

**Supplementum**  
**Middle East Studies Association of North America (MESA)**  
**Annual Meeting for Ottoman Studies**

**Üzeyir Serdar Serdaroğlu**  
*PhD Candidate in Ottoman Studies*  
*Centre for Byzantine, Ottoman and Modern Greek Studies*  
*University of Birmingham*

**Introduction**

Middle East Studies Association of North America (MESA) is one of the most important organizations in the world. MESA as a non-profit and non-political private organization was founded in 1996 with fifty founding members. In this context, MESA's goals can be summarized as threefold: to advance learning, to give an opportunity of communication between scholars, and to arrange an annual leading international forum for academicians and researchers around the world.

MESA now has more than 2,700 members. It serves as an umbrella organization for more than sixty institutional members and thirty-nine affiliated organizations. It must be known that Institute of Turkish Studies (ITS), American Association of Teachers of Turkic Languages (AATT) and Turkish Studies Association (TSA) are included in MESA. MESA also gives out Graduate Student Paper prizes to Middle East studies graduate students for outstanding papers on any aspect of post-600 AD Middle Eastern history.

Apart from this, MESA's significant contributions in Middle East Studies undoubtedly include a quarterly journal published by the Cambridge University Press, *International Journal of Middle East Studies* (IJMES), and an electronic journal *The Review of Middle East Studies* (RoMES).<sup>1</sup> IJMES publishes original research on politics, society, economic history, and culture in the Middle East from the seventh century to the present day. There are many papers in Ottoman studies published in

---

<sup>1</sup> <<http://mesana.org/>>.

almost every issue. The journal also welcomes papers related to Spain, south-eastern Europe, and parts of Africa, South Asia, and the former Soviet Union.

### **MESA's Annual Meetings**

The first MESA's meeting was held in 1966. The meeting featured panels and special sessions on a variety of topics related to Middle East studies. It was complemented by meetings of MESA's affiliated groups, an exciting 4-day film festival, a comprehensive book exhibit featuring the latest books and software in the field, and other informal events.<sup>2</sup> It was arranged as an annual meeting and regarded as the most systematically organized meeting in the world. We now know MESA's future annual meetings' venues, dates and some details for the next five years. According to the official website of the Middle East Studies Association of North America, Annual Conferences will be held in Denver, Boston, Washington, DC, San Antonio and New Orleans in the years following 2015.

### **Ottoman and Turkish History at MESA 2014**

Every three years, MESA arranges an annual meeting at USA's capital. Last year the meeting took place in Washington, DC.<sup>3</sup> In this review, it is divided into three main titles. First, *sessions* and *panels* are for discussions in general. A program of 277 sessions, squeezed into 12 panel time slots, began on Saturday, November 22 at 5:30 p.m. and ended on Tuesday, November 25 at 3:30 p.m. Out of these sessions, there were 60 sessions related to the Ottoman Empire and Modern Turkey. Many sessions on the Ottoman studies had interesting topics such as 'Merchants in Ottoman Empire', 'Commerce', 'Transformation of Ottoman Literature', 'The end of the Ottoman Empire', 'Ottoman Smyrna', 'Patronage in Ottoman System', 'Ottoman Military power in the seventeenth century', 'Intellectual exchange between the Ottoman Empire and South Asia', and 'Religion in the late Ottoman Empire'.

Apart from these subjects, there were many papers presented in fields of history, economic history, legal history, politics, international relations, contemporary issues, philosophy, sociology, anthropology, art, and literature. Also there were many

---

<sup>2</sup> <<http://mesana.org/annual-meeting/upcoming.html>>.

<sup>3</sup> <<http://mesana.org/annual-meeting/previous/program.html>>.

Ottomanists present, including Gabor Agoston, Virginia Aksan, Ariel Salzmann, Suraiya Faroqhi, Carter Findley, Juditch Tucker, Linda Darling, Fariba Zarinebaf, Sherry Vatter, Baki Tezcan, Mustafa Aksakal, Elena Syrett Frangakis, and Resat Kasaba. That is why, last year, a great number of participants attended and participated in the MESA annual meeting.

Second, *thematic conversations* and *roundtables* are two other major parts of meetings. The Middle East Studies Association introduced a new category of participation called ‘thematic conversations and roundtables’ in 1998. Thematic conversations are, by MESA rules, to continue over two but no more than three consecutive MESA meetings. For Ottoman studies, most of participants are members of the Turkish Studies Association as well as MESA, and have experimented with a thematic conversation format. Thematic conversation called ‘Ottoman and Turkish Studies: What’s Happening?’ organized by Virginia Aksan was surely efficient in order to see ‘What is new?’ for young researchers in November last year.

Finally, it can be argued that *the special reception* was one of the distinctive features of MESA’s annual meeting. On the first day of the annual meeting, the Association of Ottoman and Turkish Studies organized a reception open to all participants.

## **Conclusion**

The MESA Annual Meeting provides participants with a chance for sharing and getting information as well as access to famous Ottomanists and PhD students focusing in fields of Ottoman Studies and Modern Turkey. Another point worth mentioning is that young scholars can be encouraged by the Ottoman specialists and discussants. Participants’ feedback and comments show that presenting a paper at one of these conferences or meetings has a big influence on personal academic improvement. My participation in MESA has very beneficial effects on my study and view.