IN MEMORIAM

THE TWELFTH ANNUAL
WADIE JWAIDIEH
MEMORIAL LECTURE

ADVENTURES IN FIELD-BUILDING:
ON THE ORIGINS AND TRAJECTORY
OF MIDDLE EAST STUDIES
IN THE UNITED STATES

ZACHARY LOCKMAN
NEW YORK UNIVERSITY

Thursday, October 24, 2013 at 7:30 PM
President’s Room, University Club
Indiana Memorial Union
In Memoriam:  
Celebrating the Lifelong Contributions of a Legendary NELC Scholar at IU

We are delighted to present Professor Zachary Lockman's insightful lecture from last year titled “Adventures in Field-Building: On the Origins and Trajectory of Middle East Studies in the United States.”

The abstract states: The history of Middle East studies in the United States is usually narrated in terms of a number of broad themes: area studies as a product of Second World War exigencies, the Cold War, modernization theory, Title VI, and so on. There is much truth in this framing; but we still lack a more complex and fine-grained understanding of the emergence and evolution of our field that also takes into account the intellectual, institutional and political contexts that facilitated the rise of area studies as a distinct way of producing and disseminating knowledge. My lecture will share some of the early results of the research I have been conducting on the history of area studies and Middle East studies in this country, in the archives of the Social Science Research Council, the Carnegie Corporation of New York and elsewhere, in the hope of contributing to a fuller and more useful account of how we got to where we are today.

For all of us engaged in Middle East Studies today, such a project of retrieval is most welcome since it promises to throw much-needed light on the origins of our field and its maturation in the current period as an academic discipline. The kind of forensic investigation and analytical acuity plentifully evident in Prof. Lockman's essay would have impressed the scholar we commemorate through this series - Prof. Wadie Jwaideh himself. We hope you will enjoy this essay, as you have enjoyed our previously published essays.

As always, we rely on your support in making the Wadie Jwaideh Memorial Lecture a success every year and in planning ahead for the future. We have benefitted enormously from generous contributions in the past, notably from members of the Jwaideh family, as well as from a number of Dr. Jwaideh’s colleagues and students. Please help us continue this noble tradition for many years to come.

Asma Afsaruddin  
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Adventures in Field-Building:
On the Origins and Trajectory of Middle East Studies in the United States

Zachary Lockman
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The Twelfth Annual Wadie Jwaideh Lecture
Indiana University
Thursday, October 24, 2013
Adventures in Field-Building: On the Origins and Trajectory of Middle East Studies in the United States

I never had the opportunity to meet the distinguished scholar whose memory the Wadie Jwaideh Memorial Lecture was established to commemorate. But I certainly know of his intellectual contributions, particularly his pioneering work on the history of the Kurdish national movement; and as I will relate shortly, I have in fact encountered the late Professor Jwaideh in the course of my current research project. I share here some of the early fruits of that project, on which I have been working for the past several years. I am not yet sure in what direction it will ultimately take me or what form it will assume, so this is very much work-in-progress.

In my book Contending Visions of the Middle East I presented, among other things, a broad overview of the emergence and evolution of Middle East studies in the United States from the end of the Second World War to the near present.1 While that overview included some discussion of how this field developed in terms of institutions and resources, it focused on the intellectual side of things. In seeking to delineate what I called the field’s “politics of knowledge,” I traced how the power which the United States exerted in the Middle East over the past seven decades can be related to the kinds of knowledge that have

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been produced in this country about this region, along with the transformations which the field of Middle East studies underwent in that period.

I continue to stand by the big picture I drew in that book, though I would not claim that it is the last word on the subject. However, I also realize that the account of the history of U.S. Middle East studies that I offered there was based largely on secondary sources and on analyses of selected scholarly texts, which I treated as emblematic of certain approaches and trends in the field over the decades. In the years since that book’s publication I have become increasingly aware of how little we actually know about many dimensions of the history of our own field or of the contexts that gave birth to it and helped shaped it. To help remedy this lacuna I have therefore been delving into archival and other sources relating to what one might call the deep history of area studies in the United States, with a focus on the emergence and development of Middle East studies.

My research thus far has concentrated on the archives of the Social Science Research Council (SSRC), the American Council of Learned Societies (ACLS) and the Carnegie, Rockefeller and Ford foundations. I have more research yet to do, as well as a lot more thinking and writing; but I believe that I have nonetheless made some progress toward reconstructing the origins and development of area studies as a distinct way of producing and disseminating knowledge about the world, embodied in a new set of institutions and practices within American higher education in the period, with special attention to the
elaboration of what might be termed the institutional and resource infrastructure of Middle East studies.

A good part of what I have found fits with the story that I and others have told about the trajectory of area studies in this country, but I have also found things that I had not known about or expected. Like all human endeavors, the field of Middle East studies as we know it today is the product of all sorts of unforeseen contingencies and unanticipated consequences, of early visions and projects that proved to be dead-ends, of interventions by people and institutions located well outside of academia, and of much else besides. Hence the title of my Wadie Jwaideh Memorial Lecture: “Adventures in Field-Building.”

Let me begin at the beginning, or more precisely with what came before what is usually taken as the beginning. The Second World War has often been described as the “midwife” of area studies, and there is considerable truth in this assertion. Yet it is also clear that area studies had prewar antecedents which provided important models for, and experience with, research, training and scholarly interaction along regional lines. During and after the war some of these would be developed further and incorporated into what would come to be known as area studies.

For example, from the late 1920s and through the 1930s key figures in the American Council of Learned Societies, founded in 1919 to foster the humanities in the United States, sought to encourage scholars in the humanities disciplines to produce more, and more practically useful, knowledge about the non-Western world. With funding provided largely
by the Rockefeller Foundation, the ACLS began promoting the development of new scholarly networks and institutions focused on specific world regions, as well as of more effective language-training methods and resources, thereby laying the basis for what would emerge after the Second World War as area studies. So, for example, both Latin American studies and what was then commonly referred to as Far Eastern studies began to coalesce in the course of the 1930s as distinct and increasingly institutionalized fields with growing attention to the modern and contemporary periods, and scholars working on those regions began to create networks, work on common projects, and in general function as if they belonged to a common academic field with a regional, rather than a disciplinary, focus.

