



Middle East Center Breathes New Life

A conversation with Director Chris Low

I had the opportunity to sit down with the new Director of the Middle East Center, Professor Michael Christopher Low, to learn more about the reboot of this important center.

What is your vision for the Middle East Center?

Working in close consultation with Dean Hollis Robbins, my hope is to reenergize the Middle East Center and Middle East Studies major and minor programs. In the short term, students and faculty will likely see more Middle East-related lectures and events on campus. In the medium term, we hope that our efforts will result in faculty hiring and more diverse course offerings. And in the longer run, the goal will be to build a center that is competitive for national funding competitions and comparable to the very best of our peer public universities across the country.

How does the Aziz Atiya Collection impact the new life of the center?

In many ways the Aziz Atiya Collection is the foundation of the University of Utah's Middle East Center. Housing some 195,000 physical items, including over 150,000 books, this collection is the physical embodiment of Utah's unique six-decade legacy as a leading center of Middle East Studies in the United States and globally.



Director of the MEC

Assistant Professor Michael Christopher Low

From rare papyri and parchment collections to Qurans and photograph holdings, the collection is truly a treasure. As we look to recruit new Middle East faculty, this collection should prove an invaluable asset.

Do you have any final statements on the re-opening?

First, I would like to thank my colleagues in History, International and Area Studies, and across campus for their support with this undertaking. Second, I would like to welcome our students in the Department of History to come learn more about our course offerings and plans for the future.

As the Fall term kicks off, I am especially excited for what promises to be a year of growth and revitalization. We are thrilled to welcome Annie Greene, a Postdoctoral Fellow in History and Middle East Studies, to the center's affiliated faculty. Dr. Greene will offer exciting new courses on Gender in Middle East History and Jews of the Islamic World.

Continued to page 2.



Continued from page 1.

In October, we look forward to co-sponsoring (with History) a lecture by the distinguished Middle East historian Alan Mikhail (Yale).

The Middle East Center faculty and staff are also excited to co-sponsor the 4th U.S. Universities Arabic Debating Championship with our partners from Qatar Debate. And most important of all for the Department of History and its students, this year we are also set to conduct a search to hire a new tenure-track historian of pre-modern Middle East, North Africa, and Islamic World history, c. 600-1400 C.E. ♦



Will Smiley
Associate Professor
University of New Hampshire

Alumni Spotlight

I'm currently an Associate Professor in the Humanities at the University of New Hampshire, where I am also coordinator of the Middle East Studies Minor Program. My research focuses on international law in the Middle East and Eurasia, particularly on the Ottoman Empire's relationship to its rivals (such as Russia) and its place in the development of the international system. After graduating from The U with my MA in History, I did a PhD in Middle Eastern Studies at Cambridge in the UK, as well as a JD from Yale Law School.

I applied to Cambridge at the urging of my MA advisor at Utah, Peter Sluglett, and I'm very glad for his support both in getting into the program and in securing funding. I then went on to do two postdocs in Near Eastern Studies at Princeton, before starting a tenure-track job at Reed College, and then moving to UNH. Along the way I also held a fellowship in legal history at NYU for a year. My first book, building on my PhD dissertation, was titled *From Slaves to Prisoners of War* (2018). It looks at the development of rules around captivity and slavery between the Ottoman and Russian Empires. My entire career really started at The U, since I hadn't done a lot of Middle Eastern history as an undergraduate. The U's program, both the History Department and the MEC, helped me do the necessary coursework in history and other disciplines, while also studying Russian, modern Turkish, and Ottoman Turkish. The professors I had at The U—especially Peter Sluglett, Peter von Sivers, Didem Havlioğlu, and Nadja Durbach—guided me both in my research ideas and in the practical elements of choosing my next steps. Moreover, the MEC provided fantastic opportunities and funding for me to study Arabic in Egypt, modern Turkish at the University of Chicago, and Ottoman Turkish in Turkey. I also appreciated the vibrant intellectual environment among other history graduate students, and of course all the outdoor opportunities around Salt Lake City!

Will Smiley contributed, 'Freeing "The Enslaved People of Islam": The Changing Meaning of Ottoman Subjecthood for Captives in the Russian Empire, to the book *The Subjects of Ottoman International Law*, co-edited by Middle East Center Director Michael Christopher Low.

History provides the intellectual and entrepreneurial tools to thrive in a world that is highly specialized and globally interconnected. Our graduates who have majored or minored in history have gone on to a variety of fields and pursued diverse interests.

[Read more about alumni accomplishments here.](#)



College of Humanities News

History of Drag in Utah

Elizabeth Clement

Where there's Smoak

Gregory Smoak's Legacy as the Director of the American West Center

A Global Partnership with Qatar Debate Center

Scholarship for Humanities Students

Pilar Pobil Legacy Foundation

More news from the College [here](#).



Tanner Humanities Center Events

National Theatre Live
Shows & Dates here.

October 5

Carmen Maria Machado

Author of *In the Dream House* and *Her Body and Other Parties*

October 24

David Wallace-Wells

Journalist and author of *The Uninhabitable Earth*.

November 14

Latoya Ruby Frazier

Visual artist, photographer, advocate.

More events and information at thc.utah.edu

Alumni Association Fall Events

The University of Utah Alumni Association holds events throughout the year and the world to connect U. Here are a few that are happening this semester, check out more events [here](#).

[Legacy of Lowell Day of Service](#)

[Young Alumni Mixer](#)

[Black Homecoming at the U](#)

[U Alumni Pep Rally](#)

We want to feature you and your accomplishments!

Please reach out to Shavauna Munster, shavauna.munster@utah.edu, or reply to this email.

Send a headshot, a short bio, and how your History experience impacted your journey.

