The Middle East in London

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Dear Reader

Nadje Al-Ali, MEL Editorial Board

During a recent trip to the US, Iraq made headlines for several days after a long period of virtual news blackout. Ironically, I was talking to a group of retired military and business people at the World Affairs Council in Colorado City (my most challenging audience ever) after President Obama had just announced the withdrawal of all US troops by the end of 2011. After days of talking to impressive students and staff at a progressive liberal arts college, this felt rather different. The overall story presented on the mainstream American TV channels was also prevalent amongst my audience: we have done our job and it is high time to bring Americans back home to safety. Very few voices in the media addressed the actual situation in Iraq which, as Professor Charles Tripp so eloquently discusses in this issue’s Insight piece, does not look promising in terms of democracy and human rights. His reflections are illuminating but make also for a depressing read. We seem to have come full circle.

The human costs of the war and the occupation in Iraq are written out of many current accounts. Kate Robertson from the Council of Assisting Refugee Academics (CARA) has been working relentlessly for several years with Iraqi academics - a particularly vulnerable group in terms of the lawlessness, lack of security and violence. Her contribution introduces CARA’s Iraq programme, which has been trying to address the crisis of Iraqi higher education both in terms of other great exoduses of academics but also within Iraq. SOAS has supported CARA’s important work during the past four years and is part of its nationwide network of partner universities. The article written by the team of Iraqi academics – Irada Al-Jabbouri, Inass Al-Enezy, Huda al-Dujaili and myself - zooms in to the specific problems and challenges faced by female academics in contemporary Iraq.

Yet, as we are showing in in this issue, Iraq’s long history of cultural and artistic productions and creations continues despite the extremely difficult political, economic and social conditions. Ionis Thompson interviews Lamia al-Gailani, one of Iraq’s foremost archaeologists who has been instrumental in trying to reconstitute the stolen collection of the National Museum in Baghdad. Professor Sami Zubaida provides us with a very interesting account of the hybridity of Iraqi culture, not only in terms of a multi-ethnic and multi-religious mosaic, but he demonstrates that language, music and food – the cornerstones of any culture – have been mixed and hybrid due to cultural encounters and entanglements. The newly established Humanitarian Dialogue Foundation off Edgware Road, introduced by Ali Saffar and Dr Ahmed Naji attempts to revive this very history and tradition of cosmopolitan and mixed spaces for Iraqis within London. Hassan Abdulrazzak – who has become known to many people through his wonderful play Baghdad Wedding – discusses new talents linked to emerging Iraqi cinema, but also criticizes the fact that much of what we have seen on screens about Iraq has been produced in the west through a western gaze.

An issue about Iraq would not be complete without reference to food. We have a special gem with Lamees Ibrahim’s article on Sumerian cuisine. The restaurant review was another family production and triggered a nostalgic journey into the past… Enjoy it!
On October 17 the governor of Ninawa province in northern Iraq, Athil al-Nujaifi, raced from one public institution to another across Mosul for repeated flag ceremonies. The songs, parades and raising of the Iraqi flag marked the final withdrawal of all US forces from the province – the first in Iraq to be free of an American military presence. In fact, US forces there, as in much of Iraq, had scarcely been visible for the preceding 18 months, having already withdrawn to their barracks and camps across the country.

The ceremonies in Mosul signalled the imminent departure of all US troops from Iraq nearly nine years after the invasion of 2003. This conformed to the Status of Forces Agreement signed in the dying months of the Bush administration in 2008. President Obama had tried to extend the December 31 2011 withdrawal deadline, but he had been unable to convince the Iraqi government to grant extraterritorial privileges to the thousands of US military personnel the US hoped to retain in Iraq, ostensibly for ‘training purposes’. An Iraq free of US forces has caused mixed feelings and sometimes alarmist predictions in both the US and in Iraq itself, although it would be accurate to say that for much of Arab Iraq the reaction has been overwhelmingly positive. Nevertheless, it is worth giving some thought to the kind of Iraq that has been emerging as the US presence became less visible, particularly since the past few months have been marked by an upsurge of violence that has caused some 550 civilian deaths in September and October alone.

It is certainly not the case that the US forces will be leaving any kind of ‘vacuum’ in Iraq. On the contrary, under the watchful and often encouraging eye of the US, Nuri al-Maliki, the prime minister for the past five and a half years, has been busy ensuring...
that a strong centralised state should re-emerge to impose the kind of order that has now become characteristic of Iraq’s political life. Flawed in many respects, and vulnerable as recent suicide bombings, assassinations and attacks on security forces have shown, this political order has already taken on features that have been characteristic of previous periods in Iraq’s political history. It also shares much in common with other states of the region where the impulse to accumulate power has been greater than the resources available to those who want to make power accountable.

It has been precisely this trend that so many young Iraqis, in the spirit of the Arab Spring, have been trying to challenge. The February Youth Movement, the organisation Ayna Haqqi? (where is my right?) and the group Iraqi Streets for Change have been demonstrating publicly for greater accountability, an end to corruption and a radical improvement in public services. However, the vicious attacks launched upon them by ‘civilians’ armed with iron bars and knives in Baghdad’s Tahrir Square, the arrests made by units of the Iraqi armed forces and the shaming of their offices by the security services, show that it is an order of privilege ruthless in the defence of its position. The murder of the investigative radio journalist, Hadi al-Mahdi, in September was an ominous sign. Long known for his fearless reporting, his mockery of the powerful and for his revelations of high level official corruption, he had been detained earlier in the year, tortured and threatened with rape by the security forces. He refused to be intimidated and paid for this with his life.

Ostensibly, of course, all this has been happening while a democratically elected parliament has been in place as the supreme embodiment of the Iraqi people’s sovereign authority. However, as most Iraqis acknowledge, this is not where power lies. It is located instead in the networks of association and complicity that run behind and through the parliament, the ministries and all public institutions. As might be expected, one of the most crucial of such networks centres on the person of the prime minister, Nuri al-Maliki. By no means unchallenged, he has nevertheless managed to carve out for himself an increasingly powerful position, using personal connections, patronage and intimidation.

Nuri al-Maliki has been busy ensuring a strong centralised state to impose the order that has now become characteristic of Iraq’s political life. Wary of the organs of state controlled by his allies, let alone by his rivals, he has taken steps to ensure his personal control of anything connected particularly to security and to the coercive arm of the state. Thus, nearly a year after the formation of his new government he still holds the posts of Minister of Interior and of Minister of Defence, claiming that he is ‘unable’ to find candidates who could gain sufficient political support. Meanwhile, in his capacity as commander in chief of the armed forces (a power vested in him by the constitution) he has made full use of transfers, promotions and dismissals to ensure an officer corps that he can trust. At the same time, he has retained direct control over the Baghdad Brigade and the Counter-terrorism Task Force, making the prime minister’s office much more than simply the office of executive power. This impression is reinforced by the proliferation of intelligence agencies that report directly to him, one of which has come to be known as Awlad al-Hindiyya (the lads from Hindiyya) since it is mainly staffed by men who share al-Maliki’s own provincial origins.

The main obstacles to the gradual extension of al-Maliki’s personal networks across the public institutions of Iraq are the networks of other powerful figures, such as those of his nominal allies Muqtada al-Sadr and Ammar al-Hakim, or of his political rivals Iyad Allawi and Athil and Usama al-Najaifi, or of the Kurdish political leaders, Jalal Talabani and Masoud Barzani. This may prevent al-Maliki from establishing the kind of autocratic power that many fear he craves. However, the result has been that the institutions of the Iraqi state have become the battleground for a struggle amongst powerful oligarchs to control the ‘shadow state’, the sinews of power behind the public facade. The consequences have been institutional degradation, abysmal public services and high levels of corruption, as well as the violence associated with efforts to silence critics and to gain short-term advantage.

Thus, far from leaving a political or security vacuum in Iraq, the US forces will be leaving a system that their own intervention and occupation helped to establish. It is one in which the oil continues to flow, generating revenues that are used to cement and create political alliances to the benefit of the few. The latter in turn guard their privileges ruthlessly, in an Iraq where there are now more men under arms than there were in the last decade of Saddam Hussein’s rule. Meanwhile bombings, attacks and assassinations form a backdrop that is used to justify putting security first. Under this system, the place of the still resilient, if battered Iraqi independent media, trades unions, civil liberties organisations and human rights groups becomes ever more precarious. But this does not appear to trouble unduly those who wanted to ensure that al-Maliki, or someone like him, should emerge to rebuild the Iraqi state.

Charles Tripp is Professor of Politics with reference to the Middle East at SOAS.
The Council for Assisting Refugee Academics (CARA) launched its Iraq Programme in late 2006, at the height of the targeted campaign of assassination against Iraq’s academics. Over 200 had been murdered with each death prompting the outflow of dozens more. At that time, a UN report estimated that up to 40 per cent of Iraq’s pre-2003 university faculty were either dead, in exile, or internally displaced. This irrefutable attack on Iraq’s educators, coupled with a strong sense of moral imperative – the British government had after all been in the front line of the invasion despite protest from some British people – forced CARA back to its 1933 roots and the vision of its founder, Sir William Beveridge. This vision was captured in an earlier CARA incarnation: The Society for the Protection of Science & Learning. Iraq led CARA to reclaim its broader mandate, reaching beyond the UK to Iraqi academics still at risk in-country, or living in post-invasion exile in neighbouring countries.

Initially framed as a rescue mission, providing periods of constructive sanctuary through doctoral and post-doctoral placements in UK universities, the Iraq Programme has been sufficiently fluid and responsive to evolve with changing circumstances. Since 2009, it has worked with academics still in post in Iraq as well as colleagues in exile to support both their roles in the resurgence of the higher education sector and the future of Iraq. The programme now encompasses a number of complementary initiatives that each reflect CARAs academic niche and organisational objectives to facilitate continued academic engagement and contribution to society. The aims are: to support academic development – in the case of Iraq, to help fill the knowledge gaps born of nearly two decades of international isolation as a result of wars and sanctions; and to assist re-engagement with the wider international academic community, even when in rescue mode.

The CARA UK Universities Network, 68 universities collaborating to promote and defend academic freedom and provide practical support to academics in need, has been an extraordinary resource. It was to the Network members that CARA turned in 2006 with the question: ‘What will the UK universities do to help their Iraqi colleagues?’ and they have not been

In 2006 a UN report estimated that up to 40 per cent of Iraq’s pre-2003 university faculty were either dead, in exile, or internally displaced.
found wanting. Academics from 17 UK universities are leading or facilitating CARA-funded research collaborations, combining small teams of Iraqi academics in exile and in-post with senior UK academics. 26 UK universities have hosted, or are still hosting, one or more CARA Fellows as part of the original UK Fellowship Scheme for Iraqi Academics at Risk, several of which – Cambridge, Chichester, SOAS and Wolverhampton – have contributed to the CARA Fellowship fund, as well as waiving fees. A notable contribution has been made by the SOAS Alumni Association committed to an annual fundraiser to support future CARA Fellows.

The more recent Regional Round Table (RRT) series has led to the formation of two standing topic-based networks on ‘gender’ and ‘social sciences’, with three more on ‘research’, ‘cross-university fertilisation’ (attempting to build communication between universities) and ‘teaching’ pending new funding. The RRT Networks have provided an effective mechanism to address identified challenges for higher education in Iraq, introducing an important regional dimension that informs and contributes to the development of practical strategies.

Following three calls for applications in 2009 and 2010, the Iraq Research Fellowship Programme (IRFP) now supports 12 Fellows. The IRFP has not prioritised one discipline over another, nor senior academics over younger academics, nor males over females. We have supported poets and physicists, etymologists, medics and microbiologists, chemists, psychologists, paediatricians, political scientists and sociologists on a first come first served basis. Some such as chemists have been more difficult to place where the discipline trajectory in Iraq has been radically different to that of international counterparts.

Some CARA Fellows have faced threats and sabotage by colleagues, but we have become adept at recognising those more interested in personal career gain, or who confuse academic opportunities with shopping and travel opportunities. There is an enormous amount that still needs to be done.

CARA’s work is driven solely by the desire to preserve intellectual capital wherever and whenever world events place academics in the firing line as independent or just contrary thinkers. I have managed the Iraq Programme since its inception. It has been a steep learning curve, central to which is the awareness that nothing is straightforward where Iraq is involved. It has been a challenging, frustrating, humbling and extraordinary experience, from which I have gained much, and many friends. I still have an enormous amount to learn, but I am extremely grateful to all who have contributed to my education.

Kate Robertson is Deputy Executive Secretary of CARA and Iraq Programme Manager

CARA is a UK registered charity.

www.academic-refugees.org.

