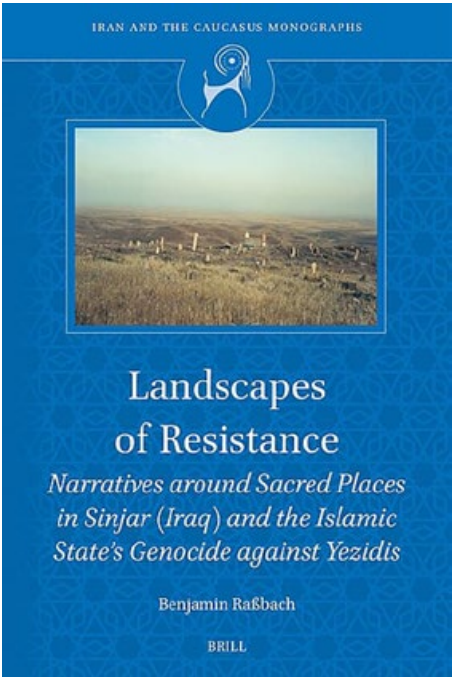
Benjamin Rassbach



Benjamin Rassbach was a postdoctoral fellow at OIB whose research examines religious minorities, sacred places, material religion, and political transformations in the Middle East. Trained in religious studies and anthropology at Philipps University of Marburg and Leipzig University, he completed his doctoral research on narratives surrounding sacred places in Sinjar (Iraq) and Dersim (Turkey) in the aftermath of genocide. His work combines ethnographic fieldwork with the study of religion, memory, heritage, and commu-

nity formation, drawing on extensive research conducted across Iraq, Turkey, Iran, Egypt, and Lebanon. His doctoral dissertation, *Landscapes of Resistance: Narratives Around Sacred Places in Sinjar (Iraq) and the Genocide Against Yezidis* published in 2024 by De Gruyter Brill, contributes to broader debates on religion, violence, and the reconstruction of sacred landscapes in post-conflict societies.

During his postdoctoral fellowship at OIB, Rassbach pursued two interconnected research projects. Initially, he investigated contemporary understandings of religion and secularity within Lebanon's Druze



community. Through interviews and ethnographic fieldwork, particularly in the Chouf region, he explored how Druze interlocutors negotiated distinctions between the religious and the secular, as well as the role of narratives of reincarnation within emerging forms of communal identity. His findings suggested that many Druze increasingly frame such beliefs not as religious doctrine but as forms of spirituality compatible with secular and scientific worldviews, reflecting broader transformations in communal authority and identity.

The escalation of the war in Lebanon during 2024 reshaped the trajectory of his research. Alongside volunteering with local relief efforts assisting displaced populations in Beirut, Rassbach began investigating the impact of war on religious heritage and sacred places across Lebanon. Fieldwork in the Beqaa Valley and research on developments in southern Lebanon led him to develop a new project examining the relationship between conflict, heritage preservation, and religious coexistence. His research focuses particularly on Lebanon's southern and eastern regions, where non-state actors often play a central role in maintaining religious sites and cultural heritage.

Central to this emerging project is the study of shared sacred spaces and their role in local communities. Through ethnographic observations and interviews, Rassbach examines how shrines and pilgrimage sites can function as spaces of interreligious interaction and coexistence despite broader political and sectarian tensions. His work highlights the ways in which local practices surrounding healing, pilgrimage, and

devotion often transcend rigid communal boundaries and offer alternative perspectives on belonging, memory, and territory. By exploring the histories and contemporary uses of these sites, he contributes to ongoing discussions about heritage, conflict, and religious diversity in the Middle East.

The fellowship provided an important environment for developing these new research directions. Engagement with Beirut's scholarly community, combined with fieldwork conducted during a period of profound political and military upheaval, enabled Rassbach to connect questions of religion, heritage, and conflict in new ways. The project he developed during his residency has since formed the basis of a larger research proposal on sacred places and war in Lebanon, further expanding his long-standing interest in the intersections of religion, memory, violence, and material culture.

Lara Sabra



Lara Sabra is an anthropologist whose research examines prisons, incarceration, and state violence in Lebanon. Her work explores how carceral power extends beyond prison walls to shape everyday life, social relations, and possibilities for survival amid conditions of war, state neglect, and political instability. Focusing on the experiences of formerly incarcerated women, her dissertation investigates how memories of imprisonment illuminate broader carceral logics and how relationships formed in prison continue to

shape strategies of care, solidarity, and survival after release. Through ethnographic fieldwork and collaborative methods, she seeks not only to document the effects of incarceration but also to explore possibilities for imagining futures beyond carceral forms of governance.

During the reporting period, Sabra conducted extensive ethnographic fieldwork in Beirut, complemented by visits to Baabda Prison and meetings with lawyers, legal advocates, social workers, and civil society organisations working on prison-related issues. At the centre of her research were long-term relationships with formerly incarcerated individuals, with whom she conducted in-depth life-history interviews and ethnographic conversations. She also compiled an archive of prison narratives through digital media, testimonies, and publications produced by former prisoners and advocacy organisations. In collaboration with two interlocutors, she established a storytelling group that met regularly to develop writing and storytelling exercises, creating a space

where personal narratives, memory, and creative expression could become part of the research process.

Her research was presented at several major academic venues, including the international conference *Research in Crisis Settings* at the American University of Beirut and co-hosted by Birzeit University, the *Violence and Visuality* conference at the American University of Beirut, the *American Anthropological Association Annual Meeting* in New Orleans, and the *European Association for Social Anthropology Biennial Conference* in Warsaw. Particularly significant was her participation in the *American Anthropological Association Annual Meeting*, where she presented on prison language, solidarity, memory, and visual storytelling. The discussions generated valuable feedback on questions of resistance, language, and memory, while also connecting her with scholars working on incarceration and state violence in comparative contexts.

Sabra's work extends beyond academic audiences through public scholarship. During the reporting period, she published the essay "Breaking Bread, Building Bonds: How Incarcerated Women in Lebanon Found Unity Through Food" in *al-Rawiya*. Drawing on her fieldwork, the essay examines how food practices inside prison foster forms of collective care, social connection, and mutual support among incarcerated women. Written for a broad public readership, the piece reflects her commitment to making research accessible beyond academic institutions and contributing to wider conversations about prisons, justice, and social inequality in Lebanon.

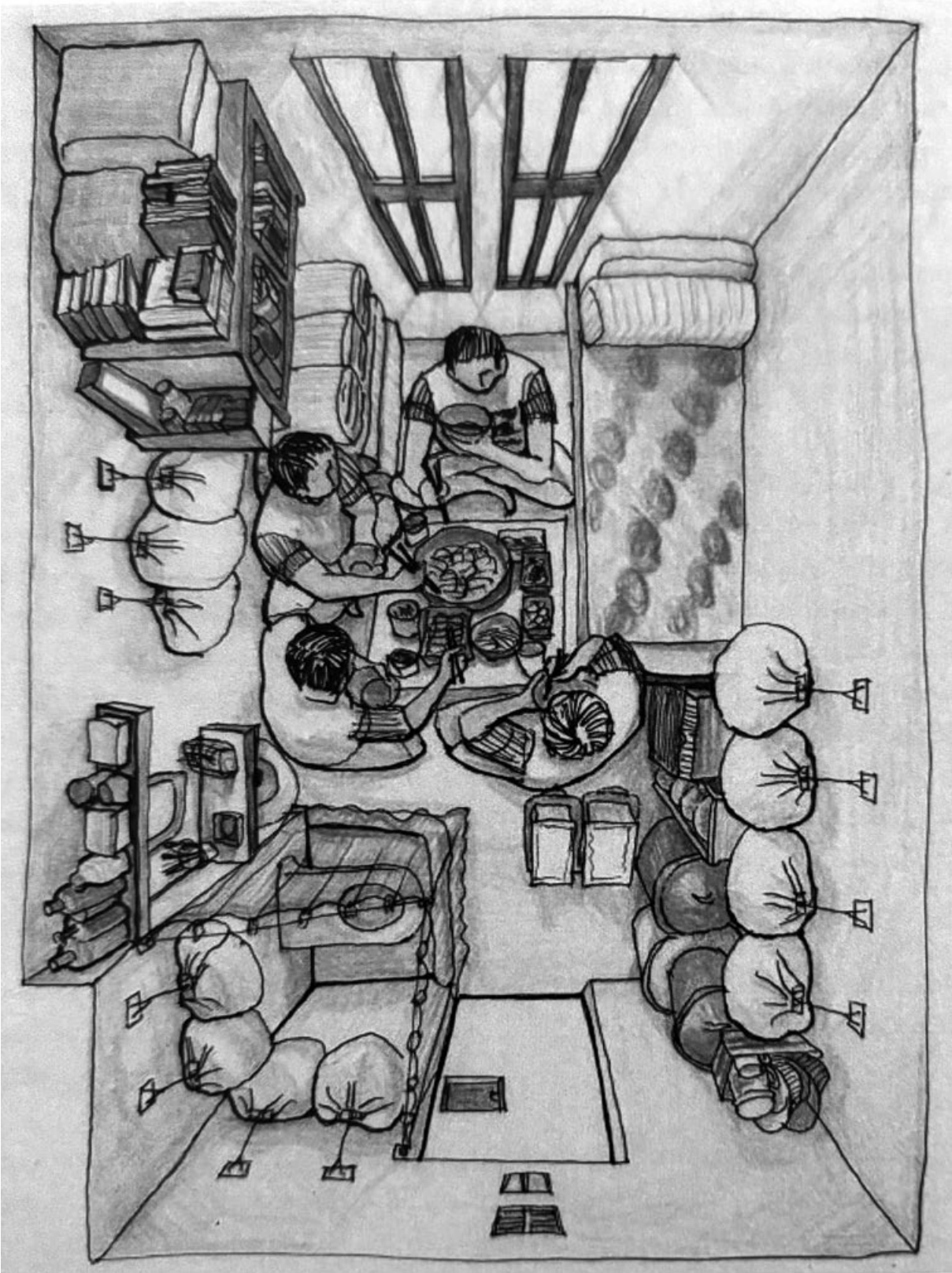
Her research was further recognised with the Armstrong Graduate Student Research Grant (University of Massachusetts Amherst), awarded in support of the next phase of her fieldwork analysis and dissertation development.

Beirut remains central to Sabra's research and intellectual practice. As the primary site of her fieldwork, the city provides access to the individuals, organisations, and institutions that form the core of her research. At the same time, Beirut offers a vibrant intellectual environment where scholars, activists, artists, and practitioners engage with questions of justice, resistance, and social change. These conversations have encouraged her to think creatively about ethnographic practice and to connect her research on incarceration to broader debates about state violence, memory, and survival.

The fellowship at OIB provided an important institutional framework for Sabra's research, allowing her to conduct sustained fieldwork while participating in interdisciplinary discussions through the Theory and Method Seminar and the Institute's wider scholarly community. The

fellowship offered both practical support and intellectual exchange, enabling her to refine her analytical framework and engage critically with questions of language, class, solidarity, and carceral power. Equally important was the community of fellows, whose conversations and mutual support helped sustain intellectual exchange during a period marked by war and instability.

Through ethnographic research, public engagement, and collaborative work with formerly incarcerated individuals, Sabra contributes to a growing body of scholarship on prisons, state violence, and social justice in the Middle East. Her work foregrounds the experiences and voices of those most affected by incarceration while exploring how relationships of care and solidarity persist under conditions of confinement and conflict.



Drawing by Adachi Masao,
Roumieh Prison, Beirut,
1998.

The Fellows’ Seminars

At the heart of OIB’s fellowship programme is a commitment not only to support individual research projects, but also to foster an intellectual community in which ideas can be tested, challenged, refined, and shared. Throughout the reporting period, residential fellows met regularly through two complementary seminar series designed to support both the development of their scholarship and their professional growth: the Theory and Method Seminar and the Professionalisation Seminar, both coordinated by Research Associate and mentor of Residential Fellows, Zeina G. Halabi.

Theory and Method Seminar

The Theory and Method Seminar was one of the central pillars of the Residential Fellows programme. It emerged consistently in fellows’ reports as one of the most valuable aspects of their experience at OIB. The seminar provided a dedicated space for fellows to workshop research in progress and engage critically with one another’s work. By circulating drafts in advance, discussions moved beyond presentation toward sustained collective engagement with questions of theory, methodology, evidence, interpretation, and writing. Invited scholars regularly joined the sessions to offer feedback and discuss fellows’ work, enriching conversations that crossed disciplinary, institutional, and regional boundaries.

Bringing together historians, anthropologists, literary scholars, sociologists, and researchers from across the humanities and social sciences, the seminar fostered a rare interdisciplinary environment in which emerging scholarship could be strengthened through rigorous intellectual exchange. Fellows repeatedly emphasised the quality of the feedback they received from both peers and senior scholars, noting that the seminar helped sharpen arguments, refine conceptual frameworks, clarify methodological approaches, and strengthen writing. Several highlighted the opportunity to present their work at different stages of development, allowing them to track the evolution of their projects and test new ideas over time. Others stressed the value of engaging with research outside their own disciplines, which exposed them to new theoretical perspectives, comparative approaches, and methodological tools.

The seminar was widely praised for its thoughtful moderation and intellectual depth. Fellows noted that discussions consistently pushed them to identify the broader stakes of their research while situating their work within larger scholarly and regional debates. At once intellectually demanding and supportive, the seminar fostered both account-

ability and experimentation. Beyond its role as a venue for feedback, it created a sustained community of inquiry in which fellows learned from one another’s projects, developed new intellectual connections, and strengthened their ability to communicate their research across disciplinary boundaries.

The Theory and Method Seminar in the Fellows’ Own Words

The level of intellectual engagement, thoughtful readership, and feedback has not only helped level up my scholarship and writing, but also my engagement as a reader of my colleagues’ work.
— Susan Abraham

The weekly seminar [...] constantly challenged my theoretical and methodological priors for the greater good and has helped me become a better scholar and writer.
— Zeead Yaghi

Was a lifeline for me. Even though I was not in Beirut, it sustained me emotionally and intellectually.
— Janina Santer

Was the intellectual spine of my fellowship year.
— Hratch Kestonian

The best course I took during my entire PhD.
— Christin Sander

Professionalisation Seminar

The Professionalisation Seminar complemented the fellows’ research activities by addressing the practical dimensions of academic life and preparing participants for the transition from doctoral and postdoctoral research to longer-term academic careers. Designed especially for doctoral and early-career researchers, the seminar sought to demystify the profession while equipping fellows with practical skills and knowledge that would support them well beyond their residency at OIB. Sessions focused on academic publishing and publication strategies, grant writing and applications, conference participation and presentation skills, curriculum vitae and cover letter preparation, research statements, teaching portfolios, academic job market strategies, and mock

interviews and job talks. Fellows frequently noted that the seminar addressed aspects of academic life that are rarely taught in formal graduate training, providing concrete tools they could immediately apply to fellowship, grant, teaching, and job applications. Equally valuable was the opportunity to exchange experiences across different disciplinary and institutional contexts, allowing fellows to learn from diverse career trajectories while developing a clearer understanding of the opportunities and challenges of contemporary academic life.

The Professionalisation Seminar in the Fellows’ Own Words

- These sessions had immediate practical value for my job applications and grant writing.

— Hratch Kestonian
- The seminar helped me think about how to present my work for job applications, publications, and academic audiences beyond my immediate field.

— Joan Chaker
- The seminar allowed me to learn new tools for writing an academic biography, cover letter, course syllabus, and a CV.

— Lara Sabra

Why Location Matters: Rethinking Knowledge Production from Beirut

In January 2026, OIB, the Arab Council for the Social Sciences (ACSS), and the Middle East Studies Association (MESA) convened the inaugural *Why Location Matters* workshop, bringing together doctoral researchers from across the Arab world, the United States, and Germany. After two postponements caused by regional instability, the workshop finally took place in Beirut as the first in what is envisioned as a longer series of Arabic-English, multidisciplinary research workshops. Its goal was not simply to discuss research but to foster a transnational community of emerging scholars working on the Middle East and North Africa.

The workshop was guided by two central questions: How do different locations of research shape scholarly assumptions, methodologies, and research agendas? And how do theories, methods, and forms of knowl-

edge production change when scholars trained in different academic traditions come together to discuss their work from within the region itself? These questions emerged from a recognition that doctoral researchers working and living in the Arab world often develop different intellectual priorities than colleagues trained primarily in Europe or North America. Research agendas are shaped not only by disciplinary conventions but also by unequal access to archives, funding structures, political and academic freedoms, and the broader social and historical contexts in which scholarship is produced.



Guided tour of Beirut’s neighbourhoods and port area organised by AUB’s Beirut Urban Lab.