Pre-war developments that contributed to the emergence of area studies, including Middle East studies, have not yet received the attention they deserve, though new work is under way. For example, in a recent article Robert Vitalis has explored how both international studies and political science, as they emerged in the United States in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, were profoundly shaped by concerns with the maintenance of white racial supremacy at home and abroad. As he reminds us, the influential journal we know today as Foreign Affairs began its life in 1910 as the Journal of Race Development.² More research is clearly needed on the deep history of our academic disciplines and fields. To recast Ernest Renan’s aphorism about the nation: “the essence of

an academic field is that its practitioners have many things in common, but have also forgotten much together.”

However, despite important prewar developments, it can nonetheless plausibly be argued that it was the entry of the United States into the Second World War at the end of 1941 that created the context within which the emergence of area studies as we know it today became possible. The War Department, the armed forces, the State Department and other government agencies now began to divide the world into a more or less distinct set of regions and “theaters of operations,” and they demanded actionable knowledge that corresponded to this spatial framing. It was this urgent demand, accompanied by the provision of resources on an unprecedented scale, that set the stage for the emergence of area studies as a significant component of postwar American academic life.

We can see this process unfold in several different domains. For example, it became clear soon after the United States entered the war that there was an urgent need for large numbers of personnel trained in the languages, as well as the histories, politics and cultures, of parts of the world which U.S. military forces were likely to operate in, occupy and administer. A few months after Pearl Harbor, with Rockefeller Foundation funding, the ACLS launched a new program that provided intensive training in a broad array of languages – including Arabic, Persian and Turkish – to military and civilian personnel on college and university campuses; this also required development of the new kinds of teaching materials and methods needed for such intensive courses. Soon, however, the
military took over with its own federally-funded program, on a much larger scale. This program, in which many thousands participated, gave colleges and universities extensive (and unprecedented) experience with courses and curricula focused on regions of the world hitherto ignored, and with intensive instruction in languages that had previously not been taught in the United States, or had been taught (often as dead languages) only to a tiny number of students at an even smaller number of universities. When the war wound down, universities were reluctant to give up these regionally-focused programs – or to lose the generous outside funding that had made them possible.

Another wartime entity that exemplified, and reinforced, this new regional approach was the Ethnogeographic Board, established in 1942. At its very first meeting the board explained its mission as follows: “Government agencies, in seeking information upon man’s existing and potential activities in various regions, tend to think mainly in terms of areas, whereas the sources of such information in the scholarly world are classified in terms of disciplines. Therefore representatives of the scholarly world have created the Ethnogeographic Board to serve as a more efficient means of translating the scholarly resources of the several disciplines into the geographical categories used by the governmental agencies.”3 One could hardly ask for a clearer statement of the original core rationale of area studies.

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3 Minutes of the first meeting of the Ethnogeographic Board, August 3, 1942, folder 3939, box 331, subseries 200S, RG 1.1 (FA386), Rockefeller Foundation records, Rockefeller Archive Center (hereafter RAC).
But the most important wartime model for area studies was the Office of Strategic Services, the new intelligence agency created by President Roosevelt in 1942. In 1964, McGeorge Bundy, at the time President Lyndon Johnson’s national security advisor and a key architect of American military intervention in Vietnam, would go so far as to assert that “The first great center of area studies in the United States was not located in any university, but in Washington, during the Second World War, in the Office of Strategic Services.” Bundy was referring specifically to the Research and Analysis branch of the Office of Strategic Services (OSS), headed by Professor William L. Langer of Harvard. Langer and his senior colleagues in the Research and Analysis branch, drawn largely from elite universities, recruited large numbers of other scholars from colleges and universities across the country, including many of their former and current graduate students, who possessed expertise on parts of the world in which American military forces were, or soon would be, operating, and about which U.S. military and civilian policymakers desperately needed accurate information and reliable prognoses.

The Research and Analysis branch was initially organized along quasi-disciplinary lines, but early in 1943 it was reorganized into regional divisions, including one for the Near East. At the time there were very few scholars in the United States specializing in the contemporary Middle East or North Africa, so the OSS was compelled to recruit anyone

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who knew anything about the region, past or present. The Near East section would thus come to be headed by an Assyriologist, E.A. Speiser of the University of Pennsylvania, who had been born in what was then Habsburg-ruled Galicia and later immigrated to the United States. Shortly after the war Speiser would acknowledge that the work which he and his OSS colleagues were called upon to do “had only a remote relation to the work for which they had been trained…. It was not at all unusual for an Egyptologist to serve as an analyst on Arab affairs or for a cuneiformist to investigate the manifold problems of Afghanistan.”

Many of the scholars who worked in the OSS during the war would go on to play leading roles in the development of Middle East studies after the war. For example, in 1951 the Social Science Research Council, established in 1924 to promote social science research, established a Committee on the Near and Middle East to foster research and training on this region, just as it had done, or would soon do, for other world regions. Fully half of the members of the new committee had served in the OSS, and several others had seen service in other wartime government agencies. The same was true for other nascent area studies fields, often to an even greater degree; for example, most of the scholars who would create Russian and Soviet studies in the postwar United States and who would dominate that field

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for a generation, especially at the major new centers established with foundation funding at Columbia and Harvard, had worked together in the OSS during the war.

So the idea of organizing research and training around a specific geographic region gained intellectual legitimacy, social weight and momentum through its adoption and deployment by a range of government and academic entities during the war. In 1942 the SSRC already deemed it probable that postwar academic work would be at least partially organized on a regional basis, rather than along conventional disciplinary lines, and its leaders became increasingly convinced that the wartime programs, created hurriedly to meet urgent immediate needs, would have long-term intellectual and institutional consequences for American academia. In January 1943 the SSRC established a new Committee on World Regions to consider the implications of wartime developments for the social sciences and to begin formulating a long-term approach to the development of what now began to be explicitly referred to as “regional studies,” “areal studies” or “area studies.”

