

Centering the Archives of the Middle East and North Africa

Rebecca Hankins

The 2022–2023 academic year has been one of significant change for me professionally. My thirty-plus career was transformed from a tenured archivist and endowed professor in the archives at Texas A&M University to a teaching professor with minimal connection to the work I was dedicated to and which has been instrumental in defining my career. Despite this upheaval, I have continued championing marginalized communities' voices, interests, and collecting focus in my teaching, mentoring, publishing, and scholarship. When fellow Editorial Board member Sumayya Ahmed suggested this Special Section on Middle Eastern and North African (MENA) archives for *American Archivist*, I quickly volunteered to help with this valuable work that centers diverse collections and stories often underrepresented in western scholarship.

Writing about my month-long archival fellowship at the American Center for Oriental Research—now the American Center of Research—in Amman, Jordan, in 2012 has been a longtime and still unfulfilled desire. Thus, I am excited to see such places represented in Brad Bauer, Samar Mikati Kaissi, Ryder Kouba, and Stephen Urgola's article, "What's in a Name? Archives and Special Collections at American Research Institutions in the Middle East." The Special Section also features Alexis Braun Marks, Mason Christensen, Amanda Ford, Steven Gentry, Ashley Johnson Bavery, and Matthew Jaber Stiffler's article, "Locating Arab Americans in Greater Detroit: An Overview of MENA Archives in Southeast Michigan." As an alumnus

© Rebecca Hankins.



of Eastern Michigan University, where I regularly interacted with MENA communities, it is particularly gratifying to see these holdings included.

In a study of the MENA region, it is crucial to have the perspective that Amin Alsaden brings in his article “The Counter-Archive: Eluding the Erasures of Iraq’s Successive Wars,” which looks at archival recovery efforts following the devastation Iraq endured after the US invasion. The Kurds and Iranian archives discussed in Mahdi Ganjavi’s “Activating Personal Counter-Archives: The Case of the Amir Hassanpour Fonds” provide a unique and rarely heard perspective on these collections from an archivist who documents his personal history. Similarly, Ryan Zohar’s “Beyond the Frame: Toward a Collection-Level Redescription of the Colbert Held Archive” provides us with another viewpoint from an archivist’s personal papers documenting his work in Saudi Arabia, Abu Dhabi, Oman, and other places in the Gulf oil regions. Zohar’s article also tackles contemporary issues of reparative processing and description. Sakena A. Al-Alawi’s “The Absence of a National Archives and Legislation: The Vacuum of Records and Archives Management in Kuwait” speaks to the problem and impact of not having proper systems in place to archive a country’s history. Finally, Vanessa Paloma Elbaz’s “KHOYA: Jewish Morocco Sound Archive: Sounds, Voices, Memories and Cognitive Rupture” provides an expansive understanding of the Jewish Moroccan archival survival that seeks to ensure a critical MENA story is remembered.

I am incredibly proud to be a part of this *American Archivist* Special Section that advocates for understanding Middle Eastern and North African archival needs and practices. We look forward to hearing the feedback that will encourage continued engagement with our global archival communities.

Rebecca Hankins, C.A.
Wendler Endowed Professor
Texas A&M University