Rather than focusing on formal paper presentations, the workshop emphasised collective inquiry, mentorship, and sustained conversation. Participants worked in small groups led by DRs. Pascale Ghazaleh, Zeina G. Halabi, Driss Ksikes, and Hanan Sabea, engaging questions of positionality, disciplinary practice, archival and ethnographic research, and the institutional conditions under which knowledge is produced.

Beirut was not simply the setting for these discussions but an integral part of them. As a long-standing centre of intellectual life in the Arab world, the city offered participants an opportunity to reflect on the relationship between place and scholarship. A keynote lecture by urban studies scholar Mona Fawaz, co-founder of AUB's Beirut Urban Lab, together with visits across the city, grounded broader conversations about history, power, urban transformation, and knowledge production in the lived realities of Beirut itself.

The workshop also highlighted a broader conviction shared by its organisers: that despite war, political uncertainty, unequal resources, and restrictions on mobility, scholarship produced within the region remains vibrant, innovative, and intellectually indispensable. Bringing together scholars from different locations made visible not only disparities in academic infrastructures but also the distinct insights that emerge from research conducted in close proximity to the societies, languages, archives, and communities under study.

For many participants, the workshop's greatest value lay in its open and collaborative format. The extended mentoring sessions created space for conversations that rarely occur in conventional academic settings, allowing doctoral researchers to discuss intellectual uncertainties, methodological challenges, and the broader structures that shape their work. As participant Michael Nuding (Erlangen University) reflected, "Without the pressure to perform or produce something tangible, the conversations became surprisingly honest, at times unexpectedly personal, and in a way lastingly productive."

More than a standalone event, *Why Location Matters* marked the beginning of a longer-term collaboration among OIB, ACSS, and MESA. By bringing together emerging scholars across geographic, linguistic, and institutional boundaries, the workshop demonstrated that the production of knowledge is never independent of location. At the same time, it showed how intellectual exchange across locations can challenge inherited assumptions, expand methodological horizons, and create new forms of scholarly community that are attentive to the unequal geographies of knowledge production while remaining committed to dialogue across them.



Doctoral students from Germany, the US, the Arab world with their mentors Pascale Ghazaleh, Idriss Ksikes, Hanan Sabea, and Zeina G. Halabi with *Why Location Matters* workshop co-organiser, Dina Khoury at OIB.

Entangled Histories Across the Bengal-to-Balkans World

In September 2023, OIB joined a consortium of international partners to organise the Summer Academy on the Entangled Histories of Concepts in the Bengal-to-Balkans Complex (B2B), hosted by the Orient- Institut Istanbul. Now in its second year, the initiative brought together doctoral students and early-career researchers working across a vast geographical and linguistic space stretching from South Asia to Southeast Europe, united by an interest in conceptual history, intellectual exchange, and the circulation of ideas across regions.

Co-organised with scholars from the Orient-Institut Istanbul, Freie Universität Berlin, the Max Weber Forum for South Asian Studies in Delhi, and the University of Oslo, the Summer Academy explored how concepts travel, acquire new meanings, and become entangled across languages, traditions, and political contexts. Inspired by the work of Shahab Ahmed and recent developments in global conceptual history, the programme sought to move beyond methodological nationalism and area-based divisions by examining shared intellectual formations across what participants termed the “Bengal-to-Balkans” world.

Over two weeks, participants engaged in lectures, workshops, and intensive discussions on theory, methodology, and sources. Research projects addressed a wide range of languages and intellectual traditions, including Arabic, Persian, Turkish, Urdu, Bengali, Greek, Hebrew, Armenian, Kurdish, and Slavic languages. The academy encouraged participants to reflect critically on the concepts through which historical change is understood and to develop approaches grounded in the intellectual traditions of the regions they study.





07

OIB Connects Scholars



OIB serves as a meeting place for scholars, writers, journalists, artists, and cultural practitioners whose work engages with the Middle East and North Africa from a wide range of disciplinary, professional, and creative perspectives. During the reporting period, OIB hosted senior scholars and writers through the Hans Robert Roemer Fellowship, welcomed journalists and artists whose work bridged research and public engagement, supported affiliated researchers based at institutions around the world, and provided opportunities for students and early-career scholars through its internship programmes. These affiliations generated new research projects, publications, exhibitions, public interventions, and institutional partnerships while extending OIB's scholarly networks across Europe, North America, the Middle East, and Asia. The pages that follow illustrate how OIB's various fellowship and affiliation programmes transform the Institute into a site of encounter—one where research is advanced, collaborations take shape, and scholarly communities extend far beyond the Institute itself.

Hans Robert Roemer Fellows

The Hans Robert Roemer Fellowship brings distinguished scholars, writers, translators, and intellectuals to OIB, enriching the Institute's research environment through mentorship, public engagement, and scholarly exchange. During the reporting period, the following Roemer Fellows made indelible contributions to the intellectual life of the Institute.

Peter Hill

Peter Hill is featured in "Presence as Method" on page 33.

Writing Palestine from Beirut: Stefan Weidner



German writer, translator, and public intellectual Stefan Weidner joined OIB as a Roemer Fellow from January to March 2026. During his stay, he worked on a new book project, *Land aus Worten* (Land of words), scheduled for publication by Matthes & Seitz in 2027. Conceived as an extended essay rather than an academic study, the book seeks to revisit Palestinian literature in light of contemporary conflicts in the Middle East and the debates surrounding their reception in Germany.

Beirut provided an ideal setting for this work. As a city that continues to serve as a meeting point for writers, scholars, artists, and intellectuals from across the region, it offered opportunities for conversations that directly informed the project. Through exchanges with Lebanese, Palestinian, Syrian, and other Arab writers and thinkers, Weidner was able to explore different perspectives on literature, memory, displacement, and political responsibility. These encounters became an integral part of the research process and helped shape the book’s emerging arguments.

A particularly significant moment during the fellowship was a visit to Damascus in February 2026, where Weidner attended the International Book Fair, held for the first time since the political changes of 2024. The fair brought together writers, publishers, and intellectuals from Syria and beyond, creating a rare opportunity for discussion about the future of cultural and intellectual life in the country. During his visit, Weidner reconnected with long-standing colleagues and acquired publications that were difficult to access elsewhere. He also reported on the event for German media audiences, helping to introduce developments in Syria’s literary and cultural sphere to a European audience.

The fellowship unfolded against the backdrop of renewed regional tensions and escalating conflict. Security developments in early 2026 ultimately forced Weidner to end his stay in Beirut earlier than planned and continue his work from Germany. Yet these events also transformed the direction of the project itself. Experiencing the unfolding crisis from Beirut sharpened his reflections on the conditions under which literature is written, read, interpreted, and debated. What had begun as a study focused primarily on Palestinian literature evolved into a broad-

er meditation on the challenges of writing about Palestine, memory, and political responsibility in a moment of ongoing war.

Reflecting on his time at the Institute, Weidner emphasises the importance of Beirut as an intellectual and political centre for anyone seeking to understand the contemporary Middle East. For him, OIB offered not only a place to work, but also a space for meaningful encounters, scholarly exchange, and dialogue across disciplines and perspectives. In a period marked by uncertainty and conflict, the fellowship demonstrated the continuing importance of institutions that foster intellectual engagement, cultural exchange, and sustained reflection on the region’s most pressing questions.



Damascus Book Fair, 2025.

**Researching Urban Infrastructure from Beirut:
Aleksandra Kobiljski**



Aleksandra Kobiljski, Directrice de recherche at the CNRS in Paris, joined OIB as a Roemer Fellow from December 2025 to February 2026. Her fellowship marked a pivotal moment in the development of a new research project on the history of urban infrastructure in Beirut between 1958 and 1990. During her time at OIB, she also contributed to the Institute’s engagement with the rehabilitation of Al-Madrassa al-Wataniyya in Zokak el-Blat, a project that drew on OIB’s long-standing connections to the neighbourhood and its commitment to cultural heritage preservation.

Kobiljski arrived in Beirut with a broad interest in urban infrastructure but without a fixed research focus. It was her immersion in the city—and more specifically in Zokak el-Blat during the rainy season—that shaped the direction of her project. Observing the visible failures of drainage and wastewater systems in everyday urban life led her to focus on the history of wastewater infrastructure, a subject she is now developing into a European Research Council grant proposal scheduled for submission in 2027. Her experience illustrates how research questions often emerge not only from archives and scholarly debates but also from direct engagement with place, environment, and lived urban realities.

The fellowship also highlighted the importance of OIB as a space of intellectual exchange. Kobiljski credits the Institute’s library, garden, and informal conversations with researchers as important catalysts for the development of her project. Discussions with fellows and visiting scholars helped refine her thinking, while the neighbourhood itself became a constant interlocutor, revealing the historical layers and contemporary vulnerabilities that shape Beirut’s urban landscape.

Among the most memorable intellectual moments of her fellowship was attending Salim Tamari’s lecture, “The Land of Palestine: Early Ethnographers, Late Archives, and Present Law,” which she described as unforgettable for both its scholarly depth and contemporary relevance.

Equally significant was her experience of OIB as a genuinely family-friendly institution. During her fellowship, the Institute hosted her

son’s eighth birthday celebration, bringing together classmates from Lycée Abdel Kader and transforming the garden into a lively gathering space for neighbourhood families. For Kobiljski, this moment captured something distinctive about OIB: its ability to combine rigorous scholarship with a welcoming and supportive environment for researchers and their families.

Reflecting on her fellowship, she remarked: “OIB was my first experience of a research institute where a family-friendly fellowship policy was not a talking point but a lived reality.”

Aleksandra Kobiljski’s son and his classmates celebrating his 8th birthday at OIB.



Journalist-in-Residence Programme

The Journalist-in-Residence programme supports journalists whose work intersects with OIB's research fields in the humanities and social sciences. By providing access to the Institute's library, research environment, seminars, and scholarly networks, the programme fosters exchange between academic research and public-facing journalism while contributing to critical public debate on the region. The programme is coordinated by the directorate and research associates.

Yassin al-Hajj Saleh is a Syrian writer, journalist, and public intellectual. Author of numerous works on Syria's political and social history, imprisonment, sectarianism, and intellectual life, he is also a founding member of the independent platform *aljumhuriya.net*. During his residency at OIB, he contributed to discussions on political violence, memory, and intellectual responsibility in the contemporary Arab world.

Justin Salhani is a writer and journalist based in Beirut. Since 2023, he has worked as Senior Producer at *Al Jazeera Digital*, covering politics and society in Lebanon and Syria. His residency project examined state-building and postwar tensions in Lebanon and Syria, focusing on the relationship between transitional justice, media narratives, misinformation, and political reconstruction following the 2024 war in Lebanon and the fall of Bashar al-Asad in Syria.

Anna-Theresa Bachmann is a freelance journalist covering North Africa, West Asia, and the South Caucasus for outlets including *DIE ZEIT*, *taz*, *WOZ*, and *Deutschlandfunk*. During her residency at OIB, she conducted research on the French-German Protestant cemetery in Beirut and the Sodeco area as spaces of cultural exchange in both historical and contemporary contexts.

Artist-in-Residence Programme

In 2025, OIB launched its Artist-in-Residence programme, a new initiative designed to foster dialogue between academic research and artistic practice. The programme invites artists and cultural practitioners whose work engages critically with the histories, societies, and cultural landscapes of the Middle East and North Africa, further expanding OIB's role as a space for interdisciplinary exchange and public engagement. The programme is coordinated by Zeina G. Halabi.

Ali Al Adawy joined OIB as the inaugural Artist in Residence. A curator, critic, researcher, and editor from Alexandria, Egypt, his work focuses on cinema, moving images, urban cultural practices, and modern cultural history. During his residency at OIB, he developed a research-based artistic project exploring archives, labour, visual culture, and collective memory through engagement with Beirut's artistic and intellectual communities.

Affiliated Researchers

During the reporting period, OIB's intellectual community extended beyond its residential fellows and permanent researchers through a diverse network of affiliated researchers. Based at universities and research institutions across Europe, North America, and the Middle East, affiliated researchers pursued projects spanning intellectual history, literature, urban studies, political science, anthropology, religious studies, economic history, migration studies, media studies, and cultural history. Their work engaged topics ranging from Ottoman and modern Middle Eastern history to contemporary questions of displacement, political violence, urban transformation, archives, public culture, and social change. Although their levels of engagement with the Institute varied, they contributed to OIB's wider scholarly ecosystem through research visits, participation in events and seminars, intellectual exchange, and collaboration with members of the OIB community. The programme was coordinated first by Fatih Ermiş and, subsequently, by Alya Karamé.

Fatima Al-Bazzal | Lebanese University
Archiving Absence and Loss: Amili Manuscripts in Libraries Worldwide
(2024–2026)

Iman Ali | Cornell University
Armed in the Name of Peace: Everyday Militant Peacekeeping in South Lebanon (2024–2025)

Nour Hachem | University of California San Diego
Buds and Borders: Cannabis, Prohibition, and Identity Formation in Lebanon (2024–2026)

Philipp Widmann | University of Zurich
In and Out of Circulation: The Making and Loss of “a First National Film” (2024–2026)

Mounir Zahran | Freie Universität Berlin and Humboldt Universität zu Berlin
Beyond Western Liberalism: Multiculturalism and Liberalism in the Eastern Mediterranean (2025)

Susan Shoshan Abraham | University of Virginia
Narrating Faith Across the Straits: Morisco Manuals of Faith in the Early Modern Mediterranean (2025)

Charlotte Gaudreau-Majeau | McGill University
NGOization and Social Movements in Crisis-Affected Lebanon (2025–2026)

Sophie Schröder | University College London
The Role of Courts in Consociational Systems of Power-Sharing (2025)

Masato Tanaka | Heidelberg University
The Middle Class and Politics of Economic Development in Modern Lebanon, ca. 1860–1930 (2025)

Hadi Fakhoury | University of Cambridge
The Way to Sophia: Henry Corbin in Istanbul (1939–1945) (2025)

Stephanie Dornschneider-Elkink | University College Dublin
Women and Religion in Post-Conflict Societies (2025–2028)

Noa Sanad | Sciences Po Paris
Agriculture in Times of Crisis: New Sociotechnical Imaginaries in Post-2019 Lebanon (2025)

Stefan Maneval | Christian-Albrechts-Universität zu Kiel
Historical-Analytical Study of al-Ghāfiqī’s Kitāb al-Adwiya al-Mufrada (2025)

Alfred Naddaff | Stanford University
Ottomans on the Move: Aḥmad Fāris al-Shidyāq, Modern Adab, and the Production of News (2025)

Diala Lteif | University of Cambridge
One Hundred Years of Refuge: Migrants and the Making of Karantina, Beirut (1920–2020) (2025–2026)

Vivienne Schommer | Freie Universität Berlin
Writing Arab Women into History (2025–2026)

Gregor Meinecke | University of Hamburg
Transcultural Bearers of Script: Representations and Functions in Early Modernity (2026)

Isadora Gotts | King’s College London
Hidden Geographies of Power: Renegotiating Governance through Mosul’s Informal Housing Settlements (2025–2026)

Judith Hoppermann | University of Glasgow
Refuge and Rivalry: How Forced Migration Reshapes State–Non-State Relations in Lebanon and Turkey (2025)

Nadia Abu El-Haj | Barnard College & Columbia University
The Impossible Genocide?; Who is this Perpetrator?; Intention, Redux (2025)

Salwa Tannir | Al-Imam al-Ouzai University
Constitutional Principles Governing Electoral Laws (2025–2026)

Sarah El Bulbeisi | Ludwig-Maximilians-University of Munich
Living in Limbo (2025–2026)

Theocharis N. Grigoriades | Freie Universität Berlin
The Economics of Sinaite and Palestinian Monasticism (2025–2026)

Olga Solombrino | Università degli Studi di Napoli L’Orientale
Mapping Emergent Gender Artivism in the Mediterranean Arab Public Space (2026)

**Tracing the Political Economy of Beirut’s Urban Space:
Jan Altaner**



Jan Altaner joined OIB first as a doctoral fellow and later as an affiliated doctoral researcher while completing his PhD in History and Urban Studies. His dissertation explores the political economy of Beirut’s urban development between 1920 and 1975, examining how real estate, financial capital, urban planning, and social transformation shaped the city and contributed to the emergence of socio-economic inequalities that continue to structure Lebanon today. Drawing on extensive archival research conducted across