The central figure on this committee was Robert B. Hall, a geographer and Japan specialist based at the University of Michigan and a leader of his university’s prewar Program in Oriental Civilizations. In 1943 Hall’s committee oversaw the drafting and circulation of the first substantive intellectual rationale for area studies, titled *World Regions in the Social Sciences*. This mimeographed report argued that area studies could, at long last, help transcend disciplinary divisions and open the way to the production of truly
interdisciplinary knowledge, and it would also compel American and European social scientists to determine if their theories and findings were applicable to all cultures, or only to their own. As Hall himself would put it somewhat later: “We have studied men isolated in the milieu of the North Atlantic, thinking that we have been studying man…. We need the data of other areas to check our assumptions.”

But it is unlikely that this new approach to producing and disseminating knowledge would have gotten very far had it not been warmly embraced, vigorously promoted and massively funded by the Rockefeller Foundation and the Carnegie Corporation of New York, two of the country’s largest foundations, joined in the early 1950s by the even wealthier Ford Foundation. Until 1958, the federal government was unwilling to fund higher education, so only the large foundations had the means to turn regionally-focused knowledge production and training from a wartime exigency into a permanent feature of postwar academic life. Research in the archives of these foundations makes it clear that they played an absolutely critical role in launching and shaping area studies, and more broadly in influencing the contours of postwar American intellectual and academic life. It is unlikely that those of us who regard ourselves as in some sense engaged in a common endeavor called Middle East studies would have been able to do so had these foundations not embraced the concept of area studies some seventy years ago.

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The Carnegie and Rockefeller foundations had, of course, already been very deeply involved in American academic life well before the Second World War. Among other things they were the main funders of both the ACLS and the SSRC, and the leaders of these sister organizations were in close and regular contact with foundation officials and highly sensitive to their desires and priorities, because they controlled access to very substantial resources. In the course of my research I have, for example, come across numerous records of conversations between foundation and SSRC officials about funding priorities and decisions held over lunch at the Century Club on West 43rd Street in Manhattan, just off Fifth Avenue, a private club where the power elite convened out of earshot (and from which women were barred from membership until 1989).

The officers of the Carnegie and Rockefeller foundations were, by and large, liberal internationalists in the Wilsonian vein. They felt that President Wilson’s failure in 1919-1920 to convince the Senate to ratify the Treaty of Versailles and join the League of Nations, and more broadly to have the United States irrevocably establish itself as a global power, had been a historic setback, one which they were determined to avoid repeating. After Pearl Harbor it was clear to them that when the current war ended the United States would without question be a global superpower, and they were determined that the country would not again shirk what they regarded as its proper role in shaping – if not dominating – the postwar world order.
This meant that Americans in general would need to become much better informed about the rest of the world, and so the foundations continued to fund organizations like the Council on Foreign Relations and the Institute of Pacific Relations. But foundation officials also became convinced that the wartime programs for training Americans in foreign languages, histories and cultures, and for producing regionally-focused knowledge, which the government had abruptly terminated once the fighting stopped (and often even earlier), needed to be made an integral and permanent component of the mission of institutions of higher education in the United States. And only the foundations had the funds to accomplish this. A Rockefeller Foundation officer put it this way in 1948: “The objectives [of area studies] would seem to be derived from the fact that this country has been propelled into a position where we have power all over the world and the question is whether we will exert it with intellectual responsibility, without which there is no basis for moral responsibility. It took Great Britain 500 years to develop knowledge of world areas and we are in danger of continuing to be incredibly naive.”

To address what they regarded as a woeful shortage of people who knew much about the many parts of the world in which the United States now exercised power and influence, or would soon do so, Rockefeller and Carnegie began to elaborate a broad vision for the development of area studies. This vision included the establishment of at least one

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7 John Willits, Council minutes, April 3-4, 1948, folder 2100, box 358, series 9, RG 1, Accession 1, Social Science Research Council records (hereafter SSRC), RAC.
or two strong centers for graduate training and scholarly research for each regional field at leading universities. John Gardner, a member of the Carnegie Corporation’s staff who would later become the foundation’s president and in the 1960s would serve as President Lyndon Johnson’s Secretary of Health, Education and Welfare, spent the spring of 1947 travelling across the country visiting university campuses in order to help Carnegie decide where to award grants for the establishment of new area studies centers. That same year Carnegie also launched the first national fellowship program for postdoctoral research in area studies, administered by the SSRC.

As this process unfolded, there were obvious priorities. One was Russian studies. Long before the war ended, Rockefeller Foundation officials had begun discussing the creation of a new institute for the study of Russia with the head of the OSS Soviet division, Professor Geroid Robinson of Columbia. As US-Soviet tensions began rising in 1946-1947, escalating into what came to be called the Cold War, this became an urgent concern; and foundation officials consulted closely with government officials, including those in intelligence circles, about funding priorities for area studies. In 1946 Rockefeller provided a grant worth more than $3 million in today’s dollars to establish Columbia’s Russian Institute, with Robinson as its first director. Carnegie quickly jumped on the bandwagon
and soon thereafter awarded Harvard a very large grant to establish its own Russian Research Center.8

As the president of the SSRC explained in 1947, a better understanding of the Soviet Union and other world regions was essential for “a cool and calculated execution of the Truman Doctrine or its equivalent.” Moreover, given unrest and turmoil around the world, the United States and the Soviet Union were now clearly rivals for global influence; as he put it, “The struggle, in other words, is ... a competition to win adherents friendly to the United States and more disposed to accept our values than to follow the course of Russian leadership.... To the extent that we are able to exert our influence upon these areas and win their adherence through our understanding of their problems and, in turn, through their understanding of our objectives, we shall be able to win out in our competition with the Soviets.”9

Given the times, it is not surprising that Russian and Soviet studies received the largest grants, but in the late 1940s, new centers were also established at universities across the country for Japanese, Chinese and Latin American studies – and for the Middle East as well. Before the war there were very few scholars in the United States who studied or taught about the modern and contemporary Middle East, and after the war this region at first

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9 Quoted in Matthew Farish, The Contours of America’s Cold War (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010), 118.
seemed to be a lower priority than Russia or China; but it was not entirely ignored. As the president of the Carnegie Corporation put it in 1947, “We have been disturbed by the fact that, although distinguished work has been done in this country on the ancient Near East, attention to the modern Near East has been entirely inadequate. We have been concerned, too, with the fact that the social sciences haven been almost entirely inactive with respect to this area.”

