Language and Culture

A Magazine of the School of Languages and Cultures at the University of Sydney

Issue 1 _ June 07

Language and Culture is a quarterly electronic magazine that explores current issues in the field of languages and cultures and provides updates on the activities of the School.

In Focus

diversity and debate: arabic and islamic studies

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the southeast asia network

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Research News
gender, japan, identity and more...
We are inaugurating this newsletter for our School at a time when the importance of studying foreign languages and cultures seems once again to be getting attention in Australia. Some recent articles in newspapers and magazines as well as notices of planned workshops and conferences are describing as a “crisis” both the state of language-learning in Australia and the public’s resistance to recognising the importance of understanding other languages and cultures. An article published in the financial section of The Weekend Australian at the end of April highlights the lack of interest in languages on the part of Australian business schools and contrasts the monolingual attitudes of such institutions with the “20 million Chinese who will learn to speak English this year.”

Of course, the problem exists not only in business schools and the consequences affect much more than Australia’s economic health. In contrast with most major research universities in the United States, many comparable institutions of higher learning in Australia, including the University of Sydney, do not require students at either the undergraduate or postgraduate levels to study a language other than English.
As a result, students with an Australian PhD may not be adequately prepared to consult materials in their fields written in another language or fully engage their colleagues from other countries. Unless Australian universities are willing to transform their practices, what can we expect of the rest of the population?

In response to this and related questions, The Australian Academy of the Humanities and the Group of Eight Universities are joining together to hold a National “Languages in Crisis” Summit in Canberra on 7 June 2007. I am happy to report that two of our academics—Professor Nerida Newbigin of Italian Studies and Professor Rifaat Ebied of Arabic and Islamic Studies as well as Hebrew, Biblical, and Jewish Studies—will participate.

I share the organisers’ view that knowledge of a foreign language is the capability “most directly relevant to our competitiveness and security in an increasingly global environment.” And I understand the pragmatics involved in linking language-study with issues of competitiveness and security. But knowledge of a foreign language is, I believe, of deeper importance and significance than this. Language is a product and reflection of culture and can serve as a window on the customs, practices, and values of other world areas. Gaining insight into their history and traditions by having access to the original voices and authentic documents by which they represent themselves gives us an incomparably rich understanding, an understanding that transforms and deepens our outlook from a local to a global perspective. And if such a perspective enhances Australia’s trade and international politics, so much the better!

Finally, we need only walk the streets of Sydney to learn, from the numerous languages being spoken, that the “global community” is already here and thriving. Sydney is an international city and will be even more internationalised as it attracts larger numbers of overseas visitors, students, and business people. Will native English speakers effectively choose to cut themselves off from the experience and opportunities presented by Sydney’s international community or will they embrace it for the sake of gaining a deep appreciation of its history and values? The School of Languages and Cultures is positioning itself to be a leader in encouraging students of this and future generations to realise that the path of engagement is the only sensible one to follow.

Jeffrey Riegel

June 2007
I’m quite sure there is no place on campus like Brennan-MacCallum. Adjoining the historic Quadrangle - the structure by which the University of Sydney is probably best known - the modern building is unassuming. Nestled amidst the Tudor Gothic and sandstone of the Camperdown campus, the Brennan and MacCallum buildings are, perhaps, inconspicuous. However, what goes on inside them is anything but ordinary.

Take the lift. As you cruise the eight floors of the building, you’ll travel the world. For now stop at level 7. As you exit and turn right, you will hear Arabic in the corridor. You will have momentarily stepped into the Arab world and the Middle East.

The School of Languages and Cultures is located in the Brennan-MacCallum building. The Department of Arabic and Islamic Studies is one of thirteen departments that position teaching and research firmly within an international milieu. Fundamentalism, Islamic law and society, Islam and democracy (and even “Terrorism”) - such are some of the issues explored and debated by staff and students. A strength of the curriculum within the department of Arabic and Islamic Studies is that it addresses global developments and reflects a focus on the current affairs that confront us daily in print and televised media. Topical subjects in postgraduate studies include “Muslim Women: Realities and Challenges” and “Crisis of Democracy in the Islamic World”. However, even undergraduate students enrolled in a course on Arabic language and literature may be asked to consider a timely case study on Lebanon, the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, or the Arabic community in Australia as discussed in the Australian media.