The killings have not stopped. The number of recorded assassinations rose to over 400 in 2011.
Western films about Iraq are now a genre of their own. They tend to focus on either conflict in general or Saddam and his family in particular. These films are rarely if ever concerned with the private lives of ordinary Iraqis and so they constantly miss the opportunity to make a real human connection between Iraq and the rest of the world.

The Devil’s Double is the most recent feature film of the genre. It is loosely based on the books of Latif Yahia, the man who claims he was forcibly recruited to be the body double of Saddam Hussein’s eldest son Uday. The film doesn’t miss an opportunity to depict all the excesses of Uday. This includes drug taking to terrorizing young girls into having sex with him to killing his father’s pimp, Kamel Hana, which if the film is to be believed Uday achieved by slashing him down the middle with a sword.

In the Q&A session at the BAFTA screening where I saw the film, the actor Dominic Cooper (who played Uday and his double) conceded that the film is not concerned with historical or social accuracy. This is history mined for pure entertainment.

Indeed Iraq’s recent history has now served as fodder for several western TV and film projects. The House of Saddam was a joint BBC and HBO endeavour, breezily running through Saddam's reign from the Iran –Iraq war all the way through to his capture in the hole where he was hiding and his subsequent execution. The slaying of Kamel Hana is also depicted in The House of Saddam but in less gory details than in The Devil’s Double. The BBC made another TV series called The Occupation showing the war through the experience of British soldiers and mercenaries. HBO made a series called Generation Kill depicting the experiences of US soldiers in the very early days of the 2003 invasion. Indeed ‘the soldier's tale’ is still the predominant point of view in the majority of western dramas about Iraq, particularly in films.

In the Oscar winning The Hurt Locker Iraqis mostly appeared as zombie-like creatures in the background menacingly eyeing up the brave American soldiers who were trying to do their job in an inexplicably hostile environment. In Paul Greengrass’ Green Zone Iraqis were depicted more sympathetically but once again without the nuance required to make them part of a compelling drama. Perhaps the most balanced and satisfying film made about the war thus far is Nick Broomfield’s Battle for Haditha focusing on the massacre by coalition troops of Iraqis living in the town of Haditha. The film depicts all three sides in the conflict with equal understanding.

Iraqi cinema: under the shadow of occupation

From Leaving Baghdad, 2010, Dogwoof Films

Hassan Abdulrazzak discusses the Iraqi filmmakers who are putting their side of the story on screen

The Hurt Locker portrayed Iraqis as zombie-like creatures in the background menacingly eyeing up the brave American soldiers
and compassion: the coalition soldiers, the insurgents and the ordinary Iraqis caught between the soldiers and insurgents.

But where is Iraqi cinema in all this? Have Iraqi filmmakers succeeded in putting their side of the story on screen? The answer is yes— but chances are you have never seen their output because the films they made have not been on general release.

The filmmaker that has had the most success so far is Mohamed Al-Daraji. His first feature film *Ahlam* (2005), follows the lives of three Iraqi individuals forced onto the war-torn streets of Baghdad after the US invasion destroys an insane asylum. The film is a wonderful metaphor for the invasion but is hampered by patchy performances and the pressure of directing in occupied Iraq. Indeed Al-Daraji and some of his crew were captured by insurgents during the filming process and later released. His follow up film *Son of Babylon* (2009) is road movie about a young Kurdish boy trying to locate his father after the fall of Saddam. He accompanies his grandmother on a trip that takes them from the recently liberated prisons to the nightmare of the newly unearthed mass graves. Despite certain flaws in the script, *Son of Babylon* is a leap forward for Al-Daraji who is still in his early thirties and clearly improving with his accumulated experience.

Another name that has emerged from Iraq is director Oday Rasheed who made his first feature film *Underexposure* (2005) using expired Kodak film stock. His second film *Qarantina* (2010) will be shown later this month at Leighton House in London as part of the Nour festival (for more details see: nourfestival.co.uk).

Both Al-Daraji and Rasheed made their films inside Iraq in difficult circumstances. This does not mean that Iraqi filmmakers outside Iraq have had it easier. Filmmaker Koutaiba al-Janabi was ready to shoot his first feature film in Hungary when his financial backer suddenly and inexplicably pulled out of the project. Undeterred al-Janabi went on to make the film on a next to nothing budget. The result is *Leaving Baghdad*, a road movie following Sadik, personal cameraman to Saddam Hussein, at the end of the 1990s who is trying to escape the grip of the regime, being pursued from country to country. The film won first prize in the Gulf Film Festival and was shown in this year’s Raindance Film Festival.

Iraq has much more untapped talent than the three filmmakers mentioned so far. In 2006, I co-organised the Iraqi Documentary Film Festival at SOAS. Iraqi filmmakers both inside and outside Iraq submitted their films. I was particularly impressed with the work of young, often first time, filmmakers who were working inside the country. Despite growing up during the sanction years, these filmmakers had tried to educate themselves as best they could by watching pirate DVDs of great directors like Fellini, Scorsese and Tarantino.

I caught up, via email with two filmmakers who are still living in Iraq to see what they are up to. Oday Saleh is working as cameraman on documentaries commissioned by Western companies. These are predictably either a historical review of events since the 2003 invasion or about Al-Qaeda. Oday complains that government backing for filmmakers is almost non-existent and that most of the work emerging is the effort of the private sector. Haydar Daffar, whose film *The Dreams of Sparrows* was a hit at our documentary festival, disagrees. He works now as assistant to the director of national film (part of the ministry of culture) and informs me that he will start working as an assistant director on a feature film soon as well as three documentaries. Both Oday and Haydar still harbour the dream of one day directing their first feature film.

With increasing stability and rising oil revenue the Iraqi film industry will inevitably flourish. But will it produce trashy commercial films or world-class cinema? One only needs to look at Iraq’s neighbour, Iran, that other member of the ‘axis of evil’, to see a stark difference. Iraq does not have a filmmaker to match the reputations of Kiarostami, Makhmalbaf or Farhadi but then few countries do. Iraqi filmmakers could learn from their Iranian counterparts by creating stories that focus on private lives and by doing so, they may begin making connections with audiences across the world.

Hassan Abdulrazzak’s first play *Baghdad Wedding* won the George Devine, Meyer Whitworth and Pearson awards. He is working on a feature film adaptation of the play for Focus Features.
Memories of the terrible scenes which appeared on our screens in April 2003 as the museum in Baghdad was ransacked by looters have dimmed. The looting highlighted by this rampage, however, continues and its effects are still being felt. Dr Lamia al-Gailani-Werr,* an archaeologist now living in England who was closely involved in the attempt to track stolen artefacts and record the Museum’s remaining holdings, talked to me about the events of 2003 and the state of Iraqi archaeology today.

In the words of Dr Donny George, director of the Museum in 2003, who died recently, Baghdad’s museum held ‘the memory of mankind’. Ancient Mesopotamia (modern Iraq) is commonly known as the cradle of civilization, (Dr al-Gailani calls it ‘the Grandmother of all nations’): it is where cities first arose and writing began. The country is covered in sites, many of which have still to be excavated. This makes the plundering of its treasures so important for all of us. I asked what the full extent of the damage was, after many treasures reported as missing at the time had been discovered or returned by those who took them. It is difficult to calculate the precise extent of the loss, she said, as many artefacts had never been catalogued or published: the figure of 15,000 items given out at the time was an estimate. One major loss, of great poignancy to Dr al-Gailani who is an expert in the field, is the entire collection of cylinder seals (5000, many of them unpublished). Much Islamic material is missing and the entire archive of the Hashemite Royal family of Iraq, burnt when the National Library went up in flames. Many of the most iconic items, such as the Warka vase, were recovered and much of the priceless material, including a large collection of gold objects, had been moved to the Central Bank’s vaults where it remained untouched.

Who had been responsible for the looting, I asked? She said the fact that the first rooms looted were those easily approached and items seized were not always the most precious (indeed the first things taken included office furniture and equipment) indicated that the looters were opportunists. Other items appear to have been stolen to order, however, and by those with insider knowledge. A huge illegal trade in antiquities exists internationally, both to supply the wants of individual collectors and to money-launder the proceeds from other illegal dealings in arms and drugs. What was now being done to protect the museum? A sophisticated alarm system has been installed, but as the security situation in Baghdad as a whole is still precarious and the museum is situated near ministries and

Ancient Mesopotamia is commonly known as the cradle of civilization, it is where cities first arose and writing began.
The American troops stationed in Baghdad have been much criticised for not realising the importance of protecting the museum.

Dr al-Gailani won the Gertrude Bell Memorial Gold Medal in 2009 ‘for outstanding services to Mesopotamian archaeology’

Dr al-Gailani told me that looting had been going on for years before the 2003 invasion. It started during the late 80s and early 90s, when the Iran-Iraq war distracted the government’s attention. Later guards were placed at sites and much stolen material was recovered and sent to the museum (so much was coming in during the late 90s and early 2000s that the museum was unable to keep up with recording and publishing it all). Just before the invasion the guards all left and there was a free for all for looters. Guards are now back but they are unable to fully protect large sites, so the decision has been taken to undertake excavations on as many sites as possible, especially the ones being looted. We discussed the importance of keeping good records both of finds coming from the new excavations and of the museum’s holdings. The museum’s recording system at the time of the 2003 invasion was little more advanced than that installed by its founder, Gertrude Bell, in 1926. There were ledgers and a card index system which was scattered by looters looking for gold. Help in recovering the index and restoring the records came from two archaeologists from the British School of Archaeology in Iraq (BSAI) and one, Dr Sarah Collins, from the British Museum. Now UNESCO and the World Monuments Fund are funding a digital inventory of all the (archaeological) sites, and the museum is doing its own digital database of objects it holds. In addition to this, a virtual tour of the museum, made in Italy, is available online at www.virtualmuseumiraq.cnr.it. Dr al-Gailani says this is a good introduction but more useful to the layman than the specialist.

The collaboration between Britain and Iraq, which started in 2003, continues with the project Dr al-Gailani is involved with, run by BSAI’s successor, the British Institute for the Study of Iraq (BISI), to bring Iraqi visiting scholars to UK for training. Over the years 2005 to 2011 some 15 – 20 people have taken advantage of this scheme, learning, for example, how to conserve and make inventories of antiquities. One female Iraqi scholar from Baghdad University came over to research the Nimrud ivories: she also trained in their conservation at the British Museum. Dr al-Gailani said that in Iraqi institutions at present teaching in the field of archaeology was weak: in 2003 only one member of the teaching staff had a degree from outside the country. She hoped that in future more Iraqis would gain PhDs in Europe and America, which would raise the level of teaching and lead to improved conservation and recording techniques.

In the meantime looting of sites continues and thousands of artefacts leak out of the country into the rest of the world. The museum in Suleimaniya (in Kurdistan) recently purchased thousands of objects, which they mainly bought from dealers, profiting from the illegal trade in antiquities coming out of south Iraq on the way to being smuggled into Iran. This may represent just the tip of the iceberg and thousands of other antiquities may well be reaching illicit markets in the rest of the world.

Dr al Gailani won the Gertrude Bell Memorial Gold Medal in 2009 ‘for outstanding services to Mesopotamian archaeology’

Ionis Thompson is a member of the MEL Editorial Board

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The Oldest Cookbook in the World

*Lamees Ibrahim* discusses the origins of Sumerian cuisine

By the year 2700 BC, a full thousand years before the first legal system in the world was written in Babylon, a highly sophisticated cuisine had developed in the city of Ur, located in the south of today’s Iraq.

It was written on 12 stone tablets forming the oldest cookbook in the world.

Specialised menus were prepared for different Sumerian occasions and ceremonies, for the Gods, the rulers or the staff. The techniques described ranged from baking a small bird in an oven wrapped in pastry and served with leek and garlic to boiling a pigeon in preparation of a broth. Recipes for vegetable broths and porridge using different kinds of flour were also listed. Sweets were made with dates and figs and honey. Other ingredients used included barley, wheat, chickpeas, lentils, beans, onion, garlic, leek, cucumber, mustard and cumin seeds. Gazelles, birds, lamb, beef as well as many kinds of fish were cooked. There was no question of eating horses or dogs, still less of snakes, but pork was raised and eaten, albeit discreetly because pig was considered dirty, as affirmed by a Babylonian maxim.