Surveying the scene at that time, both Carnegie and Rockefeller concluded that Princeton was the only university in the country that had any prospect of creating an interdisciplinary area studies program focusing on the modern and contemporary Middle East. Its Department of Oriental Languages and Literatures, chaired since 1944 by Philip K. Hitti, by that time had faculty equipped to offer courses on the region since the rise of Islam as well as instruction in Arabic, Persian and Turkish. This convinced the two foundations to provide the generous grants which underwrote the creation in 1947 of Princeton’s Program in Near Eastern Studies. As Princeton’s grateful president put it, this program would “for the first time in America, provide the college undergraduate with an opportunity to choose the Near East as a field of concentration … and enable the graduate

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student to study for an M.A. degree in this area, for the purpose of utilizing his training as business man, teacher, missionary or governmental official.”

But Princeton did not quite live up to the foundations’ expectations, and they soon began looking around for other universities that seemed more likely to seriously promote interdisciplinary research and teaching on the modern and contemporary Middle East. Thus in the early 1950s the new Middle Eastern studies program at the University of Michigan, and a little later what became the Middle East Institute at Columbia, also began to receive substantial foundation support, with Harvard following shortly thereafter.

But even as Rockefeller and Carnegie began to make substantial grants to universities to create and support area studies centers, the question arose of what a proper area studies program should look like. What should be the substantive content of this new mode of producing and organizing knowledge? How should area studies relate to the academic disciplines, and how could interdisciplinary knowledge of a region be produced? How should those who would practice the area studies be trained? These were questions with which many of the early leaders of area studies struggled.

At the center of the early effort to develop what one might call a coherent theory and practice of area studies was Robert B. Hall, the University of Michigan geographer I mentioned earlier. Like many of his colleagues, Hall had served in the OSS during the war;

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11 Harold W. Dodds to Devereux C. Josephs, May 22, 1947, folder 15, box 299, Series III.A.7, CCNY.
by 1946 he had become chair of the Social Science Research Council’s new Committee on World Area Research, whose mission it was to foster the development of area studies and promote social science research on world regions. Hall saw the development of area studies as critical to America’s future. As he put it in 1947: “Our old methods of education and direction of research proved unequal either to maintaining the peace or most effectively winning the wars.... There is a demand for both an interdisciplinary and intercultural approach to many of the problems which we have so far failed to answer. Area study is at least one approach to the partial solution of these problems. For the present it would seem to be the most direct approach and as promising as any other.”

But Hall also insisted that area studies was not really a new phenomenon in American academia but actually had a long and distinguished pedigree. In addition to such prewar forerunners as his own Program in Oriental Civilizations at the University of Michigan, Hall argued that both American studies and classical studies should be seen as area studies fields. Indeed, he asserted, “much of the basic concept of area study is to be found in the very beginnings of American higher education and scholarly research. The classical programs [that is, Greek and Latin studies] were area studies.... The original aim was to give as complete an understanding of the Greek and Roman worlds as was possible.” And that, Hall argued, should be the goal of area studies today: to achieve a total

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13 Ibid., 12.
and integrated interdisciplinary knowledge of a particular region, with the social sciences at the core of each area studies field to ensure its coherence and unity. This could, Hall hoped, be realized through team-based interdisciplinary field research, similar to the wartime OSS model which he and many of his colleagues had experienced first-hand.

With this vision in mind, Hall and his colleagues looked around for research projects that in their view exemplified what area studies should be and that practitioners of area studies might emulate. One such project which they saw as a model in the late 1940s was the Puerto Rico Social Anthropology Project, launched in 1947 under the direction of Julian Steward. Steward is best remembered today for his concept of “cultural ecology”; at the time he was the head of Columbia University’s Department of Anthropology. As one account puts it, “In contrast to previous anthropological studies that investigated communities as isolated units, the Puerto Rico Project not only assessed the impact of industrialization among rural communities, it produced an analysis of the relationship between those communities and the Island through oral history, labor studies, and comparative surveys of sociocultural patterns.”

The actual field research for this project was carried out by several of Steward’s graduate students, including Sidney Mintz and Eric Wolf, who quickly zeroed in on issues of class power and U.S. control of Puerto Rico. Mintz and Wolf, who took Marxism seriously as a mode of social analysis, would eventually become leading figures in American anthropology. Steward, on the other hand, seems a questionable choice for leadership of such a project. As his biographer put it:

He had collected census material, but his method [in his previous research] depended on plumbing the memories of one or two elderly informants and had no relevance for his students.... In Puerto Rico, Steward thus found himself in the peculiar position of advising a community study project without ever having taken direct part in one himself.... Moreover, he still knew rather little about Puerto Rico.... And he did not speak Spanish or read it with great ease, which limited his access to published material and his contact with any Puerto Ricans who did not speak English.15

Be that as it may, Hall and his colleagues saw the Puerto Rico project as a prime model for area studies research, and for a time they looked to Steward to develop a coherent theory of, and methodology for, area studies. But they also favorably cited other current research

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projects, for example one run by a team of anthropologists in a valley in northern Peru that sought to study the development of the local culture from ancient times down to the present.