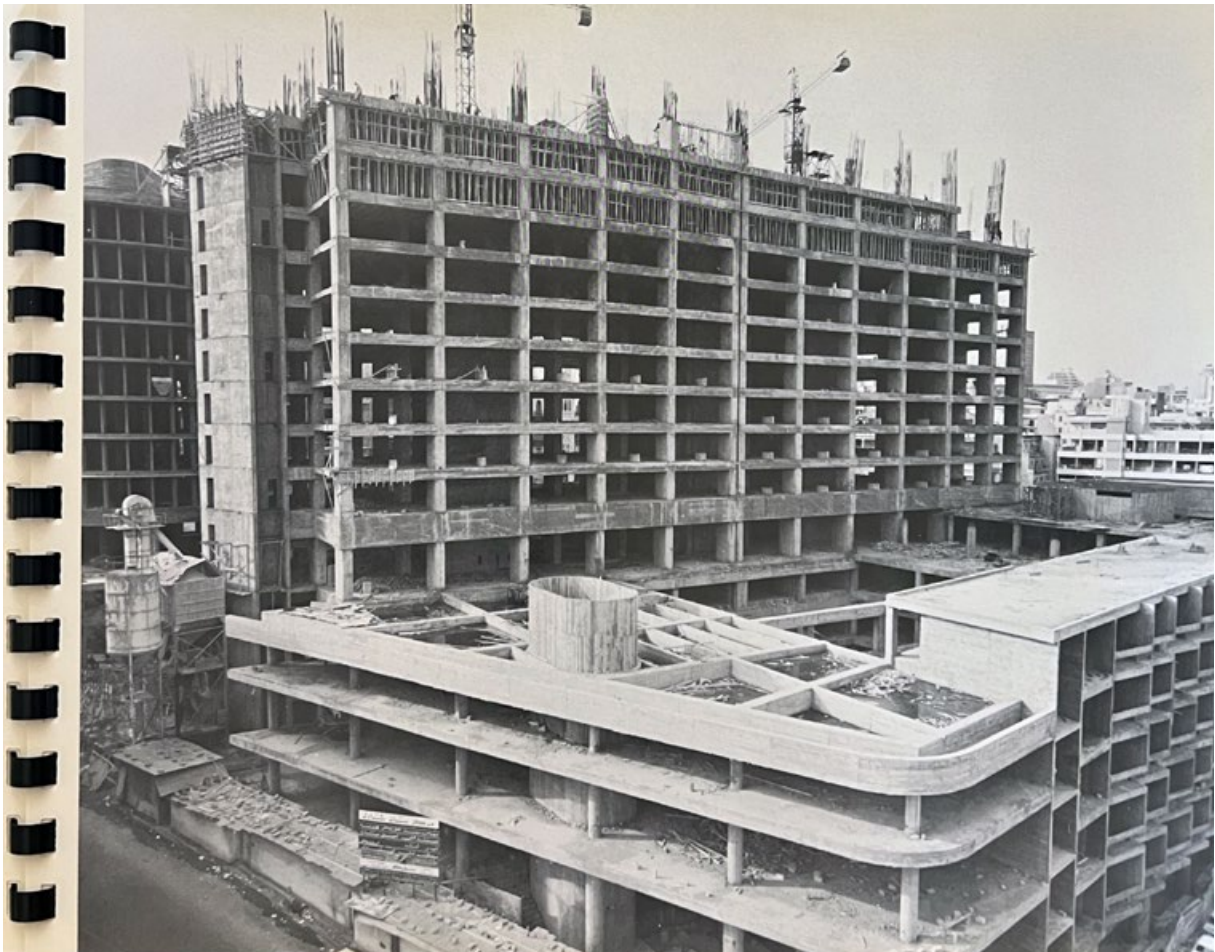
Lebanon, Europe, and North America, his work follows a wide range of actors—from politicians, developers, and foreign investors to squatters and sex workers—to understand how urban space became a central arena of economic and political contestation.

During the reporting period, Altaner conducted extensive archival fieldwork in Beirut and across Lebanon, consulting collections at the American University of Beirut, Université Saint-Joseph, the Holy Spirit University of Kaslik, the Lebanese National Archives, the Sursock Museum and private family archives, among others. Through OIB’s networks and institutional support, he also gained access to previously inaccessible private archives, including those of the Palestinian-Lebanese construction company SoLiCo, whose records offered valuable insights into the development of Beirut’s post-independence infrastructure and real estate sector. He emphasised the importance of OIB’s library and archival holdings, particularly its collections of Lebanese periodicals and rare publications documenting companies and urban development during the 1960s and 1970s.

Alongside his dissertation research, Altaner remained actively engaged in scholarly and public debates. He organised the panel *Commodity Histories of Lebanon* at the 2025 annual meeting of the Middle East Studies Association (MESA), bringing together researchers working on the transnational histories of commodities, capital, and consumption in Lebanon. He also contributed to the open-access project *Global Histories of MENA in the 20th Century* hosted by Exeter University’s Digital Archive of the Middle East and published public-facing analysis for outlets including MERIP and the Institute for Palestine Studies.

Reflecting on his time at OIB, Altaner highlighted the Institute’s role as both an intellectual hub and a practical base for conducting research in Beirut. He emphasised the importance of the Institute’s scholarly community, extensive networks, and supportive environment, which facilitated access to archives, fostered collaborations, and provided a space for sustained research. For Altaner, Beirut itself remains indispensable to his work: a city whose archives, intellectual life, and social fabric continue to shape both the questions he asks and the historical narratives he seeks to uncover.

Construction of Beirut’s Holiday Inn Hotel within the Saint Charles City Centre development, early 1970s. SoLiCo Brochure, SoLiCo Company Archive [n.d.]. The only recently completed luxury hotel would become a major site of military conflict in the first years of the Lebanese Civil War during the “Battle of the Hotels.”



Listening Across Borders: Martin Greve

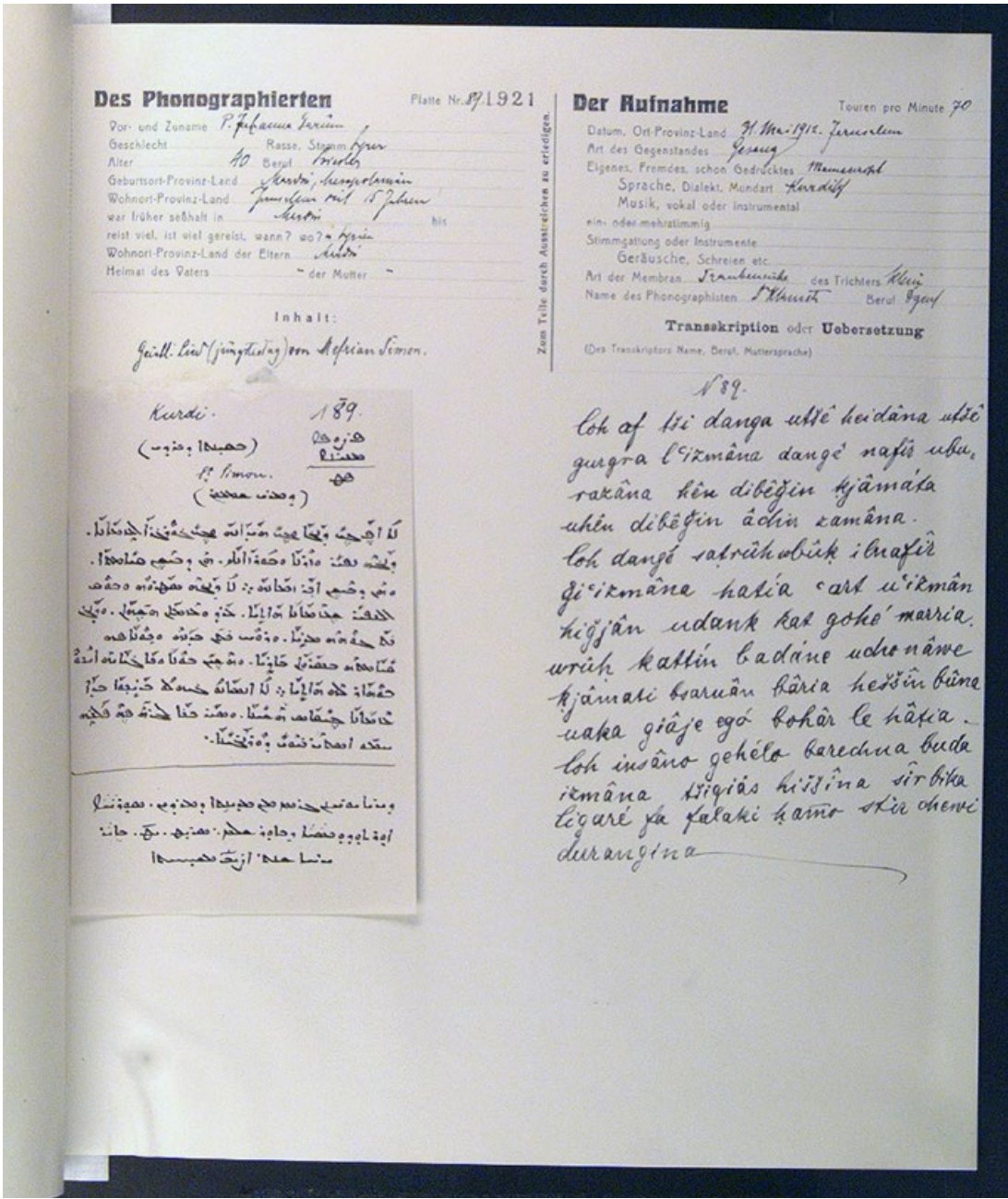


Musicologist and ethnomusicologist Martin Greve continued his long-standing research on music, memory, and cultural heritage in the Middle East while developing a new project on musical exchange in the border region between Syria, Turkey, and Iraqi Kurdistan. Building on extensive previous work in eastern Anatolia, his current research examines historical and contemporary musical connections among ethnically, linguistically, and religiously diverse communities, exploring how migration, media technologies, political

change, and conflict have shaped musical practices and repertoires across the region.

During the reporting period, Greve published the monograph *Musical Traces of a Lost Past: Looking for Greater Dersim* (with Dilek Kızıldağ), the culmination of more than a decade of research on music, memory, migration, and trauma in eastern Anatolia. He also published and prepared several articles and book chapters on Kurdish music, sound archives, Palestine, and the history of ethnomusicological research, while advancing a new research proposal on music and border regions in the modern Middle East.

Drawing on resources such as the AMAR Foundation archive, the OIB Library, and major European sound archives, Greve combined archival research with exploratory fieldwork in Lebanon and Turkey. His affiliation with OIB enabled him to expand his scholarly networks in the Arab world and to reorient his research toward questions emerging from the Levant. Through lectures, workshops, and collaborative activities, including the symposium *Early Fieldwork in Palestine* and the event *The Sound of Politics: Party Songs in Lebanon and Turkey*, he contributed to strengthening cooperation between OIB and the Orient-Institut Istanbul while further establishing musicology and sound studies as part of OIB’s research profile.



Record sheet for the recording of a Kurdish song by Gustav Klameth, Jerusalem, 31 May 1912. Sound Archive of the Austrian Academy of Sciences, Ph 1921.

From the Field: Sebastian Elsässer



Sebastian Elsässer is a historian of Islamic movements and principal investigator of the DFG-funded project *Generations of Islamic Activism* (2023–2026), which examines sociocultural and ideational change within the Arab Muslim Brotherhood from the 1970s to the present. Moving beyond approaches that treat the Brotherhood primarily as a political actor, his research investigates it as a religious and social milieu shaped by processes of generational change, education, migration, and shifting cultural norms. Through

oral-history interviews conducted across the Middle East, Europe, and Turkey, the project explores how broader social transformations have influenced the movement's internal dynamics and evolving understandings of religion, community, and activism.

During his time at OIB, he conducted fieldwork with current and former members of the Jamaa Islamiyya in Beirut, Tripoli, and the Chouf, gathering biographical interviews that shed light on both generational change within Islamic activism and the wider social and political history of Lebanon. He also engaged with scholars working on Sunni Islam in Lebanon and presented his research in an OIB lecture titled "Beyond the Islamic Revival: What Can the Sociology of Islam Learn from Secularisation Theory?"

From Beirut's Archives to an International Prize: Allison Gebeily



For Allison Gibeily, a doctoral candidate in comparative literature, Beirut's archives have become the foundation for a broader rethinking of Arabic literary history. Her research challenges long-standing narratives that portray the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries as a period of literary decline before the Arab Nahda. Instead, she examines travel writing, oral storytelling traditions, and merchant-class authors from Bilad al-Sham to recover overlooked forms of literary production and intellectual exchange. Drawing

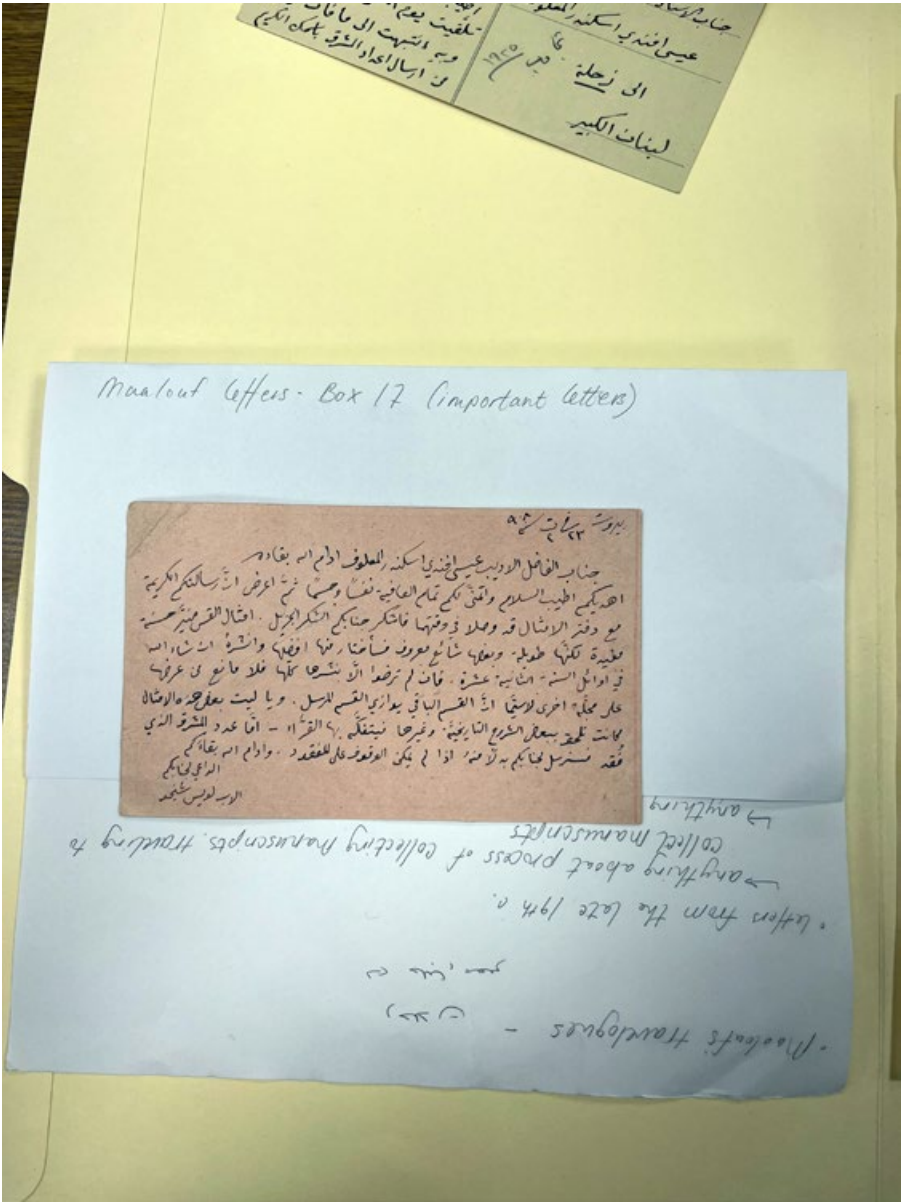
on rare manuscripts and correspondence held at AUB's Jafet Special Collections, the Bibliothèque Orientale, and historic monastic collections across Lebanon, her work sheds new light on how Arabic literature developed through encounters between oral and written culture, commerce, mobility, and religious scholarship.

During her affiliation with OIB, Gibeily completed a major dissertation chapter on the Jesuit scholar Louis Cheikho and uncovered previously uncatalogued letters in the personal papers of the Lebanese historian Issa Iskandar al-Maalouf. These discoveries helped deepen her understanding of the intellectual networks that shaped modern Arabic literary scholarship and opened new avenues for her dissertation research.

Her article, "Aleppo's Other Storybooks: Scottish Physicians, Maronite Ḥakawātīs, and Improvisational Literature," received the 2026 A. Owen Aldridge Prize from the American Comparative Literature Association, awarded annually for the best graduate student essay in the field. The article has since been accepted for publication in *Comparative Literature Studies*, one of the leading journals in comparative literature. Building on research conducted in Beirut and workshopped through OIB's Theory and Method Seminar, the article expands conventional understandings of world literature by foregrounding Arabic oral storytelling traditions and their entanglements with European literary and intellectual history.