Presentation of food was very important; gold plates were used to offer food to the Gods and for banquets in the ruler’s palace. The meal was accompanied by water and milk but also frequently by beer or even wine and these were listed with accounts of the different tastes, colours, strengths and quality. These twelve tablets containing 40 culinary recipes written in 350 lines were recovered in Ur and are housed today at the University of Yale library. Other tablets, also found in a temple in Ur, dated to around the 4th century BC and these also recorded comprehensive recipes, again with detailed ingredients, measured quantities and precise methods of preparation.

These records represent the development that took place since the cultivation of crops and domestication of animals in Mesopotamia, believed to have started around 6000 BC. The cuisine was immensely sophisticated even by today’s standards and alongside the basic cooking techniques there are also records of the traditional skills of drying, preserving in oil or brine and curing.

The Epic of Gilgamesh, the oldest story written in history, clearly points to the difference between ingestion of natural foods and the preparation of a cooked meal using natural products. The epic recounts how the goddess Shamhat introduced the wild man Enkidu to a civilized way of life, seducing him out of a feral existence in the wilderness and into an urban way of living. As part of this process she served him bread and beer, and he ate and drank, ‘until his face was glowing and he sang with joy.’ This path from wild to urban, from nature to culture, manifests the self-image of the people of Mesopotamia: inventive, intelligent, hard-working, and appreciative of their land and its produce. The sophistication of their lifestyle is reflected in their cuisine.

*Lamees Ibrahim* was born in Iraq. She is the author of *The Iraqi Cookbook* (2009)
The diversity of Iraq in ethnicity, religion, language and culture in general, is often remarked upon. These are not always distinct unit cultures, such as Arab and Kurdish, but often an intimate mix. With the foundation of the modern nation-state, following the Ottoman and colonial periods in the early decades of the 20th century, there was a process of cultural and linguistic integration mediated by the processes of modernity, of transport and communication, population movements, and above all a common education system, in Arabic, and the rise of print and broadcasting media in that language. Yet, the spoken Arabic language of Iraq continues to include hybrid vocabularies and expressions, as do other cultural spheres.

Historically, Iraq had been as much part of what may be called the Turko-Iranian world, as of the Arab. This world goes beyond Turkey and Iran into Central Asia, Afghanistan and the Caucasus. Until the early decades of the 19th century Iraq was ruled by a dynasty of Georgian Mamluks, some of whose families survived as notables after their defeat by the Ottomans. The inhabitants of the Rusafa bank of the Tigris included a mix of Turkish and Circassian soldiers and administrators, Persian merchants, a Jewish community speaking and writing in their own peculiar Judaeo-Arabic, Christians of different denominations, some speaking dialects of Aramaic and, of course, Kurds, soldiers and workers, in addition to the local Arabic-speakers. These elements of language and culture left important traces in the 20th century and the beginnings of the national state. The early generations of Iraqi politicians, intellectuals and soldiers were Ottoman. King Faysal and many of his entourage as well as the ministers and statesmen, had an Ottoman education and early careers. The major poets of the period, Jamil Sidiqi al-Zahawi and Ma’ruf al-Rusafi had both been members of the Ottoman parliament and shared the secular and positivist outlook of the Ottoman reforms. Nuri al-Said, the principal statesman of Iraq under the monarchy, was known to speak Turkish at home, and he was not alone. Popular magazines and colloquial poetry of the period commonly included words and passages in Turkish, assumed to be understandable to their audience. Subsequent generations, products of the national educational system and media regimes, were fully Arabised in their public discourses. The spoken language continued to show the traces.

Persian and Turkish words feature, of course, in many spoken Arabic dialects. Egyptians say *kubri* for bridge (the Turkish *kopru*) and *dughri*, for straight ahead (Turkish *dogru*). But in Iraqi dialect such vocabulary is not only extensive, but occurs commonly in many sentences. *Khosh* for ‘good’ (as in *khosh walad*, good boy or man); *heech* for ‘nothing’; *chara* for ‘remedy’ (as in *sawuli chara*, ‘help me’). Terms for the parts of the house: *tarma*, terrace; *sardab*, cellar; *kabishkan*, attic; *shanashil*, hanging

**Sami Zubaida** discusses the multicultural influences found in Iraq’s cultural heritage

**Historically, Iraq had been as much part of what may be called the Turko-Iranian world, as of the Arab**
windows, panjra, window, and many others. Baltu, for overcoat, comes from the Russian through Turkish, as does istikan for the small tea glass, from the Russian via Persian.

Music of the Middle East is a field of great diversity and hybridity over the centuries, and the varieties of Iraqi music and song are part of it. The one constant in this diversity is the maqam modes, in terms of which most musical forms can be classified. Yet, the term maqam has various specific designations in particular contexts. In Iraq, the term applies not only to general modes but to specific forms of chanted verse, each with its own designation: Maqam Bayat, for instance, is a general mode in Middle Eastern music, but in Iraq corresponds to a specific chant, and there are many maqams with designations specific to Iraq, such as Lami, Bhairzawi, Mkhalaf and many more. It is notable that many of the names, both of the general modes and the specific forms are Persian words or place names: bayat, nahawand, segah, chargah/panjgah (three, four and five intervals); place names include Tiflis, it is not clear why. It is generally stated that this maqam system of Iraq is quite unlike other Arab forms. But it does have much in common with the chanted verse in the Iranian tradition. The recordings that survive from the early 20th century would indicate that the lyrics of the chants were obscured in favour of the voice modulations which were the aesthetic object, and that in so far as the words were discernible they were multi-lingual. In the course of the 20th century, the enunciation and sense of the verses became central, a process promoted by the doyen of Maqam singers, Muhammad al-Qubbanchi (1901-1988), who also more thoroughly Arabised the words. Still, there remains to the present day formulaic expressions in Persian and Turkish which are uttered at certain stages of the rendering of certain maqams. Some folksongs, distinct from maqam, were bilingual in Arabic and Persian. At one stage in the 1980s it was reported that Saddam Hussein issued an order that no songs with foreign words should be broadcast on radio or TV. In any case, Arabisation proceeded apace in all fields over the course of the later 20th century.

In the culinary sphere it is well known that many of the designations of food items are Turkish and Persian: dolma, kufta, pacha, sabzi, fezenjun, and many others. Pacha, a tripe stew, is proudly proclaimed by many Iraqis as their national dish: they are surprised to learn that versions of it are common between India and Albania! The word is Persian, the diminutive of ‘foot’, that is ‘trotters’, but in the Iraqi version includes tripe. There seems to be a ‘tradition’ spread from Iran to the Balkans and even to France, for stews of this sort, served in street stalls, to be shared in the early mornings as breakfast for workers on way to work and revellers retiring from a night’s partying and drinking.

Over the course of the 20th century there developed a common public sphere of culture and communication in Iraq, mostly in Arabic, in which intellectuals and elites from the different ethnicities and regions participated. In the 1960s, for example, writers and artists known as the ‘Kirkuk group’ came to prominence in Baghdad, influenced by French existentialist philosophy and literature. Kirkuk is the centre of the Turcoman population and culture, and in earlier decades saw a Turkish literary renaissance, but with an insistence on Iraqi national identity. Kurdish intellectuals and activists participated in common quests with their Arab counterparts, especially on the political Left. Jews, Arabic speaking (except in Kurdistan, where they spoke a dialect of Aramaic, like their Christian neighbours), made notable contributions to literature and journalism. In the first half of the 20th century, the many of the most prominent musicians and singers were Jewish. This rich mix of cultures, expressed mainly in Arabic, came to a halt in the later Ba‘th decades of intensified repression, impoverishment and fragmentation, forcing people into the protective niches of local, ethnic, tribal and sectarian enclaves, a trend aggravated in the aftermath of the invasion and the violence that followed. The pockets of brave attempts at cultural revival have to contend with many dark forces of sectarianism and corruption.

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Pacha, a tripe stew, is proudly proclaimed by many Iraqis as their national dish but versions of it are common between India and Albania
Due to the dictatorship of Saddam Hussein, wars (1980–1988, 1991, 2003) and UN sanctions (1990–2003), Iraq experienced decades of international isolation and academic decline. The crisis of Iraqi academia in the post-invasion period since 2003 has been wide-ranging. There has been targeted assassinations of Iraqi academics, a high rate of academic refugees who have fled violence and lack of security, the destruction of related infrastructures, increasing corruption within academic institutions, the lack of research and teachers’ training and the impact of sectarianism on both students and members of staff. At the same time, research carried out in the post-invasion period suggests that women’s labour force participation and general position within Iraqi society has been negatively affected given both the severe crisis in higher education and the extremely difficult situation for women within contemporary Iraqi society, we asked ourselves: how do female academics manage in this context? And what specific challenges might they be facing? We, a team of female Iraqi academics of different disciplinary, and generational backgrounds, based in different locations (Irada and Inass in Baghdad; Huda in Amman and Nadje in London) have carried out qualitative research on this issue. In addition to our own experiences and participant observation, we have interviewed over 90 female academics based mainly inside Iraq, but some now living in neighbouring Jordan. It has not been easy to carry out empirical research in an unsafe, insecure and non-trusting environment, where people tend to refuse to talk to strangers, and perhaps not always provide the correct information. Gaining the confidence of our respondents was one of the main challenges during the research process.

We asked ourselves: how do female academics manage given the severe crisis in higher education and the situation for women in contemporary Iraq?

Challenges for female academics in contemporary Iraq

We asked ourselves: how do female academics manage given the severe crisis in higher education and the situation for women in contemporary Iraq?
What is different about the Iraqi context is the extent of the crisis of higher education: the dangers and insecurities, the corruption inside and outside universities

disturbed and astonished by his question. When I started to work in the university, I came to know that they prefer to hire the unmarried. Had I been married, I might not have been able to get a job.’

Yet, unlike many western countries, there is no systematic gender pay gap within higher education as men and women doing similar jobs are paid the same money. However, our interviews showed that there were institutional, cultural and social obstacles for women to obtain equality within universities. Very few women have made it to positions of senior management and senior administration while a large number of the teaching staff without PhDs is female. This is also not unique to Iraq as Nadje notice parallels with institutions based in Britain, like SOAS, for example, where part-time and fixed-term contract staff are disproportionately female and of BME (black and minority ethnic) backgrounds as opposed to people with permanent positions and staff in senior management.

What is different about the Iraqi context is the extent of the crisis of higher education: the dangers and insecurities, the corruption inside and outside universities, sectarianism and political tensions that have crept into academia. Many of our respondents bemoaned the lack of academic freedom and the lack of transparency in terms of appointments, promotions and access to scholarships, training and conferences.

Development and training opportunities are severely limited for all Iraqi academics. Dr Far’iah told us in an interview: ‘Attending conferences and participating in research projects is open to everyone inside Iraq. Often, names of participations are decided in advance for the benefit of senior academics. However, when the training course or the conference falls outside their specialisations, they choose their own students whom they supervise, or they might select academics who might be able to pay them back in particular matters.’ In other words, there is no transparency in choosing training or conference participation, and this is part of wider thriving systems of patronage.

While these issues hold true for both male and female academics, women face a very important role in opening up or closing doors. Several of our respondents praised their parents, particularly fathers, for supporting their daughter’s education and labour force participation. Yet others remarked that it was their parents and siblings who made a career very difficult as they objected to long working hours and travelling abroad for training, conferences or studies.

Husbands are also playing both supportive and debilitating roles. Several of the female academics we interviewed praised their husbands for their encouraging and supportive role. But very few men seem to translate this verbal and emotional support into practical sharing of household responsibilities and child caring. Most husbands expect female academics to continue with these tasks and engage with what has been coined the double-burden of work inside and outside the home. Unfortunately, some husbands are taking a more pro-active stand to prevent a woman’s career by objecting to long working hours, extra-curricular activities, training or any kind of work-related travels. For those respondents who are unmarried, it was clear that MA and PhD degrees have a direct relationship to their marriage prospects: the higher the degree, the less the likelihood for them to find a suitable spouse or even to identify any potential husband.

We realised that some of our interviewees did not seem to be very much interested in staff development, research and an academic career. For them, teaching at a university was mainly a job to pay the bills. This is not surprising given the economic climate and general level of insecurity. However, what was really heartening for all of us was to see a small number of female academics of different generations forging ahead with passion and conviction despite the great number of challenges and obstacles. Women take great risks and make great personal sacrifices to fulfill their dreams of gaining PhDs, doing research, writing and introducing new methods into their established teaching routines. Seeing these brave and dedicated female academics work in Iraqi universities today is humbling and inspiring to us all.