There were efforts early on to put something like Hall’s vision of area studies into practice. One such effort involved scholars of the Middle East, and it merits some discussion if we are to understand the fate of this vision of formulating a coherent interdisciplinary theory and method for area studies. The central figure in launching Middle East studies at the University of Michigan was George G. Cameron, who did his graduate work on ancient Iran, with a focus on epigraphy and philology, at the University of Chicago’s Oriental Institute and then taught there for many years. However, in 1948 Cameron moved to Michigan, where he became the first chair of that university’s new Department of Near Eastern Studies. There he initiated a model of graduate education that required students to meet all the requirements of their disciplinary department, with their training in Near Eastern studies regarded as supplementary. This was quite different from Princeton’s model, where graduate students generally did most or all of their training in the Department of Oriental Languages and Literatures rather than in a disciplinary department. Cameron soon began to receive substantial funding from the foundations, which saw his approach to graduate education as a promising model for area studies.

But Carnegie and Rockefeller also very much liked, and funded, something else George Cameron did in this period. In 1951 Cameron planned and led what he
characterized as an interdisciplinary research expedition to northern Iraq. Cameron’s main goal was to study two steles which had not been looked at by scholars since their discovery in 1898. But to potential funders he offered a much broader and more present-oriented argument for the critical importance of his expedition’s target region. Cameron put it this way:

Historically, the area was the center of early Medes and Persians, and toward it, four years ago, Soviet armies moved in a great show of force. Since it is here that the civilizations of the Turks, Arabs, and Persians are impinging on each other, with the Caucasus just on the horizon, the area presents a superb case study for the modern sociologist, political scientist, and anthropologist.... Thus, through the teamwork of members of its staff, it is now within the power of the University to make a contribution to science which will not only bring it considerable fame but also advance our knowledge and improve the relations of our own government vis-à-vis the inhabitants and government of the peoples of the Near East.\(^\text{16}\)

Cameron received university and foundation funding for his expedition to Iraq, on which he took along a geographer, an anthropologist, a political scientist, an archeologist, a

\(^{16}\) George G. Cameron, “The University of Michigan Field Project in the Near East, 1951,” draft submitted September 1950, and Gardner to Cameron, November 16, 1950, folder 7, box 221, Series III.A.5, CCNY.
zoologist and several graduate students, including Ernest Mcarus, who would become one of this country’s leaders in Arabic-language pedagogy. The group spent the spring and summer of 1951 in Baghdad and in Rawanduz, in Iraqi Kurdistan, with an excursion across the border into Iran.

A Carnegie staffer would characterize this expedition as “an extraordinary experiment in interdisciplinary cooperation in a common endeavor.” This is clearly an exaggeration, if not a distortion, of what actually happened. Cameron apparently got to copy his inscriptions, Mcarus was able to complete his dissertation research on Kurdish grammar, and the other expedition members also presumably benefited from their time in Iraq. But as far as one can tell, there was nothing really interdisciplinary about the project: each participant pursued his own separate research project with little apparent intellectual interaction, much less interdisciplinary cross-fertilization.

Nonetheless, this expedition made Cameron a star at the Social Science Research Council, and after returning from Iraq he became the first chair of its newly constituted Committee on the Near and Middle East, whose mission it was to lead the development of Middle East studies and foster social-science research on the region. But Robert Hall’s prescription for area studies, seemingly exemplified by Cameron’s expedition, proved a dead-end. Hall himself would oversee the establishment of a field research station at

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17 “CPH’s Visit to the Department of Near Eastern Studies (University of Michigan),” November 15, 1951, folder 7, box 221, Series III.A.5, CCNY.
Okayama, Japan, in the early 1950s, designed to foster the kind of total, integrated, interdisciplinary knowledge of a specific place that he saw as the hallmark of area studies research; but it folded in 1955 and does not seem to have yielded the results he had hoped for.

In the 1950s and 1960s social scientists in many area studies fields were of course powerfully influenced by modernization theory, and in Middle East studies concepts and methods derived from an older Orientalist tradition persisted for decades; but these approaches did not embody or require a theory of area studies as such, or a methodology specific to it. In fact, despite the efforts and continuing hopes of Hall and others, no coherent, interdisciplinary theory or methodology of area studies ever emerged. As things turned out, what those engaged in a particular area studies field had in common was not a shared paradigm or set of methods but simply the fact that they all related, in one way or another, to more or less the same region, though they did not all understand, define or study it the same way. There was in a sense a common object for the field, the specific geographic region; but beyond that, each area studies field ended up being the sum of the many different things that its practitioners did, each from their own disciplinary (or interdisciplinary) standpoint and in their own way.

We can perhaps get a better sense of how this unfolded by looking at the trajectory of the SSRC Committee on the Near and Middle East, which as I mentioned was established

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in 1951. Like the SSRC or joint SSRC-ACLS committees for other area studies fields, this committee’s mission was to foster research and training in U.S. Middle East studies and to provide intellectual leadership for the field by formulating and implementing a research agenda for it. From the start, however, the committee’s members could not agree on how to proceed. Some favored focused team research projects of the kind Robert Hall advocated, while others harkened back to the glory days of the OSS: they argued that the goal of the committee should be, as the minutes of one early meeting put it, to “develop an over-all program which would be something like that attained by the OSS during World War II, in which a group of able and informed people from the fields of sociology, psychology, law, history, etc., who were possessed of expert knowledge about individual countries of the Near East, could pool their judgments in such a way as to represent and reflect the region as a whole.”