The aim is to impart Modern Standard or ‘living’ Arabic – a proactive pedagogical choice that reflects the reality of the language as a contemporary medium of communication across a diverse region and diaspora. Within senior units of study on Arabic language and literature, a range of texts are drawn upon – short stories, films, newspaper articles, television news reports – to introduce the students to generic and cultural contexts, and develop oral, written and translation skills. Teaching methods are also innovative.
Catholic Bishops debate Islam

Ahmad Shboul and Nijmeh Hajjar generated lively discussion when they conducted a day seminar on Islam for the Catholic Bishops Formation Committee in North Sydney. Talks illustrated aspects of Islam and its history, modern challenges facing Muslims and Islamic attitudes to Christianity and the West and women in Islam.

Public Lectures at the Art Gallery of NSW

As part of the series of lectures in connection with the Arts of Islam Exhibition at the Art Gallery 22 June - 23 September, Ahmad Shboul will present a lecture on Arabic Calligraphy and Islamic aesthetics.

Take as just one example the animated multimedia resource developed by Dr. Nijmeh Hajjar and based on her book Living Arabic in Context (2005), soon to be offered on-line. Inspired by this richly diverse environment, students can go on to live and study abroad. Opportunities to study in universities in Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Kuwait or the United Arab Emirates allow for an intense and invaluable experience of linguistic and cultural immersion.

In addition to the study of language and literature, students work towards an understanding of the Arab world and the Middle East in terms of history, society, culture and politics and are invited to engage with complex notions of Islam. It is this striking diversity in content and approach that challenges the student to develop a global perspective and perhaps to reassess his or her own world view.

“Debate and diversity within the curriculum leaves students poised to address crucial international issues and the world we now find ourselves in.”

Given the involvement of Australia in world affairs and theatres of war, more than ever there is a need to develop an awareness and understanding of the Arab world, Islam and the Middle East. Students at the University of Sydney have the scope to consider Arab culture, Islamic thought, and the challenges of modernity. They can contemplate relations between the Muslim and non-Muslim world, and develop their own opinions as to interaction between the Arab world and the West. In developing such skills of critical thinking, they will be guided by scholars of world repute. Associate Professor Ahmad Shboul frequently acts as a media commentator for radio services such as the BBC World Service, Radio France International, Singapore Radio, Voice of America, and Australia's ABC and SBS. This reflects his expertise on Islam in the modern world and the current Middle East situation, also seen in scholarly contributions such as his book chapter “Between Rhetoric and Reality: Islam and Politics in
in focus

the Arab World” (Johns and Lahoud, 2005).

The Department of Arabic and Islamic Studies undoubtedly has a contemporary focus. However, this does not belie the solid principles of historical scholarship and linguistic expertise that inform the teaching and research activities. Professor Rifaat Ebied has worked extensively on Arabic medieval texts, and Muslim-Christian relations in the medieval period, notably during the Crusades. He has recently published on Christian Arabic studies, and is convening the International Conference on Mandaean Studies, which will bring scholars from the United States, Europe and the Middle East to the University of Sydney in July. This is a scholarly endeavour which involves community outreach through the participation of Australia’s Mandaean community - people who regard John the Baptist as the Messiah and come originally from Iraq and Iran.

Together with the work of Professors Shboul and Ebied, Dr Nijmeh Hajjar’s research shows the breadth of focus in the Department of Arabic and Islamic Studies. She is currently working on the consequences of contemporary Fatwas for Muslim women in Western societies, and gender issues in contemporary Arabic creative literature and cinema.

Eventually one leaves the microcosm of the world as it exists in the Brennan-MacCallum building. What a student will not leave behind, however, is the insight and awareness he or she has gained. The Department of Arabic and Islamic Studies has a vibrant culture of teaching and research that equips students with critical and linguistic skills. Debate and diversity within the curriculum leaves students poised to address crucial international issues and the world we now find ourselves in.

The Myrtle Tree (A Novel of Love and Dreams in War-Torn Lebanon)

The Arabic and Islamic Studies department recently co-sponsored, in collaboration with Glebe Books, the launch of The Myrtle Tree (A Novel of Love and Dreams in War-Torn Lebanon), London, Panibal, 2007. This is the second novel of author Jad El Hage. Born in Beirut and now living in Australia Jad El Hage is a novelist, poet, short-story writer and journalist.

Ahmad Shboul and Nijmeh Hajjar spoke on the themes of healing, hope and connection that are woven through the story and its landscape.

“One of Glebooks’ best book launches”, according to some participants.
Almost every discipline in the University has some involvement in Southeast Asia, from full-time research on agriculture to consultancies in Education, and so far more than 75 staff and postgraduate students are on the Network’s email list.

**The Southeast Asia Network**

**By Professor Adrian Vickers**

Southeast Asian Studies have long been a part of the research identity of the University of Sydney.