Huda Dujaili was formerly lecturer in economics at Mustansariya University; Irada al-Jabbouri is a lecturer in media and mass communication, University of Baghdad; Inass al-Enezy is a lecturer in politics, University of Baghdad and Nadje Al-Ali is a member of the MEL Editorial Board and Professor of Gender Studies at SOAS

(Opposite) Work from the Open Shutters photography project, 2006, where women from five cities in Iraq learned about photography

(Right) Women at work on the Open Shutters project, 2006
The Iraqi diaspora in London is one of the oldest and largest Arab communities in the city. Iraqis arrived in several waves: throughout the 1970s, as Iraq, newly awash with revenue from its newly-nationalised oil industry, sent its best and brightest to be educated here, in the 1980s, as political refugees fleeing Saddam’s increasingly despotic tendencies, and in the 1990s, seeking opportunities away from their forcibly impoverished country.

Iraqis have generally done well. They set up mosques that doubled up as community centres, they fought hard to preserve their identities, and their children, second-generation British Iraqis, have flooded the UK’s finest universities and are now reaping the rewards of their hard work. The coming of age of this generation, who are now leading the community, has meant that the concerted efforts of their parents to preserve and promote Iraqi culture and heritage has taken a backseat. This is understandable; second-generation British Iraqis, particularly those who were born in the UK, will never have the same connection to Iraq that their parents have. There are also many more practical considerations: many children of the 1980s are now reaching the age where they are getting married and focusing on their careers, and do not have time to organise or participate in community events.

Mosques and religious centres have become increasingly ill-equipped to deal with the needs of the community. Films, debates and art exhibitions could not be hosted in these places. London was lacking a truly secular cultural centre that could promote Iraqi heritage not only to those whose knowledge of Iraq was confined to depressing news reports, but also to the young British Iraqis who were growing further and further away from their parents’ heritage. In early 2009, the Humanitarian Dialogue Foundation in London was created, in an effort to promote Iraqi culture. We worked on a number of key objectives, including a forum for frank discussion and dialogue between first and second-generation British Iraqis, and between Iraqis of different religious, ethnic

**London was lacking a truly secular cultural centre that could promote Iraqi heritage**

*Ali Saffar and Ahmed Naji discuss the work of the organisation set up to bring the Iraqi community in London together*
and sectarian backgrounds in an effort to promote understanding and friendship. This, for us, was particularly important given the feeling that the tensions that were heightened between Iraq’s composite communities during the 2006-07 civil war had permeated the community here.

The HDF’s English programme was launched in November 2010 by Baroness Emma Nicholson, who spoke about her work in the country’s southern marshes. Her talk in front of a packed audience set the standard for a successful schedule that also saw Professor Sami Zubaida present on the topic of the anthropology of Iraqi food, Dr Colin Rowat on his decade-long campaign against sanctions in Iraq, and Professor Charles Tripp on the modern history of Iraq. We also hosted raucous debate with Kanan Makiya, who fielded questions on his best selling book, Cruelty and Silence.

The HDF has worked hard to build relations with other Iraqi groups, and together with the Iraq Youth Group held a screening of Son of Babylon, the award-winning film on a mother’s search for her missing son in Iraq, and also hosted the Iraq Youth Foundation’s regular book club. A unique poetry translation workshop by the Poetry Translation Centre also takes place every month at Salam House in Maida Vale, where the HDF is based, to translate contemporary Arabic poetry from different Arab countries into English.

The HDF’s programme has not been limited to English-language events. We have attempted to carry on the tradition started by the Kufa Gallery, a distinguished cultural centre that celebrated Iraqi culture and arts between the 1970s and the 1990s. We hold talks and lectures in Arabic every Wednesday, in a programme that has so far included notable speakers presenting a variety of topics ranging from the tradition of intellectual dialogue between Islamic schools of thought as outlined by Dr Rasheed al-Khayoon, to a plethora of subjects including Iraqi sociology, healthcare, education, interfaith dialogue. Some of the participating speakers so far include Dr Ali Allawi, Iraqi poets Fawzi Kareem and Awad Nasir, and many others. The programme continues to be a platform for apolitical non-sectarian dialogue on Iraq and the region.

Iraqi art also is a focus of HDF given the importance and richness of Iraqi contemporary art since its birth at the hands of Faeq Hasan and Jewad Salim and the other pioneers, with a continuing influence by Iraqi artists scattered across the world map to the present day. The first art exhibition at Salam House was in November 2010 and was by the renowned Iraqi artist Rashad Salim. It spanned three weeks and was accompanied by workshops and performances based on his creations of the Re-Piano Project; a project that recycled defunct pianos into instruments and objects for dialogue and addressed issues as conflict resolution, identity and trauma therapy. The second art exhibition commemorated the death of one of Iraq’s leading artists Shaker Hasan Al-Said. The exhibition attracted lots of attention from both Iraqi and Arab audiences who wanted to see a chronological selection of his works spanning eight decades of his life. The exhibition was inaugurated by Dr Mohammed Makiya, a world famous Arab architect and expert in classical Islamic architecture. Dr Makiya was the first elected president of the Iraqi Fine Arts Association in the 1960s, and a close friend of al-Said. Salam House has been chosen by many other Iraqi artists as a place to exhibit their works and showcase the forgotten face of Iraq that is often veiled by political unrests and sectarian tensions.

The Humanitarian Dialogue Foundation hopes to continue to be at the forefront in representing the Iraqi cultural scene in London, not only as a forum for discussion and dialogue, but also to re-establish links between Iraq and British Iraqis. Iraqi culture is rich and diverse, but has not had a forum in which it can be continually displayed, despite the fact that there are dozens of Iraqi organisations across the city, and as a result, it has often been overlooked. The HDF hopes to remedy this, and with the continued support of an array of distinguished speakers, artists and academics, there is every hope that it will continue to be successful in this endeavour.

Ali al-Saffar is former Communications Officer for HDF and Dr Ahmed Naji is a trustee and former executive officer of HDF

(Opposite) Dr Mohammed Makiya speaking at a commemorative event for artist Shaker Hasan Al-Said at HDF this year

(Left) Ethics and Politics: Does a Contradiction Exist? lecture at Salam House in February this year

Iraqi culture is rich and diverse, but has not had a forum in which it can be continually displayed and as a result it has often been overlooked.
Mapping Iraqi Art in London

It is perhaps to Dia Azzawi that Iraqi artists in London owe most gratitude. With a career spanning over 49 years he has participated in more than sixty five shows and has been editor of major international magazines including UR: The International Magazine of Arab Culture, London; Funoon Arabia, London and on the Editorial Board of Mawakif, London. Through his publications and exhibitions, he has contributed widely to the intellectual development of the arts of the Middle East. Tellingly, out of the 77 artists shown at the British Museum’s Word in Art Exhibition in 2006, nearly 25 per cent were from Iraq and it was to Dia that the curators of the inaugural exhibition last year at the Mathaf Gallery in Doha turned for guidance and support.

Working in a variety of media, his most distinctive images are undoubtedly those encapsulated in his powerfully evocative paintings. Executed in neo-Cubist style, his blocks of brightly coloured pigments combine seamlessly to reflect often semi-abstract subject matter ranging from memories of Iraq’s rich heritage to more political imagery, highlighting the pain of loss and struggle throughout the Arab world.

Acknowledging Dia’s influence, the American born, Iraqi artist, Maysaloun Faraj has, through her work as an artist, curator and gallerist, achieved acclaim for promoting Iraqi art in London. Conscious of the hardships suffered by Iraqis in exile, Maysaloun wanted to bring together the country’s scattered ‘talents in the wind’ and to communicate their positive and creative energies. Thus in 1995 her project entitled ‘Strokes of Genius: Contemporary Iraqi Art’ was born. At first its focus was a comprehensive database of Iraqi artists...
The growing success of Iraqi art and artists globally can undoubtedly be measured in the participation of Iraq in this year’s Venice Biennale

www.incia.co.uk. With the help of others including curator Ulrike al-Khamis and artists Rashad Selim and the then Baghdad based Hanaa Malallah, by 2000 the project had grown into a touring exhibition and the subsequent publication of the eponymous book, the only comprehensive reference in English, on the subject.

Maysaloun’s work continued when in 2002 she opened the Aya Gallery in west London with her husband. Here Maysaloun curated a series of important Iraqi shows until her last exhibition in 2009, a solo show of her own paintings and ceramics entitled ‘Boats and Burdens: Kites and Shattered Dreams.’ Through the joie de vivre imagery of her ceramics, to a more poignant expose of the tragic destruction of life symbolised in withering date palms, her work attempts to capture a beauty and innocence lost forever.

Not all Iraqi artists in London share the same feeling about their homeland. Rashad Selim, who was born in Sudan, of a German mother and Iraqi father, resides in a more liminal mental space, neither outside or inside Iraq or London. While he acknowledges his Iraqi identity (he is Jawad Salim’s nephew), his peripatetic childhood and time in London, where he has lived since 1982, have given him a duality of perspective not prevalent in many of his compatriots. Although influenced by Islamic culture, which he began to appreciate while living in London, he sees his art as having universality not specific to Iraq. For Rashad, being in London has broadened his creative side. Most indicative of this is his current re-piano project, in which he strips out and transforms old pianos into living works of art, Rashad aims symbolically to re-engage with and transform the universality of broken culture.

Hanaa Malallah by contrast, who came out of Iraq in 2006 (and now cannot return), at first found living in London difficult. Here though now she is able to concentrate on her art and has exhibited widely. A deeply thoughtful and philosophical person, Hanaa’s work addresses the subject of ancient Mesopotamia, contemporary destruction and exile. Like many artists of her generation, she found traditional media inadequate to express her ideas. Instead she uses burnt paper and cloths, barbed wire and bullets, with splintered wood and found objects. Often shown in Dubai, Hanaa is now preparing for an exhibition at the Qattan Foundation in April 2012.

The growing success of Iraqi art and artists globally can undoubtedly be measured in the participation of Iraq in this year’s Venice Biennale. Being one of the six artists chosen to exhibit in the exhibition entitled Wounded Water, made London based Iraqi Kurdish artist Walid Siti, not unsurprisingly, very happy. From a voyage out of Iraq via Yugoslavia, in 1984, Walid has come a long way to the point where he now goes back regularly to assist young artists in Iraq. He arrived in London speaking virtually no English and knowing no-one and it was through a meeting with Rose Issa in 1987, who at the time was running the Kufa Gallery, that he started his career in the art world. Known for his distinctive monochromatic and highly symbolic work, he pares down his subject by using simple shapes or symbols and reflects war and violence and mankind’s ultimate helplessness.

Such are the narratives depicted by Iraqi artists. Others such as Yousif Nasser, who left in Iraq in 1979 or Suad Attar who moved to London in 1976 and whose solo exhibition at Leighton House has recently finished, have equally chilling memories and historical roots, that they feel compelled to explore.

Janet Rady is a specialist in contemporary art from the Middle East

(Left) Walid Siti, 5, 2010, White Cube Gallery
Selecting a few literary stars from a galaxy of outstanding poets, rooted in a tradition that dates back to pre-Islamic Mesopotamia and boasts some of the finest poetry in the Arabic language, is not easy. Poetry is a well established Iraqi art—indeed the classical Iraqi style of lyrical composition has lent its name to the sublime genre of romantic and mystical ghazal, composed not exclusively by the best classical poets of Iraq and the Hejaz, but throughout the Persianate world and the Indian sub-continent. In modern times too, the renaissance of Arabic poetry has been led in part by deceased Iraqi poets such as Muhammad Mahdi Al-Jawahiri (1899-1997), Abd al-Wahhab al-Bayati (1926-1999), Nazik Al-Malaika (1922-2007), Badr Shakir as-Sayyab (1926-1964) and Sargon Boulus (1944-2007), whose literary output is not only highly praised in Iraq but is also critically acclaimed throughout the Arab world and borders beyond. The five named poets’ treatment of the themes of love, death and particularly the tyranny of exile, torments of which was experienced by all of them, has created a body of work wherein myth, history, interrogation of the self and snapshots of everyday life far away from the homeland, are woven together in sombre and vivid poems.

The theme of exile—true exile and not the sentimental longings of expatriates or émigrés—informs the poetry of ‘Abd al-Wahhab al-Bayati, when time and again the poetic persona refuses to even contemplate closure, as encapsulated in lines from ‘Al-Nar wa al-Kalimat’, Fire and Words: ‘My homeland is exile, I carry Baghdad in my heart, From one home to another.’

Robert Fisk, in his obituary of al-Bayati, recalled that the poet ‘spent his last years from 1996 in the beautiful but alien city of Damascus, drinking in its coffee shops and lamenting his home.’ In his poem ‘Nusus Sharqiyyah’, Oriental Texts, al-Bayati reflects: ‘I always dream at night that I’m in Iraq, and hear its heart beating and smell its fragrance carried by the wind, especially after midnight when it’s quiet’ and poignantly reiterates: ‘I haven’t found life and light, in the cities of loss and lack; my poetry was the fire to dispel the gloom of exile and frosty homes’.