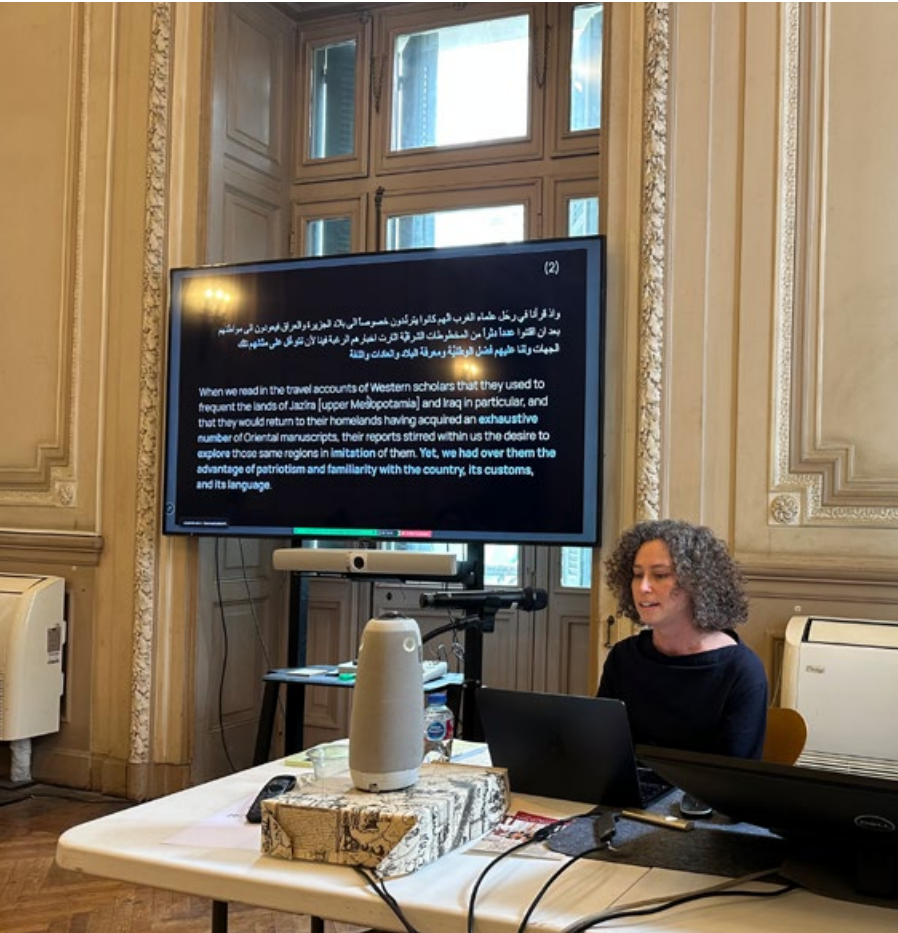
In recognition of the promise of her research, Gibeily was also awarded the Buffett Dissertation Fellowship (2026–2027) from Northwestern University's Roberta Buffett Institute for Global Affairs. The fellowship will support a full year of dissertation research and writing in Beirut,

allowing her to continue working in close proximity to the archives, collections, and scholarly communities that have become central to her project.



A postcard (23 Nov. 1908) from Father Louis Cheikho, the director of the Bibliothèque Orientale in Beirut and editor of the Catholic scholarly journal *al-Mashriq*, to Issa Iskandar al-Ma'alūf, editor of the journal *al-Āthār*.

Allison Gebeily presenting her paper on Louis Cheikho at *New Perspectives on Connections between South Asia and the Middle East*, a conference organised by OIB fellow Simon Conrad and Antoinette Ferrand at IFAO, Cairo.



Allison Gebeily receives the Aldridge Prize at the 2026 Comparative Literature Association Conference.



Fellows-at-Large Programme at OIB

This programme was inaugurated following Advisory Board approval in October 2023 with the purpose of establishing multi-year academic and cultural co-operations with senior scholars and artists who wish to host events at OIB. These include academic conferences and workshops, exhibitions, Arabic poetry slams or similar activities. Fellowships-at-large are geared towards two constituencies of non-resident fellows: colleagues abroad, including residents of Germany and Lebanon.

The selected scholars and cultural producers are to develop their multi-year projects with OIB where they will be granted free accommodation for up to one month per year. International colleagues are encouraged to foster exchanges between their institution and OIB, including short-term stays for OIB researchers, joint conferences at their work place and cognate connections. Local colleagues may receive the monetary value of a month’s free accommodation towards their events at OIB.

Claudia Derichs | Chair for Transregional Southeast Asian Studies at Humboldt University Berlin in Germany; President of the Advisory Board of OIB for several years until December 2024.

Sami Khatib | Professor of Political and Social Aesthetics at Karlsruhe University of Arts and Design

Max Weiss | Professor of History at Princeton University

Academic Interns

Throughout the reporting period, OIB Beirut and OIB Cairo continued to host interns and student researchers from a range of international and regional universities. Working across research support, archival work, public programming, library activities, and institutional operations, interns formed an important part of the Institute’s intellectual and everyday life during a period marked by war and regional instability. The programme was coordinated first by Thomas Würtz and, subsequently, by Alya Karame.

OIB Beirut

Theodore Rai | Lebanese University | Political Science | Mar–Apr 2025

Tasnim Abokafsha | Marburg University | Modern Arab Politics / Middle East Studies | Apr–Jun 2025

Levke Christiansen | University of Erfurt | International Relations / Social Sciences | May 2025

Louisa Rohde | University of Tübingen | Islamic Studies | May–Jun 2025

Zena Ismail | American University of Beirut | International Relations | May–Jul 2025

Petra Priskin | LMU Munich | Cultural and Social Studies | Jun–Jul 2025

Süheyla Bektas | Marburg University | Cultural and Social Anthropology | Jun–Jul 2025

Check King Tay | Leiden University | Middle Eastern Studies | Jul–Aug 2025

Salwa Tannir | Beirut Arab University | — | Aug–Oct 2025

Heide König | LMU Munich | Philosophy | Sep–Oct 2025

Angelos Chatzigiannis | University of Tübingen | Philosophy | Oct–Nov 2025

Mohamed Tabaja | American University of Beirut | Islamic Studies
| Nov–Dec 2025

Tarek Wolter | Friedrich Schiller University Jena | Arab Studies /
Romance Studies | Nov–Dec 2025

Rani Lehmann Abi Haidar | Freie Universität Berlin | — | Jan–Feb
2026

Luise Stoss | Freie Universität Berlin | Political Science | Jan–Mar
2026

Hafiz Aslan | University of Tübingen | Culture and Politics of the
Middle East | Feb–Mar 2026

Neisson Ohnmacht | Sciences Po Lille / University of Münster |
International and European Governance | Feb–Mar 2026

Theodore Rai | Lebanese University | Political Science | Mar–Apr
2026

Ben Breuer | University of Leipzig | Arab Studies / Islamic Studies
| Mar–Apr 2026

Danilo Topic | Georg August University Göttingen / University of
Freiburg | Islamic Studies / Philosophy | March 2026

Ella Hammerich | Trinity College Dublin | Political Science /
Philosophy | Jul–Aug 2025

Shirin Metwalli | Freie Universität Berlin | History and Culture of
the Middle East | Jan–Mar 2026

Danilo Topic | Georg August University Göttingen / University of
Freiburg | Islamic Studies / Philosophy | March 2026

David Hertel | University of Tübingen | Comparative & Middle
East Politics and Society | Apr–Jun 2026

OIB Cairo

Antonia Grau | Viadrina / Freie Universität Berlin | MA Politics /
Arab Studies | Jan–Mar 2025

Patricia Martin | Martin Luther University Halle-Wittenberg |
Near Eastern Studies / Semitics / Arab Studies | Feb–Mar 2025

Maria Atallah | Lumière University Lyon II | European and
International Studies | Mar 2025 and May 2025

Rebeka Schäfer | Mainz University of Applied Sciences |
Multilingual Communication | May–Jun 2025

Jona Sievers | Goethe University Frankfurt | Islamic Studies /
Ethnology | Jun–Jul 2025

Research Across Disciplines: Til Reimer



Til Reimer is a psychology graduate from the FernUniversität in Hagen and a bachelor student of Arabic at the University of Cologne. During his internship at OIB's Cairo office in May and June 2026, Til Reimer contributed to a range of events and research and institutional projects that offered insights into the diverse forms scholarly work can take. Working closely with Nahed Samour, he participated in a research project examining Arab positions towards the International Court of Justice. As part of this project, he

conducted an exploratory corpus-linguistic analysis of legal arguments, investigating whether common patterns could be identified across different Arab perspectives on international law and international humanitarian law.

Alongside his research work, Reimer assisted Yasmin Amin in organizing public and academic events, including a lecture by the Egyptologist Okasha El-Daly and a two-day workshop on *Hadīth* studies hosted in cooperation with COSIMENA and DAAD. He supported event preparation, documented proceedings through photography, prepared research materials for lectures, and contributed to the Institute's public outreach efforts. He also worked on the preparation and editing of the OIB annual report, gaining insight into the broader institutional processes through which research is communicated to diverse audiences.

Particularly meaningful for Reimer were the intellectual exchanges that accompanied these activities. Attending lectures and workshops brought him into conversation with scholars from different disciplines, countries, and intellectual traditions, including researchers from Egyptian universities, al-Azhar, and international academic institutions. He was especially struck by the ability of these events to foster dialogue across disciplinary, institutional, and beliefs boundaries. Working within the small Cairo team alongside Yasmin Amin and fellow interns Ben Keberle and David Hertel further strengthened his sense of engagement with the Institute's work.

The internship also broadened his understanding of research itself. Beyond the production of knowledge, he gained first-hand experience of the organisational, administrative, and collaborative structures that

View of the Nile from the 15th of May Bridge, Cairo, during Reimer's daily walk to the OIB office. Zamalek (left) and Agouza (right), May 2026.



sustain academic institutions. Close collaboration with colleagues in both Cairo and Beirut provided insight into how OIB operates across locations and continues its work under conditions of regional instability. Discussions on Islamic studies, law, politics, and the ongoing genocide in Gaza inspired him to reflect on the relationship between scholarship and contemporary public debates.

Following the internship, Reimer continued intensive Arabic language study while writing his bachelor's thesis. The experience strengthened both his commitment to research and his connection to the wider scholarly networks surrounding OIB. Encouragement, feedback, and academic contacts received through the Institute helped shape the next stage of his academic development and reinforced his interest in pursuing future research related to the region.

Building Research Skills in Cairo: Ben Keberle



Ben Keberle is a student of Arab Studies and Political Science at the Friedrich Schiller University Jena and joined OIB's Cairo office in May and June 2026 as an intern. During his internship, he became involved in a wide range of research and institutional activities that offered a glimpse into the many forms scholarly work can take. Working closely with Yasmin Amin of the Cairo office, he supported research projects in Islamic studies and intellectual history, prepared source materials for lectures and workshops, assisted with

institutional correspondence, and contributed to the preparation of the Institute's annual report. He also played an active role in the organisation of the OIB/COSIMENA lecture series and workshops hosted by Amin, gaining first-hand experience of the scholarly, organisational, and collaborative dimensions of academic life.

Among the projects he worked on, research on the Egyptian intellectuals Qāsim Amīn and Hudā Sha'rāwī proved particularly meaningful. Having previously studied their feminist thought in a university seminar, he welcomed the opportunity to explore a different dimension of their work by examining their views on anti-colonialism. He also assisted with research for Amin's work on *Ḥadīth* studies, including the preparation of source materials related to *Ḥadīth al-Ifk*. These projects demonstrated how familiar topics can acquire new significance when approached through original research and close engagement with primary and secondary sources.

The internship also offered insight into the collaborative nature of academic work. Through his involvement in the OIB/COSIMENA lecture series and a workshop on *Ḥadīth* studies, Keberle observed how scholars from different disciplines, countries, and intellectual traditions engage one another's work through sustained dialogue. Equally formative was his exposure to the realities of conducting research in a region marked by ongoing political uncertainty. While working on materials related to the Institute's activities in Beirut, he gained a deeper appreciation for the challenges and importance of sustaining scholarly exchange during times of crisis.

Beyond the Institute, Cairo itself became part of the learning experience. Everyday encounters with the city's social customs, public spaces, and rhythms of life complemented the academic dimension of the internship and deepened his engagement with the region.

Following his internship, Keberle returned to Germany to continue his studies in Arab Studies and Political Science. The experience strengthened his interest in pursuing further research, spending extended periods in the Arab world, and continuing to develop his Arabic language skills. It also offered an early introduction to the ways research, public engagement, and institutional collaboration come together within an international research institute.



OIB Cairo branch interns
(from left to right): Ben
Keberle, David Hertel, and
Til Reimer, June 2026.

OIB Alumni & Friends Association

Shared Pasts and Futures: OIB Alumni and Friends By Yvonne Albers, President of OIB Alumni and Friends Association (EFOI)



Over the course of an academic career, one usually lives in and passes through various places. Yet, of these, only a few become formative places of experience and, in retrospect, sites of memory. OIB is nothing less than a collective site of memory for generations of German—and later, increasingly international—scholars of Middle Eastern studies. Since its founding in 1961, an unverifiable number of research associates, scholarship holders, visiting scholars, interns, and stranded freelancers have, by their own account, spent one of the most important phases of their careers here. Whatever each hoped to find, for most, the Institute became more than a research location in the Arab world or a source of access to an archive of Arab intellectual history that is unmatched by most European university libraries. It became a forum for discourse, a stimulating think tank, a place of respite after exhausting fieldwork, and above all a social hub and knot in a city to which one had become passionately attached by the end of one's stay.

It is the shared nature of this experience—and the bonds it has generated—that have shaped OIB's academic community through the ups and downs of recent decades. Taking the step toward institutionalising this community seemed to us both natural and necessary. What began as a desire among a few individuals to stay in touch and build stronger connections with one another soon evolved into an association. On 16 December 2024, the founding meeting of Ehemalige und Freunde des OIB / OIB Alumni & Friends (EFOI) took place at the Catholic Academy in Berlin with nearly forty attendees. Since its registration, the association has enjoyed a steadily growing membership.

The association has tasked itself with strengthening the connections among its members as well as between them and OIB. It is dedicated to actively and sustainably supporting its work, and critical scholarship in the field of Middle Eastern studies more generally, as well as its communication to a broader public. To this end, the association organises academic and cultural events both independently and in cooperation

with OIB as well as holds annual alumni gatherings in Germany and the MENA region. In the future, we also plan to support and advise early-career scholars by facilitating travel to conferences or through mentoring by our members, who currently work in a wide variety of professional fields.

From the perspective of our members, the history of OIB reflects, on a small scale, what is true of Beirut's history on a larger one: No other place in the Arabic-speaking Middle East has offered generations of researchers—particularly Germans—such a varied, at times contradictory, yet consistently inspiring intellectual environment, and one that has remained largely independent of German foreign policy. In a moment when the protection of academic freedom demands renewed commitment, and as Lebanon once again suffers from war and occupation, the members of the association feel united not only by a shared view of the past but also by a common vision of the future and our responsibility toward it: the future of Beirut and OIB on the one hand, and of Middle Eastern studies in Germany and elsewhere on the other.

If you would like to become a member of our association, please contact any of our board members: Sara Binay, Carsten Walbiner, Torsten Wollina, or Yvonne Albers.

"After-party" following the first EFOI panel at the DOT/DAVO-Congress in September 2025. Clockwise: Irene Fellman, Jens Hanssen, Wolf-Dieter Lemke, Isabel Toral, Barbara Winckler, Yvonne Albers, Sara Binay, Sali Abbas, Stefan Knost.



08

OIB Expands Collaborative Networks



During the reporting period, OIB continued to strengthen its position as a regional and international hub for research collaboration through new institutional partnerships, formal agreements, and joint academic initiatives.

OIB continued to expand and consolidate its international network through a growing number of formal partnerships and Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs). During the reporting period, agreements were established or strengthened with the Tokyo University of Foreign Studies, the Kunsthistorisches Institut in Florenz (KHI), the Arab Council for the Social Sciences (ACSS), the Middle East Studies Association (MESA), and the Institut français d'archéologie orientale (IFAO) in Cairo, while an additional agreement with the Institut français du Proche-Orient (IFPO) was under preparation. These partnerships support collaborative research, conferences, publications, scholarly mobility, and the development of new international initiatives.

In addition, OIB successfully secured several competitive research grants that will support new scholarly initiatives, strengthen local and international partnerships, and expand the Institute's regional impact.

Germany and Europe | OIB maintained particularly strong relationships with German and European academic institutions. Key collaborations included the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD) in Bonn and Cairo, which supported numerous joint initiatives, including projects related to Syria and higher education reconstruction. Together with the University of Cologne, OIB secured funding for the initiative *Internationalization, Infrastructure, Interdisciplinarity: Three Paths to the Revitalization of Syrian Universities*, aimed at supporting capacity building at the Universities of Aleppo and Damascus. Scheduled to begin in autumn 2026, the initiative will support academic capacity building at the Universities of Aleppo and Damascus through institutional exchange, international cooperation, and the development of sustainable research and teaching infrastructures. The project represents an important contribution to the rebuilding and international reintegration of Syrian higher education and reflects OIB's broader commitment to supporting scholarly recovery in post-conflict contexts.