In earlier decades departments such as Anthropology and History were well known for their politically-engaged scholarship, as well as their work on the classical cultures of Island and Mainland Southeast Asia.

In more recent times the work of various archaeologists associated with the Greater Angkor Project has kept the University’s profile in the field prominent. As part of a more recent general revival in Asian Studies, the University has given fresh impetus to a number of fields such as the study of Indonesian language.

The Southeast Asia Network is a new initiative to bring together the excellent research on Southeast Asia occurring across the campus. Through the Network Professor Adrian Vickers, working closely with colleagues in Geography, Government, Archaeology and Sociology, is seeking to promote the diverse range of work already taking place, and create new research partnerships. A key part of the Network’s aims is to improve the experience of postgraduate students by bringing together people from different disciplines.

Thanks to funding from the Research Institute for the Humanities and Social Sciences, the Network is currently developing a website to showcase all aspects of the research and teaching on Southeast Asia across the University of Sydney.

This will provide the opportunity to link what is happening in the School of Languages and Cultures to the Greater...
Angkor Project, the Australian Mekong Resource Centre in Geosciences, the Australian Centre for Asian Art and Archaeology, as well as to research occurring in development studies, linguistics and health.

Almost every discipline in the University has some involvement in Southeast Asia, from full-time research on agriculture to consultancies in Education, and so far more than 75 staff and postgraduate students are on the Network’s email list.

Much of the really innovative work on Southeast Asia is being produced by postgraduates, who are looking at topics as diverse as film, ancient temple reliefs and tourism. As well as special postgraduate workshops, in October, the Network will hold a master class with Associate Professor Goh Beng Lan from the National University of Singapore (NUS).

The connection with NUS is an important part of the international agenda of the Southeast Asia Network. The Network plans to build on the University’s existing exchange agreements and relationships with the region.

In this way we can combine undergraduate student exchanges with collaborations in supervision and research. In particular Professor Vickers has been working with Associate Professor Ooi Keat Gin of the Universiti Sains Malaysia (Penang) to create an active research network involving scholars from Southeast Asia and Australia Asia.

In July and August they will link up with scholars at Universitas Gadjah Mada (Yogyakarta, Indonesia), NUS and other key centres to plan further developments.
Rivers of flowing mercury, miniature palaces, an army of terracotta warriors...few of us can contemplate such extraordinary things during a day’s work. Few of us are called upon to appear on the Discovery Channel as an international scholarly expert. Professor Jeffrey Riegel, Head of the School of Languages and Cultures at the University of Sydney, has done both.

Last year, a documentary entitled “The First Emperor” was shown on Discovery and associated television networks around the world. Filmed on location in China, it tells of the reign of Qin Shi Huang – the first emperor of the Qin. Often portrayed as an overwhelmingly powerful warrior and brutal tyrant, this man defeated and then united the seven warring states that would become ‘China’. Crowned Emperor at the age of 34, in command of millions of people, he would go on to abolish feudal reign and put in place a rule of law and lasting system of governance. To protect his empire, he commissioned work on a series of defensive barriers that we know today as the Great Wall. To mark his political and military power and achieve immortality, he would build the world’s largest and most extravagant necropolis – an imperial tomb befitting a divine ruler.

As large as the Great Pyramid of Giza in Egypt, the underground burial complex replicates the Emperor’s world. It comprises some 180 pits containing over 8000 figures, including chariots, court officials, dancers, musicians, acrobats and the Terracotta Army – soldiers made of clay who would act as spirit guards and protect the Emperor against his many enemies in the after-life. The Discovery Channel documentary is the product of unprecedented access for a Western film crew to the Emperor’s burial ground. The production team worked with Jeffrey Riegel, then Professor of Chinese at the University of California, Berkeley, to investigate this largest unopened tomb in the world. Professor Riegel’s expertise lies in the archaeological excavation of the Emperor’s burial mound, which is at the centre of the necropolis. Some two thousand years after the Emperor’s death, scholars like Jeffrey Riegel and his Chinese colleague Duan Chingbo, are probing the earth of the mound through test drillings and soil core samples. The findings affirm the legend that the Emperor was buried within a bronze model of his empire – a map of all of China - which contained flowing rivers and seas of liquid mercury.

Jeffrey Riegel’s interest in archaeology developed from his reverence for ancient Chinese texts. In particular,
he is drawn to newly discovered
manuscripts, recently excavated
and brought to scholarly attention
due to the exciting work being done
in Chinese archaeology during the
last thirty years. His research focuses
upon such archaeological and
literary treasures as the Confucian
texts excavated at the village
Guodian. This calls for historical
and linguistic scholarship as well
as textual analysis, both in material
and interpretative terms.