Foretelling the tragedy of a death he writes:

I dreamt I was a fugitive
Hiding in a forest.
The wolves in a distant country
Hounded me through black deserts and over rough hills.
My dear, our separation was torture.
I dreamt I was without a home,
Dying in an unknown city,
Dying alone, my love, without a home.

From *The Fugitive*, Translated by Abdullah Udhari

The theme of exile also runs through many of the poems of the modernist poet Sargon Boulus, born in Iraq to an Assyrian family in al-Habbaniyah, on the Euphrates. After leaving Iraq, Boulus settled in Beirut for a short while before moving to the United States which became his home for the last 40 years of his life. Boulus, the poet and activist, expands the symbol of a handful of earth clutched by those banished into exile, into a moving allegory:

Um Muhammad, the fortune-teller, the woman from whose thin neck dangles what initially appears to be a necklace, but is nothing but a black leather pouch. She said it contains a handful of the homeland’s dirt. She sat on a stone bench, at the Hashimiyya Square, in Amman, with thousands of others, waiting for a visa, to any country. She said that when she crossed the border, she knew that she might never see it again in this world. Therefore, she will carry it, like a yoke, wherever she ends up. Wherever she ends up, she will carry this black pouch of dirt.

*A Pouch of Dirt* From *Azma ukhra li-kalb al-qabila* 2008
Translated by Sinan Antoon
Mohammad Mirbashiri reviews two films from the Middle East that appeared at the festival

**Aasma (أسما) , Egypt (2011)**  
Director: Amr Salama  

*Aasma* is the touching tale of a timid HIV-positive airport cleaning attendant who lives with her father Hosni (Sayed Ragab) and daughter Habiba (Fatma Adel) in modern-day Cairo. The story is made up of scenes going between the present situation and Aasma’s past. In the opening scene Asmaa is wheeled through a brightly-lit hospital corridor about to enter an operating theatre. This is intercut with a scene where Aasma is in a support-group meeting for AIDS sufferers. Whilst the 45-year-old widow Aasma is asymptomatic, she suffers from a serious and life-threatening gall bladder problem. No surgeon in the country will agree to carry out the operation because of her HIV-positive condition. Staunchly resolute in her refusal to reveal how she contracted the virus Aasma is faced with cruel prejudice and the true example of how ignorance breeds fear.

A TV producer assures her that appearing on a chat show will result in widespread national attention and a doctor agreeing to perform the simple yet urgent operation. Irritating chat show host, Mohsen (Maged El Kedwany) insists that she must make her plea on screen revealing her face and her refusal to reveal how she contracted the virus Aasma is faced with cruel prejudice and the true example of how ignorance breeds fear.

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**Where Do We Go Now? (رحلة لروين؟) , Lebanon (2011)**  
Director: Nadine Labaki  

A group of women walk in unison, some draped in black veils, others wearing short black dresses beating their chests as they walk, in a rhythmic style. Hands resting on their chests as their feet simultaneously tap the ground the women are mourning the passing of their loved brothers, fathers and husbands. This is the opening scene of Nadine Labaki’s theatrical second feature film.

Following the success of her 2007 debut film *Caramel*, Labaki’s second feature does not know whether it is coming or going. A musical-fantasy genre, the film highlights the struggles of a group of Lebanese village-dwelling women keeping the peace in the volatile multi-confessional Middle Eastern state. The storyline takes us on a rollercoaster of tears and laughter and it is a shame that the plot is so unrealistic. However, if you sit back and don’t let that consume you, it is definitely an entertaining film in a theatrical style with catchy sing along songs and at times incredibly funny. However, unlike other light-hearted comedies, this film tackles a serious theme: strife between Christians and Muslims living alongside one another in Lebanon.

Amal, the protagonist, is played by the writer and director herself, Nadine Labaki who gives a solid performance. The sub-plot of the infatuation of Rabih, who works as a decorator in Amal’s cafe is unfortunately left incomplete.

Despite, the unrealistic incidents in the plot Labaki again demonstrates a nuanced understanding of Arab societies and Levantine culture. Taking generalisations of Middle Eastern society, Labaki manipulates the melodrama of the devout yet doting Christian and Muslim mothers and the bad-tempered and feisty Arab men ready to draw arms.

Nonetheless, whilst the women in her film are the strong-willed protagonists, who cleverly plot and scheme to keep their husbands and sons from fighting against one another, it seems somewhat simplistic to think of the gender binary in such a way. *Where do we go now* is an amusing take on a grim reality, surprisingly with a cast made up of almost entirely non-professional actors.

Mohammad Mirbashiri is a freelance writer and researcher on contemporary Middle Eastern culture and society.
going out to Masgouf-Le Chef to eat Iraqi food turned into a culinary journey into the past. *Masgouf* is the name of one of the most famous Iraqi national dishes: fish (mainly carp or barb), butterflied, well seasoned, and roasted over wood embers. The Abu Nawas district of Baghdad, at the shore of the Tigris river, has the reputation of serving the most delicious *masgouf*, although it is served all over Iraq. Eating this in Iraq is an event, and Nadje recalled many family outings to renowned restaurants there, sipping cool Iraqi brewed beer, eating fava beans and home made crisps by the river, while anticipating the *masgouf*.

Now, here we were sitting off Edgware road, and eating *masgouf* (here sea bass) that had actually been offered on the house - a rare perk of this venture. And what a perk! The flaky flesh practically fell on to our forks and, savouring it, we felt we could almost see the Tigris. The restaurant certainly has an ‘authentic’ feel to it: most of the clientele are Iraqi, Iraqi music plays in the background and, most importantly, the various dishes we ordered tasted just like Nadje’s grandmother’s cooking. Unfortunately, nostalgia has its flip side. The beer or wine that would probably once have accompanied this treat by the river were, alas, absent. Masgouf-Le Chef, in common with a couple of other Iraqi places we phoned, serves no alcohol. It seems these days a new propriety rules.

We arrived to find the table already laid with white cheese, an assortment of crudité, *turshi* (mixed pickles) and olives. Hot *nan* bread came immediately from the *tanoor*. Mark loved the salty, herb flecked cheese and found it a lively partner for the rest of the food. These were palate openers for our ordered starters: *kubba mosul* - presented here as a triangular crushed wheat casing stuffed with minced meat, raisins and pine kernels - was a sophisticated offering; *kubba halab* – an egg-shaped sheath of ground rice around lamb, herbs and fried onion; and *patata chap* - lots of mashed potato pressed around lamb and herbs. The latter was our least favourite - like tasteless discs of shepherd’s pie (Nadje prefers Mark’s shepherd’s pie).

Mark ordered *kouzi* – lamb shank (here called ‘knuckle’) with saffron rice, raisins and pine nuts. He found it pleasant and filling, though the spiced tomato sauce seemed an unnecessary distraction. Nadje went for a spinach stew, a favourite at her family home in Baghdad. *Noomi Basra* (dried lemon) gives this dish a sharp flavour that can be challenging. It reminded Mark of hating spinach as a child... Alhena wouldn’t touch it... but Nadje really enjoyed it. True to form, Alhena ordered mixed grill for her main course. She loved most the tender, juicy lamb, but also enjoyed the chicken sheesh kebab and the minced lamb kebab.

The servings are generous, and with the complementary *Masgouf*, we found ourselves leaving the restaurant laden with doggie bags.

Masgouf – Le Chef has been around for ten years and seems to be thriving both for eat-in and take-away. Six years ago, its Iraqi owner opened a second restaurant, simply called Masgouf in Knightsbridge. We might go and compare some time in the future...

Main courses range from £9-17.50. Its sister restaurant *Masgouf* is on 75 Knightsbridge, London SW1X 7QU. Tel. 020-7235 3888.

*Nadje Al-Ali is a member of the Editorial Board and Mark Douglas is her eating partner. Alhena is their daughter.*
Saddam Hussein particularly had it in for the Marsh Arabs of southern Iraq. A revolt against his rule after the 1991 war for the restoration of Kuwait’s independence provoked Saddam’s ferocity. A deliberate campaign was undertaken to drain the marshes, deprive the people there of their natural livelihood and force the people out of the area. This was in addition to his normal recipes of arrest, detention, torture and execution.

The book under review documents some of these atrocities in the context of a survey of the region’s unique way of life and ecology. Different chapters record the flora and fauna, the customs, the handicrafts and the methods of construction of the people of the Marshlands. The editor, an architect himself, is particularly perceptive on the ideas behind architectural practices.

The first chapter on the history is sketchy. This is unfortunate because the question of the Marshlands needs to be seen within a broader historical and geographical context. Brutal and criminal though Saddam’s methods were, he was actually only hastening a process that had been going on for the previous century. The Marshlands, for over a thousand years, have been a place of refuge. Water coming into the Marshlands had been restricted by dams constructed in Iraq itself from the early 20th century. The construction of roads and the development of cars, as well as the introduction of the railway, had isolated the Marsh Arabs from the main lines of communication that had previously been river transport. There was a steady out-migration. The vibrant Marsh Arab culture – songs and stories – was transferred to and sustained in the suburbs of Basra and Baghdad.

There has been an Iraqi government policy to restore the Marshes the presumed site of the Garden of Eden. ‘The marshes represent a world of charm, beauty and nature at its finest,’ writes one of the contributors, Hamed ‘T Haykal. There was ‘grandeur’ in the pre-Saddam life. The best accounts of the Marshlands before Saddam are by the Iraqi anthropologist, Shakir Salim, in his 1962 study, Marsh Dwellers of the Euphrates Delta, and the British traveller, Wilfred Thesiger, who spent much time in the region in the 1950s, and wrote about the people in The Marsh Arabs, first published in 1964. There was little grandeur in their accounts. Poverty-stricken and disease-ridden, with oppressive and heartless sheikhs, the Marshdwellers had every incentive to quit the area. Most Marsh Arabs who have left have chosen not to return. ‘This is mainly,’ write Sam Kubba and Abbas F Jamali, ‘because there is little incentive to do so; why return to villages that lack essential utilities, sanitation, drinking water, healthcare and modern schools?’

The Iraqi Marshlands is just one area in the broader Middle East region that has been drained. In the Cukurova area of southern Turkey or al-Ghab in central Syria – or one might add the Huleh Swamps in northern Israel – lives have been transformed by the draining of malarial marshes during the 20th century, with greater prosperity and opportunities and expanded agriculture and nobody proposes to reverse the process. (Does anyone think of restoring the English Fens?)

This book has much information of great value, but it has been appallingly edited. There is no consistency in the spelling of place-names. Abbreviated references in the text (Author, date) do not appear in full form in the bibliography. The caption of ‘Marsh Arab and Ma’dan woman with child’ could have been written by a nineteenth century European ethnologist, as if the subjects of the photographs have no name, no identity, no dignity. The publishers could do better, especially when the book is priced at £60.

Peter Clark was the joint-editor of The Iraqi Marshlands: A Human and Environmental Study, published by Politico’s (2002)
Frederic Volpi, Senior Lecturer in International Relations and Director of the Institute of Middle Eastern and Central Asian Studies at the University of St Andrews, edits a volume that considers what it means to be ‘civil’ and ‘civilized’ in the Middle East. The analyses gathered challenge conventional ‘western’ perspectives on civility as an expression of state-guaranteed free association in a non-violent space of discourse and behaviour.

The book includes essays on how the practices of government affect everyday civilities, using Egypt as an example.

*Routledge, November 2011. £80*

Yvonne Yazbeck Haddad, Jane I. Smith, and Kathleen M. MooreFromherz

The treatment and role of women is one of the most discussed and controversial aspects of Islam. In this volume, three scholars survey the situation of women in Islam, focusing on how Muslim views about and experiences of gender are changing in the Western diaspora. The authors offer an overview of the teachings of the Qur’an and the Prophet Muhammad on gender, analyse the ways in which the west has historically viewed Muslim women, and examine how the Muslim world has changed in response to western critiques.

*Oxford University Press, November 2011. £12.99*

Bernadette Turan

Ever since the highly controversial appointment of a pious president in the secular Turkish Republic in 2007, both the Turkish state and society have been deeply divided over the issue of piety and Muslim politics. The essays in this book reveal and analyse specific affinities between the types of secularisms and pieties in a nation-state, by highlighting that secular state and the devout are neither friends nor strangers.