In the end neither of these alternative visions was realized. In its original composition the committee struggled to formulate a coherent research program that might get funded by one of the foundations, since without such funding no such program could be implemented. It managed to organize only one conference, in 1952, titled “The Near East – Social Dynamics and the Cultural Setting,” before lapsing into paralysis, and the

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19 CNME minutes, February 7, 1951, folder 1449, box 241, subseries 20, series 1, RG 1, Accession 1, SSRC, RAC.
edited volume that came out of that conference seems to have had very little impact on this young field.20

In 1955 the SSRC finally reconstituted what had obviously been for some years a moribund committee. It now acquired a vigorous new chair – the Persianist T. Cuyler Young of Princeton – and a powerhouse membership, including Sir Hamilton Gibb, newly arrived at Harvard from Oxford; Wilfred Cantwell Smith of McGill; J.C. Hurewitz of Columbia; and Majid Khadduri of the School of Advanced International Studies. In the years that followed this committee, which from 1959 onward was jointly sponsored by the SSRC and the ACLS, focused on three distinct missions. It awarded a number of postdoctoral research fellowships each year, funded by the Ford Foundation; it helped develop what I will term the infrastructure of Middle East studies in the United States; and it sought to formulate and implement a research agenda for the field.

The committee was, I would argue, much more successful at the first two of these missions than at the third, to which I will return shortly. The postdoctoral fellowship program that the joint committee oversaw was modest but important, and not a few of the younger scholars who would rise to prominence in the 1960s and 1970s benefited from it. In the 1970s the joint committee began awarding doctoral dissertation research fellowships as well, also funded by Ford, which enabled a good many promising graduate students to

do their field research. Meanwhile, the committee’s role in developing the field’s infrastructure took up much of its energy. From the mid-1950s into the mid-1960s, in the absence of a national membership organization for scholars in this field, the committee took on critical field-building tasks that no single Middle East studies department or center could undertake on its own.

For example, it played a key role in launching the inter-university consortium that, again with Ford Foundation funding, began to offer intensive training in Arabic, Persian and Turkish each summer; it supported the development of new teaching methods and materials for Middle Eastern languages; it subsidized the translation into English of Hans Wehr’s dictionary of modern Arabic, originally published in German in 1952; it helped finalize the Library of Congress transliteration system for Arabic; it encouraged the compilation and publication of bibliographies of work in Middle Eastern languages; it funded the first handbook of anthropological research on the Middle East; and it helped launch CASA, the Center for Arabic Study Abroad based in Cairo. Last but not least, in 1966 the joint SSRC-ACLS Committee on the Near and Middle East played a central role in establishing the Middle East Studies Association (MESA). It was no coincidence that the Princeton sociologist Morroe Berger, at the time chair of this committee, became MESA’s first president.21 All told, I think that it is accurate to assert that in terms of infrastructure

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21 Among the fifty-five people who participated in the December 1966 meeting at which MESA was formally established, designated its “founding fellows,” was Professor Wadie Jwaideh of Indiana University.
this committee played a critical role in getting U.S. Middle East studies as a nationwide academic field up and running.

At the same time, it was called upon to play that role, and could do so successfully, because this was a period of rapid expansion for Middle East studies and for area studies in general. And here again we must follow the money, a quest which takes us directly to the overflowing coffers of the Ford Foundation. Ford entered the American philanthropic scene with a bang in the early 1950s, because its endowment far exceeded those of Carnegie and Rockefeller. It soon began spending its money on a growing array of programs, including international and area studies; in fact, according to one estimate, between 1954 and the late 1960s, Ford made grants totaling around a quarter of a billion dollars to American universities to support centers, programs and faculty positions in these fields.\(^{22}\) Carnegie and Rockefeller also made smaller but nonetheless substantial grants to universities for area studies in this period. And of course, 1958 witnessed the passage of the National Defense Education Act, which for the first time provided large-scale federal funding for higher education, including fellowships for students studying languages deemed critical to national security but also funds to support the activities of a growing number of area studies centers. Robert A. McCaughey has aptly characterized the period

from the mid-1950s to the mid-1960s as “bonanza years” for area and international
studies.\footnote{Ibid.}

This unprecedented influx of foundation and federal funds led to rapid growth in
the number of centers, departments and programs for Middle East studies as well as a
dramatic expansion in the number of faculty and students, both graduate and
undergraduate, in this field. By the mid-1960s it had attained the critical mass necessary to
sustain a membership organization like MESA, as well as active departments and centers
at universities across the country. Both foundation and federal support for area studies
would stop growing in the later 1960s, and thereafter funding levels would gradually begin
to decline; but by then, despite the difficulties caused by retrenchment, this field, and most
of the other area studies fields, had become well-established components of American
higher education, on a scale beyond anything the founders of area studies two decades
erlier could have imagined.

From this perspective one might interpret the trajectory of area studies in general,
and of Middle East studies in particular, as a success story. Yet my research suggests that
there was a widespread feeling of anxiety, and a sense of inferiority and even failure, among
those who regarded themselves as the field’s leaders in the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s. I offer
as evidence the following quotes, taken largely from the archival sources with which I have
been working.

\footnote{Ibid.}
Here, for example, is George Cameron, chair of the SSRC Committee on the Near and Middle East, in a memorandum to his fellow committee members in September 1953, just two years after the committee was established: “Have we any more reason for existence? Have we as a group shot our bolt, contributed all we can to the development of Near Eastern research in America, and are content and remain content to carry on through our own individual work, teaching, and contacts? If so, let’s disband, or have the SSRC disband us. If not, where do we go now? Frankly, I have a guilt complex. I am unhappy with how little we have accomplished....”

Here is Cameron again, one year later: “...frankly, I see no reason for our existence unless we, as a group, endeavor somehow and immediately to inventory that basic research which must be done, and somehow run the risk of determining priorities.”

I jump ahead to May 1962 and a quote from the minutes of what was now the joint SSRC-ACLS Committee on the Near and Middle East: “One member summed up his impression of the discussion saying that while the joint committee had accomplished a good deal in the past in the services it had performed and projects it had undertaken, it appeared to him that the joint committee had no very clear idea of what it might do in the future other than administer the grants program.”