Further partnerships included the Leibniz-Zentrum Moderner Orient (ZMO) in Berlin, Ludwig Maximilian University Munich, the Free University of Berlin and the Berlin Graduate School Muslim Cultures and Societies, Humboldt University Berlin, the University of Konstanz Research Training Group Europe after Eurocentrism, the documenta Institute in Kassel, the Karlsruhe University of Arts and Design, and the Catholic Academy in Berlin.

OIB also continued its collaboration with DIVAN – The Arab Culture House in Berlin, including support for the newly established Riwaq Book Prize, whose first award ceremony will take place in October 2026. Beyond Germany, OIB strengthened its cooperation with Ca' Foscari University of Venice, particularly through ERC and Marie Skłodowska-Curie research networks, while expanding academic exchange with the Kunsthistorisches Institut in Florence.

The German Research Foundation (DFG) awarded funding for two major international conferences, each receiving more than €15,000. One grant supported *Catastrophe, Memory & Critique*, organised by Jens Hanssen and Sami Khatib, which brought together scholars working on historical rupture, political violence, memory, and critical theory. A second DFG-funded conference, *Working with What Is There: Research Methodologies with Non-Film Sources*, promotes methodological innovation in the study of visual and cultural histories. Originally planned during the reporting period, the conference has been rescheduled for autumn 2026 because of regional instability.

OIB also prepared a third DFG proposal titled *Beirut, Berlin and Beyond: The Lives and Afterlives of Weimar and the Nahda*. The project explores the intellectual entanglements between Arab and German modernities and examines the circulation of ideas across linguistic, cultural, and political contexts. While the proposal is ready for submission, it has been temporarily placed on hold due to war-related disruptions affecting institutional planning and international collaboration.

Lebanon | In Lebanon, OIB continued its close cooperation with leading academic, cultural, and research institutions. These included the American University of Beirut (AUB), the Lebanese American University (LAU), Haigazian University, Notre Dame University–Louaize (NDU), IFPO Beirut, the Lebanese Association of Ottoman Historians, the Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies, the Bibliothèque Orientale at Université Saint-Joseph, and UMAM Documentation and Research. These partnerships supported archival research, public programming, conferences, exhibitions, and collaborative initiatives in intellectual history, urban studies, memory studies, and cultural heritage.

OIB Research Associate, Zeina G. Halabi, was awarded an Arab Fund for Arts and Culture (AFAC) Regional Events Grant for *The Public Life of Empathy*, a multi-year project that will bring together scholars, translators, writers, artists, and cultural practitioners from across the Arab world to Lebanon. Through workshops, public conversations, and collaborative programming, the project explores empathy as a literary, ethical, and political practice while creating new spaces for intellectual exchange across disciplines and institutions.

Egypt | The continued expansion of OIB Cairo significantly strengthened the Institute's academic presence in Egypt. Partnerships with the Egyptian Historical Society, the Egyptian Philosophical Society, the American University in Cairo (AUC), and IFAO contributed to conferences, lecture series, workshops, and collaborative research projects. OIB also continued to work closely with Egyptian scholars and institutions in the fields of Islamic studies, intellectual history, manuscript studies, and modern Egyptian history.

North Africa | OIB deepened its engagement with North African institutions through collaborations with MECAM (Merian Centre for Advanced Studies in the Maghreb) in Tunis, where OIB is represented on the Executive Council, Bayt al-Hikma (the Tunisian Academy of Sciences, Letters and Arts), and Dar al-Kitab, the Tunisian National Library. Building on established partnerships in Morocco and Tunisia, these collaborations reinforced OIB's commitment to connecting scholarly communities across the Mashriq and Maghreb and to fostering regional intellectual exchange.

The Gulf and Transregional Networks | OIB further expanded its engagement with institutions beyond the Eastern Mediterranean through collaboration with the Doha Institute for Graduate Studies, strengthening intellectual exchange across the Gulf region. The partnership with Tokyo University of Foreign Studies also marked an important step in extending OIB's scholarly networks into East Asia.



09

OIB Engages Public Audiences



Conferences and Symposia

At the heart of OIB's mission lies the conviction that knowledge is produced through encounter. During the reporting period, the Institute convened scholars, artists, cultural practitioners, and public intellectuals from across the Middle East, Europe, Africa, and Asia to explore questions of memory, heritage, intellectual history, displacement, and cultural transformation.

Why Location Matters: Rethinking Knowledge Production from Beirut

The workshop is featured in "OIB Supports Early Career Scholars" on page 168.

Entangled Histories Across the Bengal-to-Balkans World

The workshop is featured in "OIB Supports Early Career Scholars" on page 172.

Catastrophe, Memory, and Critique

From 3–5 June 2025, OIB hosted the international conference *Catastrophe, Memory, and Critique*, bringing together more than eighty scholars, artists, writers, and public intellectuals from Europe, North America, and the Middle East. Supported by the DFG and co-organised by Jens Hanssen and Sami Khatib, the conference revisited debates first explored at the 1998 OIB-Wissenschaftskolleg Summer Academy Crisis and Memory in Beirut.

The conference examined how the relationship between memory, history, and critique has changed over the past twenty-five years. While the 1998 discussions emerged in the aftermath of the Lebanese Civil War and focused on reconciliation, democratisation, and collective remembrance, the 2025 gathering addressed a landscape shaped by war, displacement, economic collapse, authoritarian resurgence, and the ongoing destruction in Palestine since October 2023. Participants reconsidered whether concepts developed in the late 1990s remain adequate for understanding contemporary catastrophes and the political and ethical challenges they pose.

ORIENT INSTITUT BEIRUT
المعهد الألماني للأبحاث الشرقية

CONFERENCE

Crisis and Memory

PROCEEDINGS

CATASTROPHE, MEMORY & CRITIQUE

INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE

JUNE 3rd to 5th 2025

Jens Hanssen (OIB)
Sami Khatib (Hfg Karlsruhe/OIB)
Aleida Assmann (Uni Konstanz)
Yvonne Albers (FU Berlin)
Monika Borgmann (UMAM)
Nadia Bou Ali (AUB)
Leyla Dakhlī (WiKo-Berlin)
Atina Grossmann (Cooper Union)
Zeina Halabi (OIB)
Rana Issa (Masahat-Oslo)
Munira Khayyat (NYU)
Jumana Manna (Artist, Berlin)
Sonja Mejcher (AUB)
Dirk Moses (CUNY)
Benjamin Raßbach (OIB)
Sana Tannoury (LAU/FIME)
Hanan Toukan (AUB-Cyprus/Bard-Berlin)
Charlotte Wiedemann (Independent Journalist, Berlin)
Adrien Zakar (UoT)

AT
ORIENT-INSTITUT BEIRUT
This is an in-person event.

This conference was made possible with the generous support of the DFG (the German Research Council)

Discussions centred on several key questions: How have Memory Studies and Middle East Studies evolved amid recurring crises and mass displacement? What new concepts—such as multidirectional memory, epistemic injustice, situated knowledge, and critiques of methodological nationalism—help explain these transformations? How have contemporary political conditions affected critical scholarship, public reasoning, and academic freedom? And what methods are needed to sustain critique in an era marked by violence, fragmentation, and historical rupture?

A keynote lecture by Aleida Assmann “Can the Past Be Repaired?” reflected on memory, dialogue, and reconciliation within Israeli civil society. Many contributions used historical catastrophes to rethink established paradigms in memory studies. The conference concluded with a presentation by Jumana Manna, who combined rare photographs and film footage of Palestinian *mawasim* (seasonal communal celebrations) with contemporary Palestinian prison writings to explore memory, loss, and cultural continuity.

A central intervention of the conference was the shift from the language of “crisis” to that of “catastrophe.” Participants argued that catastrophe increasingly appears not as an exceptional rupture but as a condition of historical continuity. Drawing on Walter Benjamin’s observation that “the fact that things go on is the catastrophe,” discussions examined how experiences of war, exile, diaspora, and dispossession demand new approaches to memory, historical periodisation, and political critique. In contrast to the optimism surrounding civil society and democratisation in the 1990s, contributors focused on repetition, presentism, trauma, archival practice, and the tension between historicisation and dehistoricisation.

The conference also highlighted changes in the social composition of scholarly communities. Many participants connected personal experiences of displacement, migration, exile, and transnational mobility to their research, prompting reflection on how knowledge is produced under conditions of catastrophe and how intellectual work is shaped by histories of violence and dislocation.

Gaza Cultural Heritage Symposium

OIB hosted the *Gaza Cultural Heritage Symposium*, bringing together scholars, heritage professionals, archivists, artists, and cultural practitioners to reflect on the destruction, preservation, and future of Gaza’s cultural heritage amid ongoing war and displacement.

The panelists after OIB's *Gaza Cultural Heritage Symposium* at the Brugsch Pascha Hall on 7 Feb. 2025: (Left to right) Volkmar Wenzel, Omar Kattan, Stefan Weber, Jens Hanssen, Sherene Seikaly, Khaldun Bshara.



The symposium addressed the urgent challenges facing museums, archives, libraries, archaeological sites, historic buildings, and cultural collections in Gaza. Participants examined both the immediate consequences of destruction and the longer-term implications for historical memory, cultural continuity, and the preservation of collective heritage. Discussions highlighted the vulnerability of cultural institutions during armed conflict while also emphasizing the role of documentation, archiving, and international scholarly collaboration in safeguarding cultural knowledge.

Beyond questions of preservation, the symposium explored the broader relationship between heritage and political violence. Contributors reflected on how cultural heritage functions not only as a repository of the past but also as a site of identity, belonging, and resistance. The destruction of archives, monuments, and cultural institutions was therefore examined not merely as collateral damage but as a profound challenge to historical memory and cultural life.

Arab-German Relations in the Mirror of History

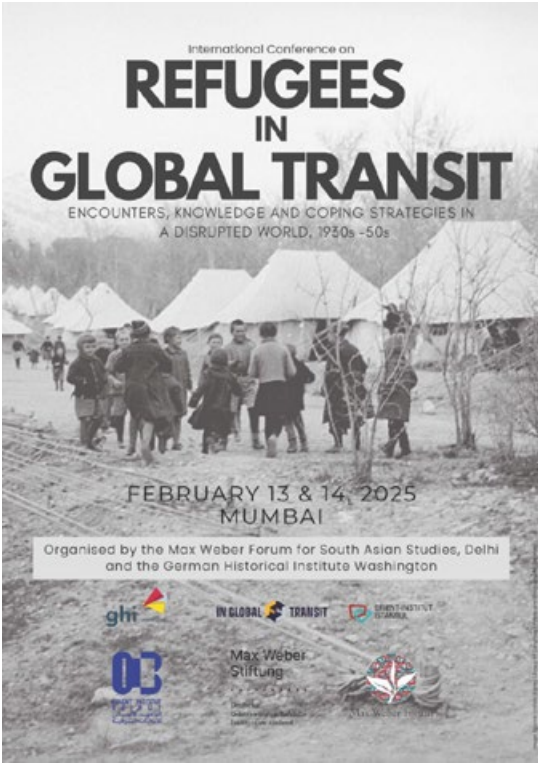
In November 2025, OIB's Vice Director, the OIB Cairo Office, and the Egyptian Society for Historical Studies organised the international conference *Arab-German Relations in the Mirror of History* in Cairo. Historians and scholars of the Middle East and Arab-German relations gathered to examine the intellectual, political, cultural, and scholarly connections that have linked Arab societies and German-speaking Europe over time.

Focusing on the ways these encounters have been studied and remembered, the conference revisited themes such as orientalism, archaeology, diplomacy, intellectual exchange, memory cultures, and the history of scholarship. Discussions highlighted how changing political and cultural contexts have shaped both historical interpretation and understandings of Arab-German relations.

By bringing Egyptian, Arab, and German scholars into conversation across disciplinary boundaries, the conference emphasised collaborative approaches to questions of methodology, knowledge production, and shared history. It also marked the first major partnership between OIB and the Egyptian Society for Historical Studies, establishing a basis for future cooperation and reinforcing academic exchange between German and Arab research communities. At a time of renewed interest in memory, heritage, and global history, the conference demonstrated the continuing relevance of historical inquiry for understanding Arab-German connections.

Ahmad Shirbini, the president of the Egyptian Historical Association, and Jens Hanssen present Simon Conrad with the *tanwih*, or "certificate of participation."





Reimagining Knowledge Production in Syria After Assad

The political transformations unfolding in Syria opened new possibilities—and urgent challenges—for scholars seeking to rethink the future of research, higher education, and intellectual life in the country. During the reporting period, OIB expanded its engagement with Syrian academic institutions through a series of conferences, workshops, and collaborative initiatives dedicated to questions of knowledge production, institutional rebuilding, and scholarly exchange.

A central initiative was the workshop series *(Re-)Imagining Knowledge Production in/on Syria after Assad*, organised in collaboration with Damascus University and international partners. Conceived as a multi-part forum extending from late 2025 into 2026, the series brought together scholars from Syria and abroad to reflect on the future of research infrastructures, academic freedom, archival preservation, and intellectual life after decades of authoritarian rule and conflict. Discussions explored both the practical challenges facing Syrian universities and the broader question of how knowledge about Syria might be produced differently in the future.

These conversations were complemented by OIB’s participation in new academic partnerships aimed at supporting the revitalisation of Syrian higher education. In cooperation with the University of Cologne, OIB secured a DAAD-funded initiative titled *Internationalization, Infrastructure, Interdisciplinarity: Three Paths to the Revitalization of Syrian Universities*, which will support academic capacity building at the Universities of Aleppo and Damascus beginning in autumn 2026.

Refugees in Global Transit: Encounters, Knowledge, and Politics

In February 2025, OIB participated in the international conference *Refugees in Global Transit: Encounters, Knowledge, and Politics in Mumbai*, organised within the Max Weber Foundation’s research initiative *Ends of War: International Perspectives on World War II*. Bringing together scholars from multiple disciplines, the conference examined refugee movements and displacement as historical and political processes shaped by war, colonialism, decolonization, state formation, and transnational networks. Rather than viewing refugees solely through a humanitarian lens, participants explored how displaced communities generated new forms of knowledge, political activism, cultural exchange, and social belonging, while also considering how encounters between refugees and host societies transformed intellectual, cultural, and political life across regions.

For OIB, the conference resonated closely with ongoing research on migration, exile, and intellectual exchange in the Middle East. By placing refugee experiences within a comparative global framework, it fostered dialogue among scholars working on South Asia, the Middle East, Africa, and Europe, while highlighting displacement not only as a consequence of conflict but also as a force that reshapes social and intellectual worlds. The event formed part of the Max Weber Foundation's broader effort to reassess the global legacies of war, displacement, and postwar reconstruction beyond a primarily European perspective.

Reimagining Afro-Asian Connections: South Asia and the Middle East in the Twentieth Century

On 9–10 May 2026, OIB and the Institut français d'archéologie orientale (IFAO) in Cairo convened the international conference *New Perspectives on South-Asian and Middle Eastern Connections in the 20th Century*. Organised by Simon Conrad and Antoinette Ferrand, the conference brought together scholars of Middle Eastern, South Asian, and global history to examine the intellectual, political, and cultural connections linking the two regions throughout the twentieth century.

Responding to the tendency to study the Arab world and South Asia separately, the conference explored networks of circulation and exchange extending from the aftermath of the First World War to the Cold War. Discussions addressed anti-colonial solidarities, political ideas, diplomatic and military ties, technological and academic exchanges, literary networks, and transregional knowledge production. Drawing on understudied archives and multilingual sources, participants highlighted forms of interaction often overlooked by conventional area studies.

The discussions demonstrated how questions of empire, decolonization, development, mobility, and intellectual exchange frequently transcend geographic boundaries, while also marking an important step in the growing collaboration between OIB and IFAO.

Philosophy and Poetry in Islamic Contexts

In January 2026, OIB partnered with the Chair of Oriental Philology and Islamic Studies at Friedrich-Alexander-Universität Erlangen-Nürnberg and supported three OIB alumni to attend the international conference *Philosophy and Poetry in Islamic Contexts*. Bringing together researchers from thirteen countries, the conference explored the often-overlooked relationship between philosophical inquiry and poetic expression across Islamic intellectual traditions.