*Palgrave Macmillan, January 2011. £55*

Willem Floor and Edmund Herzig

Safavid Persia is known for its wealth of cultural contributions to the history of Iran and to the arts of the Islamic world. Its robust military interventions with its Ottoman and Mughal neighbours, has also been extensively studied. Little is known however about the social, commercial, economic and diplomatic relations of the Safavids with the rest of the world. This book presents research into Iran’s international relations during the 16th-18th centuries, a formative period for society and culture of the Iranian state.

*IB Tauris, December 2011. £45*
Events in London

THE EVENTS and organisations listed below are not necessarily endorsed or supported by The Middle East in London. The accompanying texts and images are based primarily on information provided by the organisers and do not necessarily reflect the views of the compilers or publishers. While every possible effort is made to ascertain the accuracy of these listings, readers are advised to seek confirmation of all events using the contact details provided for each event.

Submitting entries and updates: please send all updates and submissions for entries related to future events via e-mail to mepub@soas.ac.uk or by fax to 020 7898 4329.

BM – British Museum, Great Russell Street, London WC1B 3DG
SOAS – School of Oriental and African Studies, Thornhaugh Street, Russell Square, London WC1H 0XG
LSE – London School of Economics and Political Science, Houghton Street, London WC2 2AE

DECEMBER EVENTS

Thursday 1 December

1:15 pm | Göküler ve Sûretler (Shadows and Faces) + Bellek – Benim Kürşüs (Living Memory – My Cyprus) (Film) 17th London Turkish Film Festival: Thursday 24 November - Thursday 8 December. Shadows and Faces, Dir Derviş Zaim (2010), Turkey, 116 min. Story set against the background of the beginning of the conflict between Turks and Greeks in Cyprus in 1963. A teenage girl is separated from her father when they are forced to flee from their village by escalating violence + My Cyprus Dir Riza Baloglu (2011), Turkey, 35 min. The history of Cyprus through the story of an 82 year-old Cypriot woman Adile Alparslan. Tickets: £6. To book tickets T 020 7241 9410 W www.tlf.org.uk

4:15 pm | Eylül (September) + Ben Geldim, Gidiyorum! (I’ve Come and I am Gone!) (Film) London Turkish Film Festival. September, Dir Cemil Ağacıklıoğlu (2011), Turkey, 90 min. Drama that explores the relationships between Yusuf, an introverted goldsmith in Istanbul’s Grand Bazaar, his sick wife Aslı and a young abused Russian woman with whom he starts an affair + I’ve Come and I am Gone!, Dir Metin Akdemir (2011), Turkey, 15 min. The street vendors of Istanbul still use the most ancient of marketing techniques: their voices. Tickets: £6. To book tickets T 020 7241 9410 W www.rocinema.org.uk Rio Cinema, 107 Kingsland High Street, London E8 2PB. T 020 7503 3584 / 07943 183 800 W www.tlf.org.uk

6:30 pm | Two faced? A case study of the history of collecting at the Petrie Museum (Lecture) Organised by: Petrie Museum of Egyptian Archaeology. Doors open at 6:00pm. In the uncertain world of heritage and cultural property museums are generally considered a good thing. This, however, has more to do with what people think a museum does and what it should be, rather than historical fact. Admission free. Petrie Museum of Egyptian Archaeology, Malet Place, London WC1. T 020 7679 4138 E events.petrie@ucl.ac.uk W www. ucl.ac museums/petrie

6:30 pm | Sinyora Enrica ile İtalyan Olmak (Being Italian with Signora Enrica) + Lady Windermere (Film) London Turkish Film Festival. Being Italian with Signora Enrica, Dir Ali İlhani (2010), Turkey, 110 min. Legendary actress Claudia Cardinale is man-hating Signora Enrica, renting rooms in her Rimini house to female students only. But with the arrival of young male Turkish exchange student Ekin she decides to make an exception... + Lady Windermere, Dir Taylan Mutaf (2011), UK, 4 min. The Windermere is a pub but the Lady is definitely to be avoided. Tickets: £8/E5.50 under 15s. To book tickets T 020 7241 9410 W www.rocinema.org.uk Rio Cinema, 107 Kingsland High Street, London E8 2PB.

7:30 pm | Rest Upon The Wind (Performance) Until Saturday 3 December. Play by Nadim Sawalha. The story of the birth of a book that is still being read and quoted by millions of people across the world, and its author Khalil Gibran. Tickets: £12/E10 conc. Tristan Bates Theatre, 1A Tower Street, Covent Garden, London WC2H 9NP T 020 7240 6283 E boxoffice@tristanbatestheatre.co.uk W www. tristanbates theatre.co.uk

8:30 pm | Bir Zamanlar Anadolu’da (Once Upon a Time in Anatolia) (Film) London Turkish Film Festival. Dir Nuri Bilge Ceylan (2011), Turkey, 150 min. A murder has been committed and a man has confessed; all that remains is for him to lead police to the body but the killer can’t locate the place where he left his victim. Tickets: £10/E8 conc. To book tickets T 020 7073 1350 W www.institut-francais.org.uk Cine Lumiere, 17 Queensberry Place, London SW7 2DT.

9:00 pm | Gise Memuru (Toll Booth) + Yasin Ziya Hımbılgil (The Postmodern Existence of Hımbılgil) (Film) London Turkish Film Festival. Toll Booth, Dir Tolga Karaçelik (2010), Turkey, 96 min. The life of 35-year old toll booth operator Kenan is a lonely one of monotonous work until a newly appointed operations manager arrives + The Postmodern Existence of Hımbılgil, Dir Emre Aluç (2011), Turkey, 13 min. Mockumentary about Hımbılgil’s bitter-sweet 36 years of life. Tickets: £8. To book tickets T 020 7241 9410 W www.rocinema.org.uk Rio Cinema, 107 Kingsland High Street, London E8 2PB.

Friday 2 December

1:15 pm | Unknown craftsmen: behind the scenes of Islamic art (Gallery Talk) Louisa Macmillan, BM. Organised by: BM. Admission free. Room 34, BM. T 020 7323 8181 W www.britishmuseum.org

1:15 pm | Oğul (The Son) + Barış’in Oyuncakları (Barisk’s Toys) (Film) London Turkish Film Festival. The Son, Dir Atilla Cengiz, (2011), Turkey, 97 min. Soner leaves his hometown on the Black Sea coast to see his girlfriend but the journey becomes a dangerous adventure as his path crosses with that of Musa, a Kurdish villager whose son is a guerrilla fighter + Barış’in Oyuncakları (Barisk’s Toys) Dir Antun Sallab, (2009), Turkey, 87 min. A ten year-old Baris discovers a box of toys in the attic of his house. T 020 7240 6283 E boxoffice@tristanbatestheatre.co.uk W www. tristanbates theatre.co.uk

Eylül (See December Events, pages 27, 29 & 31)
The Centre for Iranian Studies, LMEI, SOAS and the Faculty of Oriental Studies, Oxford are pleased to announce the ninth annual Soudavar Memorial Foundation Symposium

The Idea of Iran: the age of the great Saljuqs

Saturday 4th February 2012
Brunei Gallery Lecture Theatre, SOAS
10.00am-4.30pm

Enquiries & Bookings
Tel. No. 020 7898 4490
E-mail: vp6@soas.ac.uk
Website: www.soas.ac.uk/iranianstudies/

Venue
Brunei Gallery, SOAS
Russell Square
London WC1H 0XG

Barış's Toys, Dir H Sercan Tunali (2010), Turkey, 6 min. Barış learns from his grandfather what happens when seeds are sown. Tickets: £8/£5 conc. To book tickets T 0871 220 6000 W www.apollocinemas.com Apollo Piccadilly Circus, 19 Lower Regent Street, London SW1Y 4LR.

Barr's Toys, Dir H Sercan Tunali (2010), Turkey, 6 min. Barış learns from his grandfather what happens when seeds are sown. Tickets: £8/£5 conc. To book tickets T 0871 220 6000 W www.apollocinemas.com Apollo Piccadilly Circus, 19 Lower Regent Street, London SW1Y 4LR.

3:45 pm | Kar Beyaz (White as Snow) + Music Box (Film) London Turkish Film Festival. White as Snow, Dir Selim Güneş, (2011), Turkey, 82 min. Adaptation of Sabahattin Ali's short story 'Ayran' a fable-like tale of nine-year-old Sabahattin Ali's short story 'Ayran'

Saturday 3 December

10:00 am | Symposium on Moroccan textiles with contemporary Morocco textile designers and artists presenting their work. See Weaving the Threads of Livelihood: the aesthetic and embodied knowledge of Berber weavers in Exhibitions. Admission free. Pre-booking required E m.naji@ucl.ac.uk Jeremy Bentham Room, UCL. W www.soas.ac.uk/about/events/

11:30 am | Discover Mesopotamia through Storytelling on a ZIPANG Day Out Organised by: The Enheduanna Society. Guided tour looking at items which illustrate the world of stories in Mesopotamian mythology. See listing at 3:30pm. Admission free. BM (meet in the Great Court beside the Information Desk). W www.zipang.org.uk

2:00 pm | Spiritual Verses: readings from the first book of the Masnavi by Jalal al-Din Rumi (Seminar) Alan Williams, Manchester University. Organised by: The Beshara Trust. Admission free - donations welcome. October
3:30 pm | Discover Mesopotamia through Storytelling on a ZIAPNG Day Out Organised by: The Enheduanna Society. Doors open at 3.00pm. Storytelling workshop where you will hear a professional storyteller tell a Mesopotamian story and can have a go at telling the story yourself with live Iraqi music. Admission free. Poetry Cafe, 22 Betterton Street, Covent Garden WC2H 9BX. W www.zipang.org.uk

4:15 pm | Unutma Beni Istanbul (Do Not Forget Me Istanbul) (Film) London Turkish Film Festival.Dirs Hany Abu-Hassad, Stefan Arsenijevic, Aida Bejc, Josefina Markarian, Eric Nazarian, Stergios Niziris, Omar Sharwawi (2011), Turkey, 118 min. Six international directors come together to explore the cultural diversity and historical legacy that make up modern Istanbul. Tickets: £12/£10 conc. To book tickets T 0871 220 6000 W www.apollocinemas.com Apollo Piccadilly Circus, 19 Lower Regent Street, London SW1Y 4LR.

4:30 pm | Algeria: echoes of independence and cries of today + Al-Andalus Group (Talk & Concert) Martin Evans, author and Hicham Yezza, activist and journalist. Organised by: Algeria Solidarity Campaign (ASC) and hosted by the Good Enough College Arabic Society. Algeria Solidarity Campaign End of Year Event. By the 1990s, Algeria’s revolutionary political model had collapsed into a civil war between the military and the Islamist guerillas that killed some 200,000 citizens, this talk will explore the complex roots of Algeria’s predicament. Followed by a concert with Al-Andalus Group. Tickets: £12/£8 conc. and members. Good Enough College, 23 Mecklenburgh Square, London WCIN 2AD. T 0794 7074505 / 07791211253 E Algeriasolidaritycampaign@gmail.com

6:45 pm | Atlıkarınca (Merry Go Round) + Don’t Go (Film) Merry Go Round, Dir İlksen Başarr (2010), Turkey, 90 min. Erdem and Sevil and their two children Edip and Sevgi are seemingly just an average family, but after she notices Sevgi becoming unusually moody and detached, Sevil begins to uncover a dark secret + Don’t Go Dir Türgut Akaçıklı, (2010), Turkey, 4 min. What do you think your cat is up to at home while you are out working? Tickets: £12/£10 conc. To book tickets T 0871 220 6000 W www.apollocinemas.com Apollo Piccadilly Circus, 19 Lower Regent Street, London SW1Y 4LR.

7:30 pm | Rest Upon the Wind (Performance) Until Saturday 3 December. See listings for Thursday 1 December for details.

9:00 pm | Sinyora Enrica ile İtalyan Omlak (Being Italian with Signora Enrica) + Yaşin Ziya Humbilgül (The Postmodern Existence of Humbilgül) (Film) London Turkish Film Festival. See listings on Thursday 1 December for film details. Tickets: £12/£10 conc. To book tickets T 0871 220 6000 W www.apollocinemas.com Apollo Piccadilly Circus, 19 Lower Regent Street, London SW1Y 4LR.

9:00 pm | Ogul (The Son) + Barısun Oyunçakları (Barış’s Toys) (Film) London Turkish Film Festival. See listings for Friday 2 December for film details. Tickets: £12/£10 conc. To book tickets T 0871 220 6000 W www.apollocinemas.com Apollo Piccadilly Circus, 19 Lower Regent Street, London SW1Y 4LR.