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24 George Cameron to CNME, September 25, 1953, folder 5314, box 443, series 1, subseries 75, RG 1, Accession 2, SSRC, RAC.
25 George Cameron to Bryce Wood, October 28, 1954, folder 5314, box 443, series 1, subseries 75, RG 1 Accession 2, SSRC, RAC.
26 JCNME minutes, May 12, 1962, folder 1454, box 241, subseries 20, series 1, RG 1 Accession 1, SSRC, RAC.
A year and a half later the committee’s chair thanks the SSRC for relieving him of his position and declares: “Last year I felt it difficult to keep the discussions on a realistic track and did not myself have the imagination sufficient to combine realism with vision.”

February 1968: a committee member – a leading political scientist of the Middle East – declares: “I am particularly struck by the dearth of new talent coming into the field, while very gifted graduate students have been entering the various disciplines of African studies in large numbers in recent years… the Ford Foundation would like the SSRC to exert some positive leadership, rather than just passively distributing funds to individuals who come forward.”

February 1970: a committee member writes that the working papers presented to the committee to help it formulate a research agenda were promising, “but it certainly seemed from the Monday discussion that they are destined to be placed in the same dead file with several other tangible suggestions put forward in the past.” Another member declares that same month: “The indirection of the meeting symbolized to me the present lack of direction and leadership in the field, and represented a mute plea for persistence in both planning and action.”

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27 John Wilson to Herring, September 16, 1963, folder 5322, box 444, subseries 75, series 1, RG 1, Accession 2, SSRC, RAC.
28 Malcolm Kerr memo to JCNME, February 19, 1968, folder 5325, box 444, subseries 75, series 1, RG1, Accession 2, SSRC, RAC.
A few months later, a committee member tells his colleagues: “It is time the committee stopped berating itself for its failures. While it may be the case that the Middle East field as a whole has shown less intellectual vitality than is true for other area fields, I believe there are a variety of objective reasons to explain these shortcomings.... we are in that converse dilemma where self-censure and self-pity paralyzes resolve, devalues all undertakings as insufficient or irrelevant, and contributes to a self-perpetuating fantasy of incompetence. There is certainly just cause for concern with our field. Let us, finally, move from concern to productive action.”

May 1980: at a small conference convened to discuss the “state of the field” in U.S. Middle East studies, the committee chair states: “In summary, the role of the joint committee in vitalizing the field was not clear.” A SSRC staffer notes privately: “dilemma – ineffectiveness of 20 years of work from an area studies approach in producing quality research.”

Finally, I offer a quote from what at the time was generally regarded as the most comprehensive and authoritative overview of Middle East and Islamic studies in the United States, an edited volume published in 1976 as The Study of the Middle East: Research and Scholarship in the Humanities and Social Sciences. In his introduction Leonard Binder, the

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30 Marvin Zonis to JCNME, November 20, 1970, folder 5327, box 445, subseries 75, series 1, RG1, Accession 2, SSRC, RAC.
31 Notes on the May 1980 “state of the field” conference, folder 5393, box 451, subseries 75, series 1, RG1, Accession 2, SSRC, RAC.
volume’s editor and one of the leading American political scientists then working on the Middle East, declared:

The fact is that Middle Eastern studies are beset by subjective projections, displacements of affect, ideological distortion, romantic mystification, and religious bias, as well as by a great deal of incompetent scholarship. To my mind the greatest problem is that of incompetent scholarship, but incompetence can often be disguised or even defended as the application of a subjective, nonquantitative, phenomenological, or anti-positivist approach…. The area specialist, basing his arguments on his own long residence in the area or on his knowledge of the languages of the area asserts an arbitrary authority. This authority can be countered by the equally arbitrary authority of another specialist who has as much experience.\(^{32}\)

What are we to make of this persistent anxiety about Middle East studies as a field, this sense of pessimism and inadequacy? I should note that the archival evidence of such sentiments that I found going back to the 1950s resonated with my own personal experience decades later. In the early 1990s, a few years before the SSRC abolished all its regional committees in the name of globalization, I served on this same SSRC-ACLS joint

\(^{32}\) Leonard Binder (ed.), *The Study of the Middle East: Research and Scholarship in the Humanities and Social Sciences* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1976), 16.
committee on the Near and Middle East. I remember quite vividly several agonizing meetings at which my senior colleagues on the committee struggled unsuccessfully to come up with a cutting-edge research agenda for the field, which is what they felt that they had been mandated to do.

Formulating such an agenda was that third dimension of the joint committee’s mission which I mentioned earlier. Beyond handing out fellowships to promising scholars and students, and contributing to the field’s infrastructural development, the leading scholars who served on this committee from the 1950s onward were under pressure to determine what the cutting-edge of the field was and push it forward. But by and large they were not successful at this task, generating the anxiety and sense of failure I have noted here, along with a persistent sense that Middle East studies was intellectually backward, not up to speed with the other area studies fields or the disciplines.

As I have discussed elsewhere, some of this sense of intellectual inferiority and isolation is attributable to the continuing influence of elements of the Orientalist tradition, compounded by the failure of modernization theory to yield the scholarly bounty that it had once seemed to promise.33 Here I would add that, beyond the question of faulty intellectual paradigms, the imperative to develop Middle East studies research from the top down, or the center out, was in fact mission impossible; it was like attempting to herd cats. As we know, scholars are unlikely to embrace someone else’s research agenda unless they

33 See Lockman, Contending Visions, ch. 5.
see it as relevant to their own interests and work, and they usually do not like being told what the cutting-edge of their field is unless it happens to accord with their own scholarship. In intellectual terms, scholarly fields are rarely built by committees; they tend to grow in much more complicated ways, often haphazardly and unevenly, even if at times workshops and conferences can help scholars identify common issues and potentially useful approaches, and stimulate further work. The development of Middle East studies has been no different in this respect from other fields, or the disciplines for that matter.

In the same introduction from which I quoted earlier, Leonard Binder argued that one of the roots of the field’s problems was that “the paradigms of area studies, and of Middle East studies in particular, have not yet been fixed.”