ORIENT INSTITUT
BEIRUT
المعهد الألماني
للأبحاث الشرقية



Nazek Hamdy, The Lotus Girl, 1955, Oil on canvas, 70 x 50 cm. Courtesy of Barjeel Art Foundation, Sharjah

**INTERNATIONAL
CONFERENCE**

May 9 - 10, 2026

**Institut Français
D'Archéologie Orientale
(IFAO)- Cairo in
collaboration with
Orient-Institut Beirut**

**Organised by Antoinette
Ferrand (IFAO) & Simon
Conrad (OIB)**

**New Perspectives on
Connections between
South Asia and the
Middle East in the 20th
Century**

INSTITUT FRANÇAIS
D'ARCHÉOLOGIE ORIENTALE
المعهد الفرنسي
للأبحاث الشرقية

Max Weber
Foundation
.....
German Humanities
Institutes Abroad

ation visit

Drawing on fields ranging from Arabic and Persian literature to ethics, Qur’anic exegesis, metaphysics, and Islamic philosophy, participants examined how philosophy and poetry have shaped one another across centuries. A central theme was the need to historicize intellectual categories. As Alfred Khoury noted in his conference report, “the *shi’r* of a ninth-century Baghdad scholar is not commensurable with the ‘poetry’ of an eighteenth-century European Romantic poet, and the term *faylasūf* as applied to a twelfth-century logician writing in Arabic is not the same as used by Arab intellectuals of the early twentieth century.” The conference highlighted the importance of understanding concepts within their historical contexts rather than projecting modern categories onto earlier traditions.

An impromptu poetry reading by Ula Aweida, Sarjoun Karam, Worod Al Musawi, and Chafika Ouail connected the conference’s themes to contemporary poetic practice. A volume of proceedings is scheduled for publication with De Gruyter in 2026.

Group photo of the *Philosophy and Poetry in Islamic Contexts* conference participants.



Participants concluding the conference with a guided tour at the Museum of Modern Egyptian Art in Zamalek.



Public Lectures and Lecture Series

Kant and the Non-European

During the reporting period, OIB co-organised the lecture and seminar series *Kant and the Non-European* in collaboration with the American University of Beirut (AUB) and the American University in Cairo (AUC), DIVAN – The Arab Culture House in Berlin, and an international network of scholars working on philosophy, intellectual history, and postcolonial thought.

The series explored a question that has become increasingly important in contemporary humanities scholarship: How should the legacy of Immanuel Kant be understood from perspectives beyond Europe? While Kant remains one of the foundational figures of modern philosophy, his work has also become the subject of renewed debate concerning race, colonialism, universalism, and the global circulation of ideas. The series sought to move beyond simple celebration or rejection by examining how Kant's thought has been received, contested, translated, and reinterpreted in non-European intellectual traditions.

Bringing together philosophers, historians, literary scholars, and social theorists, the lectures created a space for sustained dialogue on the relationship between European intellectual history and the histories of knowledge produced in Africa, Asia, and the Middle East. Discussions addressed questions of decolonization, the limits of Enlightenment universalism, alternative intellectual genealogies, and the possibilities of comparative philosophy.

The Second Josef van Ess Memorial Lecture

Beatrice Gründler, "An Arabic 'Book That Moves': *Kalīla wa-Dimna*"

The second Josef van Ess Memorial Lecture brought the distinguished scholar of Arabic literature Beatrice Gründler to Cairo to speak on *Kalīla wa-Dimna*, one of the most influential works in world literary history. organised by OIB and the Max Weber Foundation and hosted at Bayt Yakan, the event honored Josef van Ess's legacy through a text that has shaped intellectual exchange across languages, religions, and empires for more than a millennium.

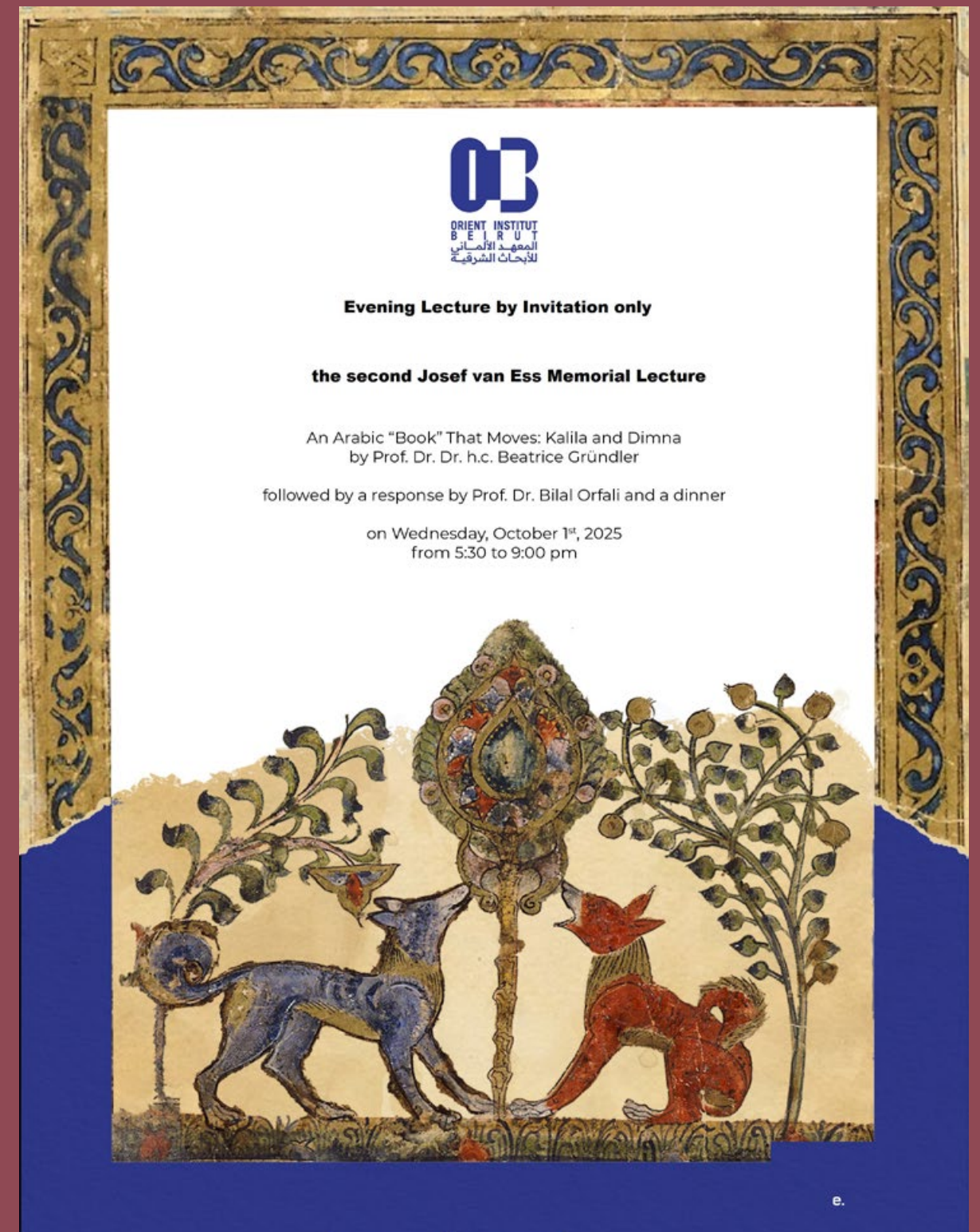
Drawing on over a decade of research, Gründler examined the transmission and global reception of *Kalīla wa-Dimna*, translated into Arabic by Ibn al-Muqaffaʿ in the eighth century. She presented it as a “book that moves,” whose significance emerged through continual adaptation, translation, and circulation from India and Iran to the Arab world



and beyond. Rather than a fixed literary work, it appeared as a dynamic archive of cultural exchange and intellectual mobility.

The lecture reflected Gründler's broader scholarship on the cosmopolitan character of Arabic literature and its role in transmitting knowledge across Afro-Eurasia. Particularly relevant to OIB's mission was her emphasis on the movement of texts, ideas, and people. The history of *Kalīla wa-Dimna*—translated into more than forty languages, with the Arabic version serving as the basis for many later adaptations—illustrates the central role of Arabic as a language of intellectual mediation and cultural transmission.

As a memorial lecture dedicated to one of the foremost historians of Islamic thought, the event also underscored the value of philological scholarship. Like Josef van Ess's own work, Gründler's research shows how close engagement with texts can illuminate broader histories of cultural encounter and intellectual exchange.



Exhibitions

Nothing Lasts Forever: Syria Through the Eyes of the Free

Among OIB's most significant public initiatives during the reporting period was the exhibition *Nothing Lasts Forever: Syria Through the Eyes of the Free* (*Mā fī lil-abad: Sūriyā bi-‘uyūn al-aḥrār*), curated by Research Associate Alya Karame and presented between April and July 2025. The exhibition documented the collapse of the Assad regime and the uncertain transition that followed through photographs taken by Syrians across the country. By foregrounding firsthand perspectives rather than international media narratives, it captured moments of celebration, return, mourning, destruction, uncertainty, and hope.

For Karame, whose work focuses on cultural memory, archives, and material heritage, the exhibition sought to preserve a visual record of a transformative historical moment before it disappeared into the flow of news and political narratives. The photographs functioned as documentary evidence, historical testimony, and acts of witnessing, recording not only political change but also the emotions and expectations that accompanied it. The exhibition's emphasis on Syrian agency was particularly significant, centring the experiences of Syrians at a time when discussions of the country are often dominated by geopolitical analysis and humanitarian statistics.

By bringing together historical reflection, visual culture, and public debate, *Nothing Lasts Forever* explored how societies remember moments of rupture and how images contribute to the writing of history. It also demonstrated the role of cultural programming as a form of public scholarship, transforming OIB into a space of documentation, reflection, and dialogue for researchers, artists, journalists, members of the Syrian diaspora, and the wider public.

Defying the Violence: Lebanon's Visual Arts in the 1980s

In January 2026, OIB hosted the launch of "Defying the Violence: Lebanon's Visual Arts in the 1980s," a special issue of *Manazir Journal* edited by Nadia von Maltzahn, Principal Investigator of the ERC-funded project Lebanon's Art World at Home and Abroad (LAWHA). Accompanied by an exhibition of archival materials and audiovisual documentation, the event brought together researchers, artists, curators, and the public to revisit a decade often overshadowed by narratives of Civil War and destruction.



Challenging the view of the 1980s as a period of cultural collapse, the project showed how artistic experimentation, institutional resilience, and new cultural networks persisted despite violence and displacement. Archival materials from the Joseph Tarrab Archive—recently donated to OIB—alongside contributions from galleries, museums, and artists, illuminated the networks that sustained Lebanon’s art world during wartime. Video installations further explored displacement and the experiences of artists who remained in the country.

The exhibition complemented the special journal issue featuring essays, interviews, and roundtable discussions on exhibition practices, museums, migration, transnational networks, and the relationship between art and conflict. Together, the exhibition and publication challenged familiar narratives of a pre-war “golden age,” wartime rupture, and post-war recovery, emphasising instead the continuities that linked artistic production across decades of political upheaval. In doing so, the project advanced LAWHA’s broader goal of recovering overlooked histories of modern and contemporary art in the Arab world.

Archival display accompanying the launch of “Defying the Violence: Lebanon’s Visual Arts in the 1980s,” featuring materials from the Joseph Tarrab Archive and collections generously shared by artists, galleries, and cultural institutions. The exhibition revisited a formative decade in Lebanon’s art history and challenged conventional narratives of wartime cultural rupture.



Manazir
مناظر
journal

7

Defying the Violence
Lebanon’s Visual Arts in the 1980s

A watercolor illustration of a woman sitting on a patterned rug in a landscape. She is holding a book or document. The background shows a green field and trees. The style is soft and painterly.

Edited by Nadia von Maltzahn

Cultural Partnerships and Public Scholarship

OIB's engagement with cultural institutions forms an integral part of its mission to connect scholarly research with broader public audiences. During the reporting period, OIB strengthened its collaborations with leading museums, archives, cinemas, and cultural organisations across Lebanon, including Metropolis Cinema, the Sursock Museum, Beirut Art Center, BeMA (Beirut Museum of Art), Dar El-Nimer for Arts and Culture, and UMAM Documentation and Research. These partnerships enabled researchers to share their work beyond academic settings while creating opportunities for dialogue between scholars, artists, curators, filmmakers, archivists, and wider publics.

A new collaboration developed through a partnership with Metropolis Cinema, Beirut's leading independent cinema and cinemathèque, inaugurating a new series of public discussions. In November 2025, Zeina G. Halabi participated in the public discussion "Two Encounters on the Brink of Death," organised in conjunction with screenings of Omar Amiralay's *There Are So Many Things Still to Say* (1997) and Sandra Iché's *Ellipses* (2015). Together with Cinemathèque Beirut team member Mahdi Awada, Halabi reflected on the final interviews and last public testimonies of major intellectual and political figures, exploring how moments of impending death reshape questions of memory, intellectual responsibility, political commitment, and the imagination of the future. The event exemplified OIB's commitment to bringing research on intellectual history, memory, and political thought into conversation with cinema and contemporary cultural debate.

OIB's long-standing relationship with the Sursock Museum continued to generate important scholarly collaborations. Research conducted at the Institute contributed directly to the museum's exhibitions and public programming. During the reporting period, doctoral researcher Ashraf Osman prepared all exhibition captions for *Becoming Icon*, a major exhibition of the museum's permanent collection, drawing on his research into artistic canon formation, visibility, and institutional recognition in Lebanon. Allison Gebeily also contributed research support to preparations for a forthcoming exhibition on Khalil Gibran, developed in collaboration with scholars at the American University of Beirut. More broadly, the museum remained an important partner in ongoing conversations about modern art history, collections, archives, and the preservation of Lebanon's cultural heritage.

Collaboration with Dar El-Nimer for Arts and Culture created opportunities for public engagement around questions of art, heritage, and cultural production. In June 2025, Ashraf Osman participated in the panel discussion "Lebanon: Art Under Pressure," where artists, scholars, and cultural practitioners reflected on the challenges facing Lebanon's cultural sector amid economic crisis, political instability, and regional conflict. The event highlighted the importance of cultural institutions as spaces for critical reflection and public dialogue during periods of uncertainty.

OIB also maintained active relationships with Beirut Art Center and BeMA (Beirut Museum of Art), both of which play important roles in shaping contemporary artistic and cultural discourse in Lebanon. These collaborations supported research on modern and contemporary art histories, exhibition practices, institutional memory, and archival preservation.

The Institute's cooperation with UMAM Documentation and Research remained particularly significant in the fields of memory studies, archival preservation, and the documentation of Lebanon's contemporary history. UMAM's extensive archival holdings and public history initiatives provide invaluable resources for scholars working on questions of war, memory, displacement, and political violence. Shared interests in archives, documentation, and public engagement continued to foster collaboration between the two institutions, reinforcing their common commitment to preserving historical memory and supporting critical research on Lebanon and the wider region.

10

OIB Pursues Research Amid Adversity



The reporting period unfolded under the shadow of war, displacement, political uncertainty, and regional instability. For many members of the OIB community, these were not distant events but realities that shaped daily life, affected families and colleagues, disrupted travel, altered research plans, and transformed the conditions under which scholarship could be produced. Yet rather than bringing intellectual life to a halt, these circumstances revealed both the resilience of researchers and the importance of institutions capable of sustaining scholarship during periods of crisis.

The effects of war were felt across all aspects of academic work. Researchers described interrupted fieldwork, postponed conferences, cancelled travel, delayed archival visits, and increasing difficulties securing funding and institutional support. International mobility became more restricted, while university security regulations and government advisories often prevented researchers from returning to Lebanon or conducting planned research elsewhere. Some projects shifted online, others relied more heavily on local resources, while several researchers turned to archival work, writing, and digital forms of engagement when field research became impossible.

At the institutional level, OIB adapted continuously to changing circumstances. Staff worked remotely when necessary, administrative workflows were reorganised, and close coordination between Beirut and Cairo ensured that essential operations continued. The Cairo office played a particularly important role as a complementary hub during periods of heightened uncertainty, helping maintain academic programming, institutional communication, and research support. Regular crisis planning between the two offices allowed the Institute to respond flexibly to rapidly changing conditions while preserving continuity across its activities.

Despite these challenges, OIB maintained its academic activities. Conferences, workshops, seminars, and lecture series continued, often in hybrid or online formats. The fellowship programme remained active, enabling researchers from across the region and beyond to pursue their work, while publication activities continued despite local logistical constraints affecting production and distribution.

At the same time, the experience of living and working through war reshaped how many researchers understood their own subjects. Scholars working on violence, memory, displacement, prisons, urbanism, infrastructure, public health, and cultural heritage found that the questions at the centre of their research acquired a new immediacy. Historical investigations into crisis, vulnerability, migration, institutional fragility, and social resilience were no longer solely matters of



OIB researcher captures the smoke from a site bombed on 8 Apr. 2026. That day, Israel launched 100 airstrikes on Beirut in less than 10 minutes killing 360 and injuring 1,220. The strikes reached neighbourhoods adjacent to Zokak el-Blat where OIB is located.

archival reconstruction; they became lenses through which contemporary realities could be understood. For some, continuing research became a way of making sense of the world around them. For others, scholarship itself became a form of continuity and intellectual grounding amid uncertainty.