Monday 5 December

2:30 pm | Yurt (Home) + Yamnur Duasi (Pray for Rain) (Film) London Turkish Film Festival. See listings for Sunday 4 December for film, venue and ticket details.

4:30 pm | Sinyora Enrica ile İtalyan Omlak (Being Italian with Signora Enrica) + Lady Windermere (Film) London Turkish Film Festival. See listings on Thursday 1 December for film details. Tickets: £12/£10 conc. To book tickets T 0871 220 6000 W www.apollocinemas.com Apollo Piccadilly Circus, 19 Lower Regent Street, London SW1Y 4LR.

6:00 pm | Assyria and Israel - Contact and Conflict (Lecture) Alan Millard, University of Liverpool. Organised by: Anglo-Israel Archaeological Society. Admission free. Stevenson Lecture Theatre, Clore Education Centre, BM. T 0208 349 5754 W www.aias.org.uk

6:00 pm | Economic Liberalisation, Class Dynamics and New Business Groups in Turkey (Lecture) Gül Berna Özcan, School of Management, Royal Holloway, University of London. Organised by: LSE Contemporary Turkish Studies. Admission free. J116, Cowdray House, LSE. E euromist.turkish.studies@lse.ac.uk W www2.lse.ac.uk/europeanInstitute/Research/ContemporaryTurkishStudies/Home.aspx

Tuesday 6 December

1:15 pm | Scientific aspects of the royal graves at Ur (Film) Gallery Talk Janet Ambers and Emma Passmore, BM. Organised by: BM. Admission free. Room 56, BM. T 020 7323 8181 W wwwbritishmuseum.org

1:30 pm | Gölgeler ve Suretler (Shadows and Faces) + Heartland: a story of Turkish Cypriotness in London (Film) London Turkish Film Festival. Shadows and Faces, see listings on Thursday 1 December for film details. Heartland, Dir Erdal Redjep (2011), UK, 10 min. A photo-film study on Turkish Cypriot identity in the UK told through the story of one woman’s experiences. Tickets: £12/£10 conc. To book tickets T 0871 220 6000 W www.apollocinemas.com Apollo Piccadilly Circus, 19 Lower Regent Street, London SW1Y 4LR.

4:00 pm | Bizim Büyük Çaresizligimiz (Our Grand Despair) + Ali Ata Bak (Film) London Turkish Film Festival. Our Grand Despair, see listings for Friday 2 December for film, venue and ticket details. Ali Ata Bak, see listings for Monday 5 December for film details.

5:15 pm | The Arab Spring: a year on (Panel Discussion) Hassan Hakimian, LMEI & SOAS; Salwa Ismail, SOAS; Corinna Mullin, SOAS; Makeen Makeen, SOAS; Charles Tripp, SOAS. Organised by: London Middle East Institute, SOAS (LMEI). A special panel on recent developments in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA). A
The Tunisian street vendor Mohamed Bouazizi set himself on fire. This act of self-immolation triggered a wave of change that swept the Middle East and North Africa. An analysis of recent developments in the Middle East and North Africa featuring a group of high-profile speakers followed by a debate and Q&A from the audience. Chaired by Stephen Chan, SOAS. Part of the LMEI’s Tuesday Evening Lecture Programme on the Contemporary Middle East, The Middle East in Transition: a new social economic and political landscape? Admission free. Khalili Lecture Theatre, SOAS.

Wednesday 7 December

9:00 am | Inaugural Conference on Iran’s Economy, 2011 (Two-Day Conference: Wednesday 7 - Thursday 8 December) Organised by: International Iranian Economic Association (IIEA) and hosted by the London Middle East Institute, SOAS (LMEI). The newly formed IIEA’s first international conference on Iran’s Economy. The purpose of the conference is to provide a venue for the best current research on Iran’s economy and to generate information and encouragement for future high quality research in this area. Tickets: £200/£70 academic rate/£35 conc. Pre-registration required. Brunei Gallery Lecture Theatre, SOAS. T 020 7898 4490 E vp6@soas.ac.uk W www.soas.ac.uk/lmei/events/.

6:30 pm | Unutma Beni Istanbul (Do Not Forget Me Istanbul) (Film) London Turkish Film Festival. See listings for Saturday 3 December for film, venue and ticket details.

9:00 pm | Kar Beyaz (White as Snow) + Music Box (Film) London Turkish Film Festival. See listings for Saturday 3 December for film, venue and ticket details.

1:45 pm | Türk Pasaportu (Turkish Passport) (Film) London Turkish Film Festival. Dir Burak Cem Arik (2011), Turkey, 91 min. An untold story which reveals how Turkish diplomats helped save hundreds of lives during the Second World War by issuing passports to Jews even if they had no Turkish connections. Tickets: £8/£5 conc. To book tickets T 0871 220 6000 W www.apollocinemas.com Apollo Piccadilly Circus, 19 Lower Regent Street, London SW1Y 4LR.

4:15 pm | Bölge (The Zone) + Annem Barış İstiyor (My Mother Wants Peace) (Film) London Turkish Film Festival. The Zone, Dirs Güliz Sağlam & Feryal Saygılıgil (2010), Turkey, 40 min. Seven workers, all women… Four trade zones in four different Turkish cities + My Mother Wants Peace, Dir Aziz Çapkurt (2011), Turkey, 50 min. The lives and struggles of ’Peace Mothers’ to overcome the devastation and pain that war brings. Tickets: £12/£10 conc. To book tickets T 0871 220 6000 W www.apollocinemas.com Apollo Piccadilly Circus, 19 Lower Regent Street, London SW1Y 4LR.

5:00 pm | Visiting the Cyrenaican Pentapolis: more than just five cities (Lecture) Lecture Theatre, British Academy, 10 Carlton House Terrace, London SW1Y 5AH. E shirleystrong@btconnect.com W www.brit.ac.uk/institutes/libya/

6:15 pm | Unutma Beni Istanbul (Do Not Forget Me Istanbul) (Film) London Turkish Film Festival. See listings for Saturday 3 December for film details. Tickets: £10/£8 conc. To book tickets T 020 7073 1350 W www.institut-francais.org.uk Cine Lumiere, 17 Queensberry Place, London SW7 2DT.

6:30 pm | Adalet Oyunu (Playing the Justice) + Direk Aşk (Love is Blind) (Film) London Turkish Film Festival. See listings for Saturday 3 December for film details. Tickets: £10/£8 conc. To book tickets T 020 7073 1350 W www.institut-francais.org.uk Cine Lumiere, 17 Queensberry Place, London SW7 2DT.

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– Robert Irwin

www.ibtauris.com
Festival. See listings for Saturday 3 December for film, venue and ticket details.

7:00 pm | The Martyr and the Saint: the Ottoman transformation of two Medieval shrines (Lecture) Zeynep Yurekli-Gorkay, Oriental Institute, University of Oxford. Organised by: Islamic Art Circle at SOAS. Part of the Islamic Art Circle at SOAS Lecture Programme. Chaired by Doris Behrens-Abouseif, SOAS. Admission free. Khalili Lecture Theatre, SOAS. T 0771 408 7480 E RosalindHaddon@aol.com W www.soas.ac.uk


9:00 pm | Gise Memuru (Toll Booth) + Yasin Ziya Himbilgil (The Postmodern Existence of Himbilgil) (Film) London Turkish Film Festival. See listings for Thursday 1 December for film details. Tickets: £12/£10 conc. To book tickets T 0871 220 6000 W www.apollocinemas.com Apollo Piccadilly Circus, 19 Lower Regent Street, London SW1Y 4LR

Thursday 8 December

9:15 am | Inaugural Conference on Iran’s Economy, 2011 (Two-Day Conference: Wednesday 7 - Thursday 8 December) See listings for Wednesday 7 December for details.

1:30 pm | Rakip Saha (Away Game) + Bordo Mavi + Seppi & Hias (Film) London Turkish Film Festival. Away Game, Dir Serkan Çiçti (2011), Turkey, 71 min. Guided by their trainer with all his years of experience a group of young football players discover that failure, as well as success, is an unavoidable part of growing up + Bordo Mavi, Dir Tunç Kaplan (2011). Germany, 9 min. Portrait of a man whose passion for a football team recognises no boundaries - or disabilities + Seppi & Hias, Dir Emre Koca (2010), Germany, 30 min. Story of a boyhood friendship that bridges all cultural and religious divides. Tickets: £8/£5 conc. To book tickets T 0871 220 6000 W www.apollocinemas.com Apollo Piccadilly Circus, 19 Lower Regent Street, London SW1Y 4LR.


4:00 pm | Saç (Hair) (Film) London Turkish Film Festival. See listings for Friday 2 December for film, venue and contact details.

6:30 pm | The US and the Arab Revolutions (Lecture) William Quandt, University of Virginia. Organised by: LSE Middle East Centre. Although the US has been of minor relevance during the Arab uprisings of 2011, this lecture will argue that the upheaval will have deep implications for US policy in the region. Admission free. Sheikh Zayed Theatre, New Academic Building, LSE. T 020 7955 6250 E mec.events@lse.ac.uk W www2.lse.ac.uk/middleEastCentre/home.aspx

6:45 pm | Eylül (September) + Ben Geldim, Gidiyorum! (I’ve Come and I am Gone) (Film) London Turkish Film Festival. See listings for Thursday 1 December for film details. Tickets: £12/£10 conc. To book tickets T 0871 220 6000 W www.apollocinemas.com Apollo Piccadilly Circus, 19 Lower Regent Street, London SW1Y 4LR.

7:00 pm | Invitation (Da’vat) (Performance) Also on Saturday 17 December. Play in Persian directed by Soudabeh Farrokhi with Soussan Farrokhi. A new interpretation of the work of the renowned writer Gholam Hossein Saedi – A wealthy woman is invited to a party. But she doesn’t know what party... Tickets: £15. Omar Cultural Centre, 45 Queen’s Walk, Ealing, London W5 1TL. T 0781 884 0 824 / 0781 396 00 31 E omidculturalsoociety@yahoo.co.uk / info@saamtheatregroup.com W www.omidculturalsoociety.com

Saturday 10 December

9:30 am | Osiris, Isis, Horus and Seth: triumph over death in ancient Egypt (Study Day) John Taylor, British Museum; Terence DuQuesne, independent scholar and author; Joanna Kyffin, researcher and Online Egyptological Bibliography; John Johnston, UCL and The EES. Organised by: The Egypt Exploration Society. A look at the various ways in which the deities of Osiris, Isis, Horus and Seth affected beliefs and practice in ancient Egypt. Tickets: £32/£27 EES members/£18 EES student members/£22 student non-members). Brunei Gallery Lecture Theatre, SOAS. T 020 7242 1880 E contact@ees.ac.uk W www.ees.ac.uk

7:00 pm | Apartheid, a Global Movement: Nelson Mandela (Screening) (Film) London Turkish Film Festival. See listings for Friday 9 December for film information of minor relevance during the Arab Revolutions

Benjamin Fortna, SOAS. Admission free. Room 116, SOAS. T 020 7898 4431 E bp@soas.ac.uk W www.soas.ac.uk

1:15 pm | The coinage of the Persian kings (Lecture) Vesta Curtis, BM. Organised by: BM. Admission free. Room 52, BM. T 020 7323 8181 W www.britishmuseum.org

Monday 12 December

5:15 pm | Paradox and Passion in the Tower of Babel: on scientific translation in the Moroccan classroom (Seminar) Charis Boutieri, King's College. Organised by: Department of History, SOAS. Seminar on the History of the Near and Middle East. Admission free. Room G3, SOAS. E hw15@soas.ac.uk W www.soas.ac.uk/history/events/nmehistseminar

7:00 pm | The Night Bus (Film) Organised by: Centre for Iranian Studies, SOAS. Part of the Centre's monthly film screenings. Dir Kiumarsh Pourahmadian (2007), Iran. Based on a short story by Habib Ahmad-Zadeh. Isa and Emad who were two young Iranian soldiers are assigned to transfer 38 Iraqi POWs to a garrison inside Iran with the help of a civilian bus driver. Their journey is far from easy. With an overview of Iran's treatment of POWs from the Iran-Iraq War by Shirin Shafai, SOAS. Chaired by Elaheh Rostami-Povey, SOAS. Tickets: £2. Khalili Lecture Theatre, SOAS. T 020 7898 4490 E vp6@soas.ac.uk W www.soas.ac.uk/iranianstudies

7:00 pm | Fulfilling the promise of 2011: the Egyptian revolution, change in the Arab world and the response (Lecture) Sir Derek Plumbly KCMB. Organised by: The British Egyptian Society. Sir Michael Weir Lecture. Doors open at 6.30pm. Lecture to be followed by a drinks reception. Admission free. Institute of Civil Engineers, 1 Great George Street, London SW1P 3AA. E noelrands@hotmail.com