In using the term “paradigm” Binder was referencing the enormously influential work of the historian of science Thomas Kuhn. Binder seems to have expected that in the not too distant future scholars would at long last successfully forge a productive and generally accepted paradigm for area studies in general, and Middle East studies in particular, and thereby finally put them on what he thought would be a proper scientific basis. In other words, they would produce something like the theory and method of area studies that Robert Hall had envisioned some three decades earlier.

Yet as I suggested earlier, no such paradigm unique to Middle East studies, and no grand paradigm for area studies as a whole, ever actually emerged. It remained in the 1970s

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and 1980s where it had been for the previous two or three decades: just out of sight over the horizon, a goal that was pursued but never attained. What in fact ensued was not the appearance of such a paradigm; instead, from the 1980s onward, increasing numbers of scholars in Middle East studies, as in other area studies fields, found new intellectual terrain on which to forge new common languages, and new relationships, with scholars and trends in other fields and in the disciplines, thereby helping them overcome their sense of intellectual isolation and, in the longer run, transform their field.

The disabling critiques to which both modernization theory and Orientalism had been subjected since the 1960s certainly helped enable this transformation. Another key factor was the emergence from the 1970s onward of women’s studies and gender studies, which had an enormous impact across the humanities. Overlapping and interacting with this was the so-called cultural or linguistic “turn” of the 1980s, which powerfully affected many humanities disciplines and fields, and to an extent the social sciences as well.35 As Timothy Mitchell has noted, a central element of this turn was a questioning of the coherence and distinctiveness of what had conventionally been accepted as the objects (and therefore the conceptual and methodological underpinnings) of a wide range of disciplines and fields. So, for example, historians could no longer take the “social” in social history for granted; they now had to grapple with how the concepts of “society” and “the social”

35 For a discussion of the critiques of modernization theory and Orientalism, and of subsequent developments, see Lockman, Contending Visions, chs. 5-6.
themselves came into being and had been deployed to produce certain narratives; anthropologists began to unpack the concept of “culture” that had been so central to their discipline; feminists and others challenged and redefined conventional notions of the “political”; and so forth.\textsuperscript{36}

These and other developments, along with the utilization of new methods and new sources, helped Middle East studies become a “normal” academic field, increasingly free of the sense of separateness and backwardness that had once been so widespread. Over the past several decades a great deal of theoretically sophisticated and empirically rich scholarship has been produced in this field, much of which has been in active dialogue with work done in other fields and disciplines. Along the way, however, the vision of Middle East studies (or area studies more broadly) as having some unique or distinctive intellectual paradigm or specificity has had to be abandoned. Instead, as I suggested earlier, there has been at least de facto recognition that what gives this field its coherence is the fact that those engaged in it, while doing a great many different things in intellectual terms, all relate to more or less the same region of the world and are involved with a common set of institutions and networks, encompassing MESA, certain academic journals and fellowship programs, the university-based Middle East departments and centers, and so on. In other

words, beyond its geographic focus (which has itself been subjected to productive critical scrutiny) the field has an essentially institutional (and perhaps social) rather than an intellectual basis. This development was probably inevitable, and I think that it is also a good thing – but it is important to recognize that it is not what was initially envisioned by many of the founders of area studies and of Middle East studies, or by their immediate successors.

I have touched here on only a few aspects of the intellectual and institutional history of Middle East studies; there is obviously much more to be said, and much more research to be done. Among other things, it is obvious that much of the crucial development of this field happened not at the SSRC or at the foundations, but at colleges and universities across the country, where in each case a small number of highly-motivated and energetic scholars and teachers – people like Wadie Jwaideh at Indiana – labored mightily to convince colleagues and administrators to support the creation of Middle East departments, centers and programs, secured Title VI and other funding for them, battled departments to allocate faculty lines, struggled to get languages taught, trained and mentored students, and so on.

Reconstructing those histories, which would complement the perspective on which I have focused here, will for the most part have to be done locally, in university archives and by means of oral interviews. That work has barely begun, and so in this respect too we clearly still have a lot to learn about the history of our field and about the broader contexts that shaped that history. I would like to think that a better understanding of that history
and those contexts could help us to grasp more fully the tasks and challenges that we as scholars and teachers face today, and perhaps even those we (and our successors) are likely to encounter down the road.

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Professor Wadie Elias Jwaideh had a long and distinguished career both within and outside of Indiana University. He received the degree of Licentiate in Law from the University of Baghdad in 1942. In 1960, he received his PhD from the Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Affairs at Syracuse University. During this time, he also held a position as lecturer in Arabic at Johns Hopkins University.

His dissertation, titled *A History of the Kurdish Nationalist Movement*, is the most comprehensive study ever made of the Kurdish question. This work established him as one of the world’s leading experts on the Kurds. It was published posthumously by Syracuse University Press in 2006, as *The Kurdish Nationalist Movement: Its Origins and Development*.

Dr. Jwaideh joined the faculty of Indiana University in 1960 and became the founder and chairman of the Department of Near Eastern Languages and Literature and Professor of History until his retirement.

In 1972, Professor Jwaideh was given the Lieber Memorial Award for Distinguished Teaching. A number of his colleagues and former students contributed articles for a Festschrift in his honor. Dr. Robert Olsen edited this book, titled *Islamic and Middle Eastern Society* (Amana Books, 1987).

After his retirement from IU in 1985, Dr. Jwaideh accepted an appointment as Adjunct Professor of History at the University of California at San Diego, where he taught until 1990.

Zachary Lockman is Professor of Middle Eastern & Islamic Studies and of History at New York University. His research and teaching focus on the socio-economic, cultural, and political history of the modern Middle East, particularly the Mashriq. He is the author and/or editor of five books, including the most recent *Contending Visions of the Middle East: The History and Politics of Orientalism*, originally published by Cambridge University Press in 2004. A revised second edition was released in 2009, an Arabic edition in 2007, a Turkish edition in 2011, and a Serbian edition in 2013. He has been the recipient of prestigious grants from the John Simon Guggenheim Foundation, the Fulbright Scholar Program, and the Social Science Research Foundation, among others.

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