The disruptions of war also generated methodological adaptations. Researchers developed new forms of digital engagement, relied on remote collaboration, turned to online archives and media analysis, expanded their use of written testimonies and documentary sources, and maintained scholarly exchange through smaller conversations, seminars, and virtual platforms. Fieldwork often became more fragmented and episodic, requiring flexible and creative approaches to data collection. Several scholars described embracing slower research rhythms, adjusting expectations, and acknowledging the emotional and practical realities of conducting scholarship in a conflict environment.

Beyond individual projects, the war underscored the importance of scholarly communities. Again and again, researchers emphasised the value of intellectual networks that allowed research to continue despite disruption. Workshops, lecture series, collaborative projects, online seminars, and informal exchanges provided continuity at moments when normal academic routines were impossible. OIB's library, research infrastructure, fellowship programmes, publication series, and scholarly community offered stable points of reference amid uncertainty, enabling researchers to maintain momentum even when movement, communication, and institutional cooperation became more difficult.

For some, the experience reinforced the importance of public engagement. Research on history, culture, politics, and society acquired renewed relevance in a context where public debate was often dominated by immediate crisis. Scholars contributed through writing, media appearances, public lectures, digital initiatives, and community-based activities, helping situate contemporary events within longer historical and social trajectories. Others became directly involved in relief efforts and solidarity initiatives, blurring conventional distinctions between scholarship, civic engagement, and public responsibility.

The period demonstrated that research does not take place outside history. It is shaped by the same political, social, and material conditions that affect the societies scholars study and seek to understand. Yet it also demonstrated something equally important: that institutions matter. In a period marked by war and instability, OIB preserved institutional continuity by maintaining its research infrastructure, sustaining its fellowship and publication programmes, adapting its op-

erations across Beirut and Cairo, and protecting spaces for intellectual exchange. The result was not scholarship despite adversity, but scholarship transformed by it—work that remained attentive to the realities of conflict while continuing to generate knowledge, sustain dialogue, and preserve spaces for critical reflection.

Stipendiat-fellows resume the Theory and Method Seminar in hybrid mode in OIB's Jerusalem Room in May 2026.



**From Intern to Scientific Researcher:
Levke Christianssen**



My journey at OIB began in August 2024, when I was supposed to come to Beirut to conduct my internship. I ended up staying in Germany due to the war and virtually jumped on Jens's research project on the Institute's history. The internship was far more interesting than you'd expect an online internship to be. By diving into the Institute's archive, I came to know OIB intimately. In Berlin, I finally had the chance to meet Jens in person and meet future colleagues for the Riwaq book prize from Divan. Another task during my internship was assisting with the establishment of the OIB Alumni & Friends Association, where I connected with many OIB alumni and stayed in touch with OIB beyond the internship. This allowed me to come back to Beirut and the Institute in May 2025, where I began my work as a Scientific Coordinator.

Even though I was supposed to focus on my MA studies at Université Saint-Joseph, I soon realised that I enjoy work at OIB far more. The insights into academia, interesting debates, and personal encounters at conferences or our beautiful garden become a central part of my life in Beirut. It leveled-up my life in Beirut and allowed me to learn more about the city, the region, and academia. While most of those aspects were affected by the 2026 war, a few small encounters stayed: chatting with Imad, Ali, Caroline, or even playing a round of table tennis with Hussein (yes, during working hours). After the war started and we shifted to remote work, I returned to working on the OIB archival research project, taking our archive folders with me into the home office. This felt like a full circle moment: I was only given this task due to the war in 2024 in the first place, and now I only had capacity to work on it again because the current war forced us to postpone other events that I originally dedicated my time to.

During all these uncertain times, OIB stayed present and continues to serve as a unique place for research and intellectual exchange. The diversity of research topics—from researchers, fellows, residents, guests, and conference speakers—lives on in the Institute, even if transferred online for a while. I often encountered people in Beirut whom I met through our events, who would ask about OIB and its team. Now, as more people return, everybody is excited to exchange research updates and study together in the library again. I am very grateful for this opportunity, team, and mentorship. Hopefully soon, OIB, its beautiful garden, and library will serve many more as a haven for research, exchange, and connections, as it does for me.

11

OIB Looks Ahead



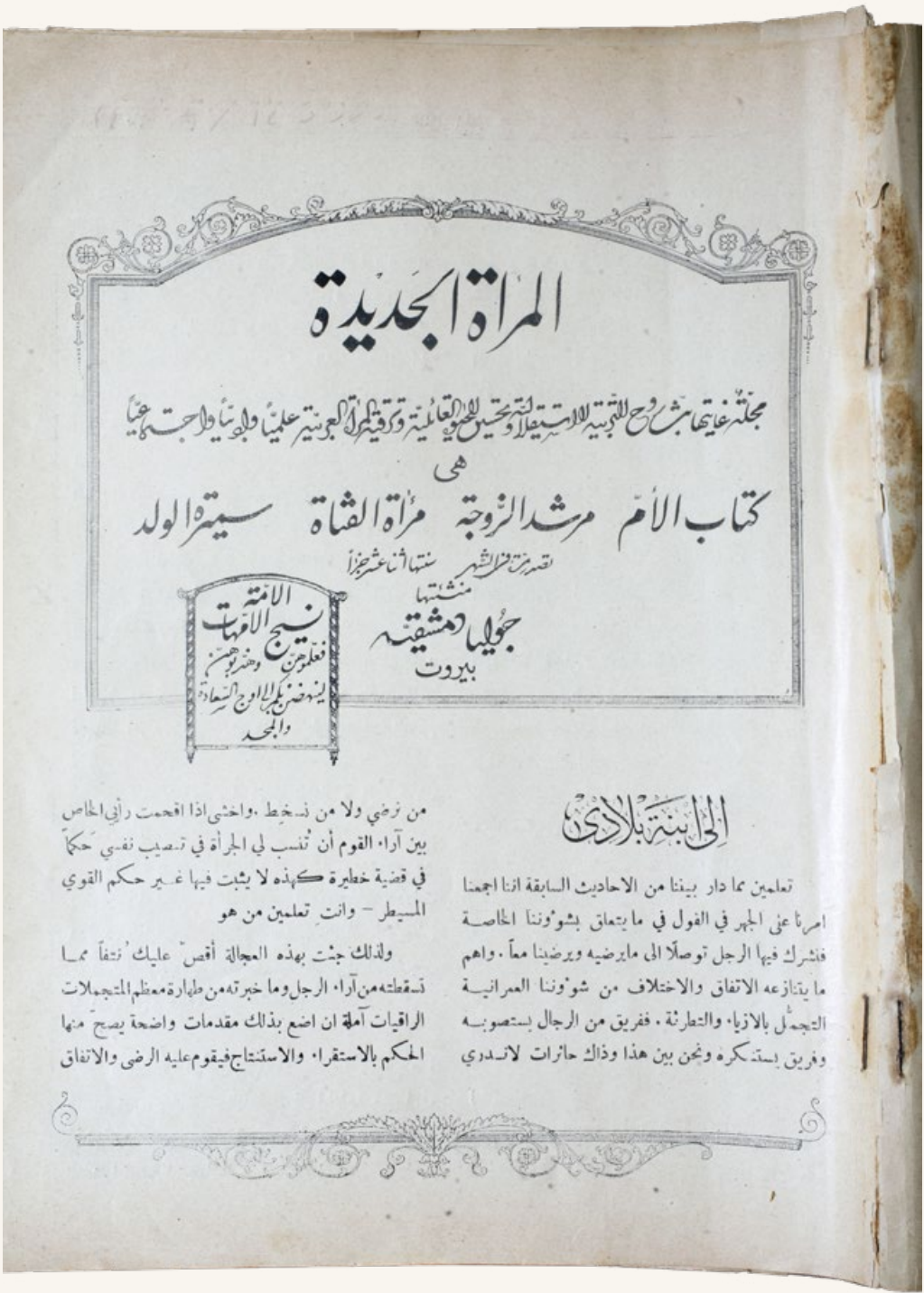
Shaping OIB's Next Chapter: Barbara Winckler



Barbara Winckler joined OIB as Vice Director in spring 2026. A scholar of modern Arabic literature, Nahda studies, periodical cultures, and postwar Lebanese cultural production, she brings decades of experience in literary scholarship, translation, and international academic collaboration. Prior to joining OIB, she held research and teaching positions at Freie Universität Berlin, the Zentrum für Literatur- und Kulturwissenschaft (ZfL) Berlin, and the University of Münster. She is also an alumna of the Arab-German Young Academy of Sciences and Humanities (AGYA) and co-founder of the international bilingual summer school *Arabische Philologien im Blickwechsel / نحو دراسات عربية / برؤى متعددة*, an initiative that has fostered sustained exchange among doctoral researchers and early-career scholars from Arab and European universities.

At the centre of Winckler's current research is the emergence of the Arabic periodical press in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, considered as "new media" that entailed the development of a new kind of public sphere which included a broader cross-section of society, transgressing geographical distance, confessional affiliation, and social boundaries. Drawing on recent trends in the field of Periodical Studies, she examines the journal as a distinct form, cultural institution, and social practice, rather than approaching periodicals merely as repositories of ideas.

A particular focus of her research are women-edited journals published in Beirut and Damascus during the 1920s that addressed a mainly, but



Al-Mar'a al-Jadida, 3.9 (Sept. 1923). Title page with masthead and ornate title (this page); cover (opposite page).

not exclusively, female readership. Drawing on collections preserved in the libraries and archives of Beirut, she investigates how the journals engaged in debates on women's rights and education as well as on the progress and independence of the nation, then under Ottoman rule and later French mandate. While earlier scholarship has often focused primarily on the ideas expressed in these publications, Winckler is equally interested in the material and social dimensions of periodical culture: how journals circulated, how communities of writers and readers were formed through the medium itself, and how (especially women) editors, authors, and readers made use of the specifics of the periodical form to distinguish themselves as intellectuals or activists and build strategic coalitions—locally, regionally, and transregionally. Through a close reading of selected journals, complemented by broader discussion of aspects such as mediality, materiality and temporality as well as reading and archival practices, her work reveals how questions of gender and nation were deeply intertwined in the intellectual debates of the period and how journals became important spaces for imagining new forms of social and political participation.

This interest in the relationship between media, publics, and cultural production also informs her broader scholarly agenda. Alongside her work on the Nahda and periodical cultures, Winckler continues her long-standing engagement with postwar Lebanese literature, contemporary cultural production, and the role of literature and the arts in shaping public debate. Looking ahead, she hopes to bring these fields into closer conversation by exploring continuities and ruptures across the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Questions surrounding gender, education, civil society, sectarianism, and cultural belonging remain central to public life in Lebanon and Syria today, and her future projects seek to trace how these concerns have been negotiated through different media, institutions, and artistic forms over time.

A defining feature of Winckler's scholarship is its commitment to interdisciplinarity. Trained in literary and cultural studies, she approaches texts not simply as reflections of social and political realities but as interventions that help shape those realities. Literature, journals, theatre, visual culture, and other artistic forms provide spaces in which individuals and societies imagine alternatives, negotiate conflict, and articulate new visions of the future. Through their ambiguity and formal experimentation, these art forms may affect us consciously or unconsciously, and, especially in times of crises, they can also help build social, cultural, and psychological resilience. In this sense, the study of literature and the arts is not peripheral to understanding the contemporary Arab world but essential to it.

As Vice Director, Winckler hopes to strengthen OIB's role as a place where scholarship remains connected to broader cultural and social conversations. She is particularly interested in fostering exchanges that bring together researchers, writers, artists, translators, and cultural practitioners. This vision is inspired not only by her own research on journals, salons, and intellectual networks, but also by the history of Beirut itself as a centre of cultural production and public debate. The Institute's location in Zokak el-Blat—once home to some of Beirut's most important intellectual and political salons, among them Maud Farjallah's salon in the very same building—offers a powerful reminder of the long-standing relationship between scholarship and public life in the city.

Another priority for Winckler is the promotion of Arabic as an active language of academic exchange. While much scholarly work on the Arab world continues to circulate primarily in European languages, she sees enormous value in creating bilingual and multilingual spaces where knowledge can move more freely across linguistic communities. Building on her experience with collaborative teaching initiatives and the international summer school programme she co-founded in 2014 which trains non-native speakers to present their research in Arabic, she hopes to expand opportunities for scholars working in Arabic, German, and English to engage one another's work, contribute to shared intellectual conversations, and explore questions of (in)translatability of academic terms and cultural concepts.

For Winckler, Beirut remains one of the most important locations for scholarship in the Arab world. Despite years of economic crisis, political instability, and war, the city continues to host an extraordinary concentration of universities, libraries, archives, cultural institutions, and research centres. As Vice Director, she hopes to expand OIB's network beyond the borders of the capital, including public universities, thus adding different perspectives and giving students from lower social strata the opportunity to get in contact with international scholars. Equally important is OIB's position within wider regional networks. Its location in Beirut offers a vantage point from which scholars can engage not only with Lebanon but also with Syria, Jordan, Palestine, Egypt, and the broader Arab world.

The coming years will offer new opportunities to strengthen these regional connections. Winckler is particularly interested in expanding forms of academic exchange that connect institutions across the region and foster new forms of South-South collaboration. As an alumna of the Arab-German Young Academy of Sciences and Humanities, she brings

in a wide network of scholars of diverse academic disciplines across the Arab world. The recent reopening of academic channels with Syria, including OIB’s participation in a DAAD-funded initiative supporting the Universities of Damascus and Aleppo and the Higher Institute of Dramatic Arts, represents one example of this broader commitment to rebuilding and sustaining scholarly networks under difficult circumstances.

At a moment when academic freedom faces growing pressures in many parts of the world and political polarisation increasingly shapes public debate, Winckler sees institutions such as OIB as more important than ever. Beyond supporting individual research projects, the Institute provides a space for sustained intellectual exchange across national, disciplinary, linguistic, and political boundaries as well as career stages. From her own experience of a one-year language sojourn at the IFEAD in Syria and various research sojourns at OIB and, most recently, at the University of Jordan, she is aware of the impact of this kind of experience. Providing German scholars the opportunity to closely collaborate with Lebanese, Arab, and international colleagues is also extremely important for German academia where perspectives from the region are often underrepresented. As OIB enters its next phase of development, she hopes to build on these strengths while expanding the Institute’s role as a forum for critical inquiry, cultural engagement, and regional collaboration.

Winckler’s vision for the future is one in which OIB continues to serve not only as a place where knowledge is produced, but also as a space where intellectual communities are cultivated, new conversations emerge, and scholarship remains closely connected to the societies and cultures it seeks to understand.

Strengthening OIB’s role as a forum for encounters and debates that brings together scholars, artists, other intellectuals or a broader audience, is not only in line with my current research project—looking at periodicals as cultural form and social practice in interplay with their performative counterparts, salons and cultural associations—but also with the history of the neighbourhood and, more specifically, with that of the building OIB is located in, where, several decades ago, Maud Farjallah held a political salon.

– Barbara Winckler

Emerging Research Directions

The reporting period marked an important moment in the long-term development of OIB. While preserving continuity under conditions of war and regional instability remained an immediate priority, the Institute simultaneously laid the foundations for future growth. New appointments, the continued development of the Cairo office, expanding collaborations across Syria and the Gulf, and a new cohort of fellows collectively point toward a more regionally integrated research agenda.

Reconnecting with Syria

The political transformations underway in Syria have created new possibilities for scholarly exchange while simultaneously raising profound questions about the future of research infrastructure and higher education in the country. Through its long-standing regional networks and its proximity to Syrian academic institutions, OIB is well positioned to contribute to these developments. As Fellow Christin Sander observes, “Since no one can predict how Syria’s future will unfold, OIB, with its stable and well-functioning infrastructure, is currently and for the foreseeable future the hub to continue research in and on Syria.”

This role extends beyond individual research projects. Through new partnerships, workshops, and the DAAD-funded initiative *Internationalization, Infrastructure, Interdisciplinarity: Three Paths to the Revitalization of Syrian Universities*, OIB seeks to contribute to rebuilding scholarly networks and creating opportunities for sustained collaboration between researchers in Syria, Lebanon, Germany, and the wider region. In the coming years, the Institute aims to strengthen its engagement with Syrian universities, archives, cultural institutions, and scholars as part of a broader commitment to supporting the reconstruction of academic life after decades of conflict and isolation.

Cairo and Beirut: From Complementarity to Academic Exchange

The relationship between Beirut and Cairo increasingly defines OIB’s intellectual profile. Rather than functioning as separate offices, the two locations complement one another in ways that expand the Institute’s research horizons and strengthen its regional relevance. Together, they

create a research agenda shaped by the region itself rather than by national or disciplinary boundaries.