Tuesday 13 December

The Middle East in London
December 2011-January 2012

The Hadassah & Daniel Khalili Memorial Lecture in Islamic Art and Culture

The Cosmic Cup in Medieval and Later Persian Art

Lecture to be followed by a reception

Admission free—All welcome

Dr Marianna Shreve Simpson, Independent Scholar, Maryland, USA and President, Historians of Islamic Art Association

7.00pm
Wednesday 18 January 2012

Khalili Lecture Theatre, Main Building, SOAS
London WC1H 0XG

Lecture to be followed by a reception

Enquiries:
E-mail vp6@soas.ac.uk or Telephone 020 7898 4490
Wednesday 14 December

3:00 pm | An ethics of the rough ground of the everyday: the struggles and entwinements of life in post-invasion Iraq (Seminar) Hayder Al-Mohammad, University of Kent at Canterbury. Organised by: Department of Anthropology and Sociology, SOAS. Part of the Social Anthropology Seminar Series. Admission free. Room G51, SOAS. T 020 7898 4491 E mm101@soas.ac.uk W www.soas.ac.uk/about/events/

Thursday 15 December

1:15 pm | Modern Syrian art at the British Museum (Gallery Talk) Issam Kourbaj, featured artist & Louisa MacMillan, BM. Organised by: BM. Admission free. Room 34, BM. T 020 7323 8181 W www.britishmuseum.org

5:00 pm | Violence against Female Political Prisoners in Iran (Seminar) Shadi Sadr, Women’s rights activist, Justice for Iran. Organised by: Bloomsbury Gender Network and hosted by the SOAS Centre for Gender Studies. Part of the Centre for Gender Studies Seminar Series. During the first decade of the Islamic Republic of Iran, thousands of political activists were arrested, tortured and executed. Sadr gives her analysis on the meaning and the effect of gender based violence in the prisons. Admission free. Room 4421, SOAS. E ruba.salih@soas.ac.uk W www.soas.ac.uk/genderstudies/seminar-series/

Friday 16 December

7:00 pm | Is the Arab Spring a women’s revolution? (Panel Discussion) Organised by: Frontline Club in association with BBC Arabic. The fight for women’s rights didn’t begin with the Arab Spring and has gone on without the attention of the world’s media. Some of the women who took part in the Arab Spring and those who have been working to promote women’s rights will discuss if the revolutions have been good for women. Tickets: £20/£15 conc. Royal College of Surgeons, 35-43 Lincoln Inn Fields, London WC2A 3PE. T 020 7479 8940 E events@fronlineclub.com W www.frontlineclub.com/events/2011/12/fcbca.html

Saturday 3 December

9:00 am | The Legacy of Rumi (d. 1273) in Later Islamic Philosophy and Poetry (Seminar) Organised by: Rumi Studies Group, Institute of Arab and Islamic Studies, University of Exeter in association with the Rumi Institute, Near East University, Nicosia, Cyprus. Seminar focusing on the later legacy in Islamic philosophy and poetry of the Sufi poet, Jalal al-Din Rumi. Tickets: £25/£15 conc. Institute of Arab and Islamic Studies, University of Exeter, Stocker Road, Exeter EX4 4ND. T 01392 724040 E jane.clark@exeter.ac.uk W http://socialsciences.exeter.ac.uk/iais/research/centres/cpis/newsevents/

Saturday 17 December

7:00 pm | Invitation (Da’vat) (Performance) See listing for Saturday 10 December for details.

7:00 pm | Yalda Celebration/ Commemoration of Mowlana Rumi (Performance) Organised by: Iranian Poetry, Art and Music Chamber in association with the London Middle East Institute, SOAS (LMEI). Talk by Shahrokh Vafadari on Yalda, the longest night of the year, followed by a talk by Namdar Baghaei-Yazdi on Mowlana Rumi’s Commemoration. With poetry by Lobat Vala and Manouchehr Javaherkalam. Orchestral performance of Persian classical songs with the Persian classical vocalist, Mazar Sadri. Tickets: £20. Brunei Gallery Lecture Theatre, SOAS. E mazzsadri@yahoo.com W www.soas.ac.uk/lmei/events/

EVENTS OUTSIDE LONDON

Friday 2 December

5:30 pm | Libya - revolution or regression? (Seminar) George Joffé, Cambridge University. Organised by: Middle East Centre, Oxford. Admission free. Middle East Centre, 68 Woodstock Road, Oxford OX2 6JF. T 01865 284780 W www.sant.ox.ac.uk/mec/

Monday 9 January

6:30 pm | The year of Egypt’s second revolution, the balance sheet so far (Lecture) Roger Owen, Harvard University. Organised by: LSE Middle East Centre. A look at Egypt’s Tahrir Square revolution and drawing upon the previous revolutions of 1919 and 1952 to indicate some of the problems and possibilities ahead. Admission free. Sheikh Zayed Theatre, New Academic Building, LSE. T 020 7955 6250 E mec.events@lse.ac.uk W www2.lse.ac.uk/middleEastCentre/home.aspx

Tuesday 10 January

6:00 pm | Concert and Talk by Khyam Allami - Resonance/Dissonance & Sound of Iraq Organised by: The British Institute for the Study of Iraq (Gertrude Bell Memorial). BISI Appeal Event. London-based Iraqi musician, composer and teacher Khyam Allami will present his debut album ‘Resonance/Dissonance’ and discuss the BISI-supported project ‘Sound of Iraq’. Tickets: £15/£10 BISI members with one guest/£5 students. British Academy, 10 W
Thursday 12 January

4:00 pm | Wanderings in the Wilderness: surveys in the Wadi Itm and along the Hejaz Railway of southern Jordan (Lecture) David Thorpe, Great Arab Revolt Project. Organised by: Palestine Exploration Fund jointly with CBRL and BfSA. Admission free. Stevenson Lecture Theatre, Clere Education Centre, BM. E ExecSec@pef.org.uk W www.pef.org.uk

Tuesday 17 January

5:45 pm | Title TBC (Lecture) Organised by: London Middle East Institute, SOAS (LMEI). Part of the LMEI’s Tuesday Evening Lecture Programme on the Contemporary Middle East. Tea and biscuits available from 5:30pm. Admission free. Khalili Lecture Theatre, SOAS. T 020 7898 4490 E vp6@soas.ac.uk W www.soas.ac.uk/lmei/events/

Wednesday 18 January

7:00 pm | The Cosmic Cup in Medieval Persian Art (Lecture) Marianna Shreve Simpson, Historians of Islamic Art Association, USA. Organised by: Islamic Art Circle at SOAS. The Hadassah and Daniel Khalili Memorial Lecture in Islamic Art and Culture. Chaired by Doris Behrens-Abouseif, SOAS. Admission free. Khalili Lecture Theatre, SOAS. T 020 7898 4490 E RosalindHaddon@aol.com W www.soas.ac.uk

Thursday 19 January

7:00 pm | Sinbad’s Cities: ancient trade and modern dwor building in the Persian Gulf (Lecture) Warwick Ball, Archaeologist and traveller. Organised by: The Iran Society. 6:30 pm for 7:00 pm. Admission free for members and guests. The Iran Society, 2 Belgrave Square, London SW1X 8PJ. T 020 7235 5122 E info@iransociety.org W www.iransociety.org

Monday 23 January

6:30 pm | The Military and the Arab Uprisings (Lecture) Yazid Sayigh, Carnegie Middle East Center, Beirut. Organised by: LSE Middle East Centre. Admission free. CLM 4.02, Clement’s House, LSE. T 020 7955 6250 E mec.events@lse.ac.uk W www2.lse.ac.uk/middleEastCentre/home.aspx

7:00 pm | Title TBC (Film) Organised by: Centre for Iranian Studies, SOAS. Part of the Centre’s monthly film screenings. Tickets: £2. Khalili Lecture Theatre, SOAS. T 020 7898 4490 E vp6@soas.ac.uk W www.soas.ac.uk/iranianstudies/

Tuesday 24 January

5:45 pm | Title TBC (Lecture) Organised by: London Middle East Institute, SOAS (LMEI). Part of the LMEI’s Tuesday Evening Lecture Programme on the Contemporary Middle East. Tea and biscuits available from 5:30pm. Admission free. Khalili Lecture Theatre, SOAS. T 020 7898 4490 E vp6@soas.ac.uk W www.soas.ac.uk/lmei/events/

Wednesday 25 January

6:30 pm | Dangers and Demon(izer)s of Democratization in Egypt: Through an Indonesian Glass, Darkly (Lecture) John Sidel, LSE. Organised by: LSE Middle East Centre. Lecture on democratization in Egypt in light of Indonesia’s experience since the fall of president Suharto (Indonesia’s Mubarak) in 1998. Admission free. CLM 7.02, Clement’s House, LSE. T 020 7955 6250 E mec.events@lse.ac.uk W www2.lse.ac.uk/middleEastCentre/home.aspx

Thursday 26 January

6:30 pm | Changing Turkish Foreign Policy in a Changing World (Lecture) Ulaş Çeviköz, Ambassador of Turkey and BIAA Honorary Vice-President. Organised by: British Institute at Ankara (BIAA). Lecture followed by a reception. Admission free. Wolfson Auditorium, British Academy, 10 Carlton House Terrace, London SW1Y 5AH. T 020 7969 5204 E biaa@britac.ac.uk W www.biaa.ac.uk

Monday 30 January

9:30 am | Middle East and North Africa Energy 2012 (Two-Day Conference: Monday 30 – Tuesday 31 January) Organised by: Chatham House. What are the implications of changes within the Arab world for the future of global energy supplies? Various ticket prices. Chatham House, 10 St James’s Square, London SW1Y 4LE. T 020 7957 5700 E conferences@chathamhouse.org.uk W www.chathamhouse.org/ mena2012

Tuesday 31 January


7:45 pm | Jim al-Khalili and Robert Winston (Talk) Organised by: Southbank Centre. Two of science’s most prominent writers unleash the forgotten history of Arab science. Tickets: £10/conc. 50% off (limited availability). Purcell Room, Southbank Centre, Belvedere Road, London SE1 8XX. T 020 7960 4200 W www.southbankcentre.co.uk

EXHIBITIONS

Thursday 1 December

Until 3 December | Passport to Palestine Group exhibition that aims to tackle issues of Palestinian statehood, occupation, the restrictions and difficulties encountered in travelling both into and out of Palestine today. Admission free. La Scatola Gallery, 1 Snowden Street, London EC2A 2DQ (Entrance through corner of Worship Street with Appold Street). E info@lascatolagallery.com W www.lascatolagallery.com

Until 9 December | Ayman Baalbaki: Beirut Again and Again Born in Lebanon in 1975, the year the Lebanese civil war began, Baalbaki’s work records the destruction that civil war and repeated Israeli invasions have inflicted on Lebanon. Admission free (by appointment only). Rose Issa Projects, 269 Kensington High Street, London W8 6NA. T 0207 602 7700 E info@roseeissa.com W http://roseeissa.com

Until 17 December | Weaving the threads of livelihood: the aesthetic and embodied knowledge of Berber weavers An exhibition of the richly coloured, densely embellished and painstakingly crafted carpets from the Berber weavers of the Sirwa, renowned for their wide range of textiles and technical knowledge and artistry. Admission free. Brunei Gallery, SOAS. T 020 7898 4046 E gallery@soas.ac.uk W www.soas.ac.uk/gallery

Until 8 January | Chasing Mirrors: My Portrait, Shape by Shape Installation of new work reflecting on portraiture and concepts of representation and identity. Part of a project that focuses on visual art and culture inspired by connections with the greater Middle East. Admission free. National Portrait Gallery, St Martin’s Place, London WC2H OHE. T 020 7323 8181 E portrait@npg.org.uk W www.npg.org.uk

Thursday 26 January

Until 15 April | Hajj: journey to the heart of Islam Examining the logistics involved, the exhibition compares how pilgrims over the centuries negotiated this undertaking and how it continues to be experienced today. Various ticket prices. BM. T 020 7323 8181 W www.britishmuseum.org
International Iranian Economic Association

Inaugural Conference on Iran’s Economy, 2011

7-8 December 2011
Brunei Gallery Lecture Theatre, SOAS

Enquiries & Bookings:
020 7898 4330; lh2@soas.ac.uk;
www.soas.ac.uk/iranianstudies/events/
The Idea of Iran Vol. 5

EARLY ISLAMIC IRAN

Edited by Edmund Herzig and Sarah Stewart