Beirut continues to provide a unique environment for critical inquiry in the humanities and social sciences, offering intellectual freedom and close engagement with questions of literature, art, political thought, urbanism, memory, and the contemporary history of the Eastern Mediterranean. Cairo, by contrast, provides unparalleled access to archives, manuscripts, libraries, and scholarly traditions central to the study of Islamic intellectual history, the Nahda, and the wider histories of North Africa, Sudan, and African and Asian connections.

The forthcoming accreditation of the Cairo office represents an important institutional milestone to turn complementarity into durable academic exchange between Lebanon, Egypt and Germany. It will create new possibilities for partnerships and research programming, while consolidating OIB’s long-term presence in Egypt. At the same time, the reporting period demonstrated the strategic value of maintaining a multi-sited institutional structure. During periods of war and instability in Lebanon, Cairo functioned as an important hub for continuity, allowing research activities, academic events, administrative operations, and scholarly networks to remain active.

5 Research Priorities for OIB’s Cairo Office

Research Priority	Focus Areas	Planned Activities and Partnerships
Qur’anic Studies and Exegesis	Qur’anic interpretation examined both diachronically and synchronically, with particular attention to intellectual, theological, and hermeneutical traditions.	International conference on Qur’anic exegesis (Mar. 2027) in collaboration with IDEO, featuring Angelika Neuwirth as keynote speaker.
Islamic History in the Long Term	The Fatimid Caliphate, the Mamluk period, and Ottoman provincial rule, using Cairo’s unparalleled archival, manuscript, and architectural resources.	Development of research projects, workshops, and collaborations centred on Cairo as a major hub for historical scholarship and source-based research.
Egypt in Global and Intellectual History	Colonialism, nationalism, the Nahda, decolonization, and the Arab Spring within broader global and transregional contexts.	Partnerships with CEDEJ, the American University in Cairo (AUC), and the Egyptian Historical Society to support conferences, publications, and scholarly exchange.
Transregional and Afro-Asian Connections	Historical and contemporary connections linking Egypt to Sudan, North Africa, the Indian Ocean, and East Asia through trade, pilgrimage, migration, and intellectual exchange.	Expansion of collaborative networks building on existing partnerships in Morocco and Tunisia and new initiatives in Afro-Asian and Indian Ocean studies.
Manuscript Studies and Architectural Heritage	Arabic manuscript cultures, cataloguing and digitisation projects, Islamic architecture, and the preservation of cultural heritage.	Collaboration with Dār al-Kutub, al-Azhar, and Ralph Bodenstein (DAI Cairo); integration with the <i>Bibliotheca Islamica</i> (BI) series under the editorship of Simon Conrad; development of research and training initiatives in manuscript studies and architectural history.

The Cairo Office’s research agenda builds on Egypt’s unique archival, intellectual, and cultural resources while expanding OIB’s engagement with Islamic studies, intellectual history, global history, and transregional scholarship across Africa and Asia.

From
Fellow to
Researcher:
Simon
Conrad



An important step in the development of OIB Cairo is the appointment of Simon Conrad as Research Associate beginning in September 2026. Having joined the Institute as a postdoctoral fellow, Conrad’s work exemplifies the intellectual possibilities created by OIB’s presence in both Beirut and Cairo.

Conrad’s research examines the intellectual history of the modern Arab world, with particular attention to Islamic mysticism, philosophy, anti-colonial thought, and the circulation of scholarly traditions in twentieth-century Egypt. During his fellowship year, Beirut and Cairo became important sites for expanding both his research agenda and intellectual networks.

The fellowship period significantly shaped the development of his scholarship. Working from Beirut situated his research more directly within the societies, histories, and intellectual traditions that form its subject matter. Engagement with OIB’s community of fellows, associates, and visiting scholars, together with participation in the Institute’s Theory and Method Seminar, helped refine his approach to intellectual history and informed the ongoing transformation of his doctoral dissertation into a first monograph. His activities in Cairo further expanded his research on Egypt and Sudan while fostering new institutional partnerships across the region.

An issue of Alexandria’s *Journal of the Faculty of Arts*, two years after establishment of Egypt’s second public university in the port city.



Mysticism, Scholarship, and Anti-Colonial Thought in Modern Egypt

Conrad’s current book project, *Revolution of the Unseen: Mysticism, Scholarship, and Politics in Egypt*, explores how Egyptian intellectuals, philosophers, and scholars turned to Islamic mysticism as a resource for cultural renewal, anti-colonial thought, and alternative political futures from the interwar period through the Nasser era.

Drawing on academic writing, literary works, textbooks, and critical editions of classical texts, the project examines how a generation shaped by anti-colonial struggle reimagined Islamic philosophy and Sufism as foundations for new forms of intellectual and political consciousness. The book highlights the role of Egyptian universities as sites where alternative genealogies of Islamic studies emerged outside colonial centres of knowledge production.

Editing as Intellectual Intervention

A major strand of Conrad’s recent work investigates the history of editing and textual scholarship in the modern Arab world.

His article “Editing as ‘Counter-Scholarship’: Abū al-‘Ilā ‘Afīfī (1897–1966), the Rescripting of *Taṣawwuf*, and the Study of Editions” (2025), published in *Philological Encounters*, argues that critical editions of classical Sufi texts were not simply preservation projects but intellectual interventions responding to imperialism, fascism, and dehumanisation in the twentieth century.

He also guest-edited this special issue of *Philological Encounters*. His introductory essay, “Towards the Study of the Editor (*al-Muḥaqqiq*) in Modern Arabic Intellectual History” (2025), advances a broader methodological argument for treating editors and editorial projects as key actors in the production of modern intellectual culture.

Egypt, Sudan, and Afro-Asian Connections

Alongside his work on Islamic thought, Conrad has expanded his research into the intellectual and cultural connections linking the Middle East, Africa, and South Asia.

This work culminated in the international conference *New Perspectives on South-Asian and Middle Eastern Connections in the Twentieth Century*, organised jointly with Antoinette Ferrand at Institut français d’archéologie

orientale (IFAO) in Cairo with support from OIB. Bringing together scholars of global, Middle Eastern, and South Asian history, the conference explored histories of anti-colonial solidarity, intellectual exchange, diplomacy, media, and institution-building across the two regions.

His own contribution examined the Sudanese novelist al-Tayyib Salih’s travels in India and the broader role of Arab intellectuals in postcolonial networks of cultural and political exchange during the Cold War.

Scholarship Across Institutions

Throughout the reporting period, Conrad contributed to scholarly exchange through lectures, seminars, and conferences in Egypt and beyond. His work addressed topics including the study of mysticism in modern Egypt, Egyptian philosophy, Catholic scholarship on Sufism, and the intellectual history of postcolonial solidarities.

At Al-Azhar University, he led a seminar on the study of mysticism in twentieth-century Egypt, examining how scholars such as Abū al-‘Ilā ‘Afīfī and Zakī Najīb Maḥmūd integrated Sufi thought into broader debates on philosophy, modernity, and intellectual renewal.

Expanding OIB’s Scholarly Networks

Conrad played a leading role in developing new institutional partnerships that strengthen OIB’s presence in regional and international academic networks.

Collaborations initiated during the reporting period include partnerships with IFAO, CEDEJ, IDEO, the American University in Cairo, the American University of Beirut, and Université Saint-Joseph. These collaborations have already generated conferences, publication projects, public lectures, and plans for future initiatives in the fields of Islamic studies, Sudanese literature, philosophy, and intellectual history.

Particularly notable is the emerging collaboration that will bring the Senegalese philosopher Souleymane Bachir Diagne to Beirut, creating new opportunities for engagement with African and global intellectual traditions.

Recognition and Future Research

During the reporting period, Conrad received Princeton University’s Bayard and Cleveland Dodge Memorial Prize for Best PhD Dissertation.

Simon Conrad and Antoinette Ferrand opening the *New Perspectives on South-Asian and Middle Eastern Connections in the Twentieth Century* conference at IFAO in Cairo.



As Research Associate, he will continue developing OIB’s strengths in Islamic philosophy, Arabic intellectual history, and Afro-Asian studies. His future work includes the completion of two monographs, the expansion of publication initiatives across Beirut and Cairo, and the development of new scholarly platforms connecting intellectual history, decolonization, and global humanities research.

Mysticism, Philosophy, and Intellectual Decolonization

- *Revolution of the Unseen: Mysticism, Scholarship, and Politics in Twentieth-Century Egypt*. Book project. Examines how Egyptian intellectuals turned to Sufism and Islamic philosophy as resources for cultural renewal, anti-colonial thought, and alternative political futures.
- “Editing as ‘Counter-Scholarship’: Abū al-ʿIlā ʿAfīfī (1897–1966), the Rescripting of Taṣawwuf, and the Study of Editions.” *Philological Encounters*, vol. 10, 2025.
- “Introduction: Towards the Study of the Editor (*al-Muḥaqqiq*) in Modern Arabic Intellectual History.” *Philological Encounters*, vol. 10, 2025.

Egypt’s Intellectual Traditions in Global Perspective

- The Study of Mysticism in Twentieth-Century Egypt.” Seminar, Al-Azhar University, Cairo, 2026.
- “In the City of ʿIrfān: ʿUthmān Amīn, Interwar France, and the Making of Egyptian Philosophy.” Paper presented at *Of Priests and Sufis: Revisiting Catholic Scholarship on Islamic Mysticism*, Institut dominicain d’études orientales (IDEO), Cairo, 2026.

Afro-Asian Connections and Postcolonial Futures

- Co-organiser. *New Perspectives on South-Asian and Middle Eastern Connections in the Twentieth Century*. Institut français d’archéologie orientale (IFAO), Cairo, with support from the Orient-Institut Beirut, 2026.
- “And Nevertheless, I Find in Delhi the Taste of Khartoum: Al-Tayyib Salih and India.” Conference paper presented at *New Perspectives on South-Asian and Middle Eastern Connections in the Twentieth Century*, Institut français d’archéologie orientale (IFAO), Cairo, 2026.
- Development of a broader research agenda linking Middle Eastern, African, and South Asian intellectual histories.

Building Scholarly Networks Across Beirut and Cairo

- Initiated OIB collaboration with IFAO, resulting in a major international conference and forthcoming publication project.
- Established collaboration with CEDEJ on Sudanese literature and Arabic pan-African intellectual histories.
- Developed partnership with IDEO and AUC for future conferences in Qurʾanic studies and Islamic intellectual history.
- Initiated collaboration between OIB, AUB, and USJ around the visit of philosopher Souleymane Bachir Diagne and future philosophy programming in Beirut.

Recognition and Scholarly Leadership

- Recipient of the Bayard and Cleveland Dodge Memorial Prize for Best PhD Dissertation, Princeton University.
- Contributed to expanding OIB’s research profile in Islamic philosophy, Arabic intellectual history, and Afro-Asian studies through conferences, publications, and institutional partnerships.

Expanding
OIB to the
Gulf:
Rosie
Bsheer



The Institute’s future development also includes a significant expansion of research on the Arabian Peninsula and Gulf region through the appointment of historian Rosie Bsheer.

Bsheer’s work challenges approaches that have long reduced the Gulf to oil wealth, geopolitics, or authoritarian governance. Instead, she examines how states, markets, and social orders are historically produced through the interplay of law, environment,

infrastructure, knowledge production, and political economy. Her research explores how archives, maps, cadastral surveys, and legal regimes shaped the emergence of the modern Saudi state and transformed landscapes, communities, and systems of governance.

By situating the Arabian Peninsula within broader histories of empire, capitalism, migration, and environmental change, Bsheer demonstrates the centrality of the Gulf to understanding the modern Middle East. Her work connects the region to Ottoman institutions, Indian Ocean networks, and global histories of knowledge and power.

At OIB, Bsheer plans to develop new initiatives on the history of the *Hajj*, slavery in the Arabian Peninsula, migration, environmental history, and legal history while fostering comparative and interdisciplinary approaches that connect the Gulf to wider regional and global debates. Through workshops, conferences, digital humanities projects, and collaborative research networks, she aims to strengthen scholarly exchange across the Arab world and beyond. Bsheer’s appointment marks an important step toward connecting Beirut, Cairo, and the Gulf within a shared framework of regional and transregional inquiry.

OIB’s
Residential
Fellows
2026–2027

OIB is pleased to welcome a new cohort of residential fellows for the 2026–2027 academic year. Bringing together doctoral and postdoctoral researchers from leading institutions across Europe and North America, the new fellows reflect the intellectual diversity that defines OIB’s research community.

Their projects explore a wide range of themes, including urban history, medicine, environmental history, gender, Islamic philosophy, literary studies, intellectual history, visual culture, and the Ottoman and modern Middle East. Through seminars, workshops, and collaborative exchange, they will contribute to OIB’s ongoing commitment to innovative research and interdisciplinary dialogue while opening new perspectives on the region’s histories, cultures, and intellectual traditions.

Doctoral

Hatem Hadi Hegab | Freie Universität Berlin | “In Pursuit of a Doctrine of Progress: An Intellectual History of Urbanism and Emotion during the Infitah (1974–1981)”

Dana Nabulsi | Harvard University | “The Creation of the Medical Professional Class in 19th-century Ottoman Syria”

Yixin Pu | New York University | “Seeding Silk in the Late Ottoman World, 1860–1914”

Johannes Ruhstorfer | Münster University | “Genre, Fiction and Conflict in Mamluk Literary Debates”

Vivienne Florence Schommer | Freie Universität Berlin | “Writing Women into History: Social Collectives in and Around Early Syrian Women’s Periodicals”

Postdoctoral

Husayn Ibrahim | LMU München | “Religious Dimensions in Islamic Practical Philosophy”

Ehsan Kashfi | University of Copenhagen | “The Forgotten Iranian Beirut: Diaspora, Exile, and Intellectual Life in Lebanon”

Ghassan Osmat | Yale University | “The Levantine Frontier: Mount Lebanon in the Early Modern Mediterranean”



Appendix

Directorate

Hussein Hussein, Director’s Office
Caroline Kinj, Director’s Office

Administration

Angelika Sadek, Head of Administration
Nirvana Ghandour, Administrative Assistant
Muhammad Syala, Building Manager
Rabia Omeirat, Janitorial Staff
Zubaida Omeirat, Janitorial Staff
Ali Wehbe, Janitor and Library caretaker

Information technology

David Kattan, IT Manager
Patrick Mzaaber, IT Assistant

Imprint

Orient-Institut Beirut

Zokak el-Blat, Rue Hussein Beyhum
P.O.B. 11-2988
Beirut, Lebanon

T +961 1 35 94 23
F +961 1 35 91 76
sek@orient-institut.org
www.orient-institut.org

An Institute of the **Max Weber Foundation,**
German Humanities Institutes Abroad

Director
Jens Peter Hanssen

Editorial Assistants
David Hertel, Ben Keberle, Til Reimer

Copyediting
Rima Rantisi

Concept & Design
May Ghaibeh

Photos
George Azar 4/7/37/42/43/49/62/66/74/80/88/91/133/174-175/208-
209/210/238/239/248/256-257
Zeina G. Halabi 6/19/30/36/64/134/176/204/232
Photo of Yvonne Albers on page 202 © Christina Stivali/TurboTurbo

Printing
Byblos Printing S.A.L
© OIB, 2026

The **Orient-Institut Beirut** (OIB) was established in 1961 by the German Oriental Society (Deutsche Morgenländische Gesellschaft), an academic association founded in 1845 to promote the study of the languages and cultures of the “Orient.” Conceived as a base for German oriental studies abroad, the Institute gained legal recognition from the Lebanese government in 1963 and moved to its present premises in the former Villa Maud Farajallah in Beirut’s Zokak al-Blat quarter, near the city centre. Over the decades, OIB has come to benefit from Lebanon’s unique position as an intellectual centre in the Arab world. As the only German research institute dedicated to Arabic and Islamic studies based in the Arab Middle East, it has trained generations of German scholars specialising in the region while serving as an academic hub for research on and across the Middle East.

Even during the most turbulent periods of Lebanese history, the Institute maintained its academic activities. Although the German staff were temporarily evacuated to Istanbul in 1987, the directorate and part of the research staff returned to Beirut in 1994. The evacuation nevertheless transformed OIB into a bilocal institution, with branches in Beirut (OIB) and Istanbul (OII), until the latter became an independent institute in 2009. In 2003, OIB joined the network of German Humanities Institutes Abroad, which was incorporated into the Max Weber Foundation in 2012. The Foundation is a publicly regulated body funded by the German Federal Ministry of Research, Technology and Space (BMFTR). Since 2010, OIB has also maintained an office in Cairo, strengthening academic collaboration and research across the MENA region.



03

ORIENT INSTITUTE
BEIRUT
المعهد الألماني
للابحاث الشرقية