Professor Riegel’s fascination for
recently excavated manuscripts
is anchored in his expertise in
ancient transmitted texts. Trained in
Continental European philosophy
and history, it was his knowledge of
the Western classical tradition that
converged with an enthusiasm for
Chinese philosophy and inspired
him to begin his research career.
The fact that pre-Socratic Greek
thought was a fragmentary tradition
– that complete texts of pre-
Socratic thinkers no longer exist but
fragments are put together and
systematised – is what led Jeffrey
Riegel to work on the fragments of
early Confucianism and, in his own
words, “to apply the sophisticated
apparatus of textual criticism that
had developed around the study
of Greek fragments, to the Chinese
material”.

What interested him
most – and still does – is Chinese
philosophy in various forms: Chinese
intellectual history, traditional
ideas, values, systems of values,
and the questions that allow you
to “recognise the contours, the
topography of a culture and
distinguish them”.

Throughout an illustrious scholarly
career, Professor Riegel has
continued to work with original
texts of philosophy and remained
focussed upon issues of ethics,
education and cultivation. One of
his current research projects reflects
his interest in morals and moral
systems in Chinese antiquity. He has
just recently completed the study of
a newly discovered manuscript that
is part of the early medical corpus.
This medical text is based on holistic
notions of health and well-being,
and a belief that the individual who
maintains moral integrity will retain
physical health. The text provides
avenues for self-reflection and self-
improvement. However, as Professor

― "Language learning enables a person
to engage with the intricacies and
subtleties of a culture, as well as its broad
strokes"
Riegel explains, “this medical text does what some traditional transmitted texts refuse to do.” It addresses all classes of society, from the elite to the ordinary, describing different techniques that should be adopted depending on one’s social position. This text of the 3rd and 2nd centuries BCE is a kind of handbook of inner development that prescribes forms of moral behaviour for all walks of life.

In addition to his book-length study based on the survey work and preliminary excavations at the burial of the First Emperor, Jeffrey Riegel is currently completing a translation of the Chinese philosophical text, the Mozi. Mozi was a philosopher who lived in China during the Warring States Period. In contrast to those of Confucius, Mozi’s moral teachings advocated self-knowledge through self-reflection. The Mozi is a collection of writings compiled by Mohists, some of which may have been written by the philosopher himself. In comparison to Confucian texts, the works of Mozi and his followers have been somewhat neglected. Jeffrey Riegel, however, is on the forefront of a resurgence - there has been a significant uptake in scholarly literature in the last five to seven years in China. Professor Riegel’s critical edition promises an annotated “textually responsible” translation of the Mozi, crucial for further work in this field.

If an interest in archaeology developed from Jeffrey Riegel’s desire to understand ancient Chinese texts, so too did his expertise in Chinese language. In recounting his career, Professor Riegel begins with his postgraduate experience at Stanford University. As a masters and doctoral student, he was exposed to Chinese language studies “quite broadly defined”. He was also exposed to authentic documents from all periods, and an extremely demanding programme of linguistic and literary study. He explains: “we were expected on the one hand to specialise but on the other hand to have taken courses – and the courses were substantial – in virtually every period of Chinese literary history”. As a result his reading advanced over his spoken abilities, until a period of immersion spent in Taiwan, an event in his life that he describes as “the single most
valuable experience. I discovered a whole new reason for knowing the language and that was real life interaction”. To this day he values this ability to communicate: “the most important thing that I have gained from knowing the Chinese language is being able to go to China and just talk to people on the street – that remains for me the most important thing. I feel myself privileged to be able to do that”.

A desire to intensify his interaction with ancient texts also inspired his study of language. Having taken courses in Chinese philosophy in translation, he began to want to read those texts in the original. Philosophy might have been his music but language would be his instrument. “I viewed the language as a tool” he says, “by studying philosophical texts in their original language I would be able to get closer to the truth, get closer to them”.

During his career at Berkeley, Professor Riegel developed his expertise in texts and language study together with the study of material culture. In his teaching he achieved both: working with original language materials while at the same time interpreting those materials in light of recent archaeology. It is this interconnectedness between language and other forms of discovery that lies at the heart of his pedagogy. Language learning is not an end in itself but is a beginning, whereby students become linguistically equipped to explore whatever it is about a culture that fascinates them. Language learning enables a person to engage with the intricacies and subtleties of a culture, as well as its broad strokes. A strengthening of the connection between language learning and other forms of knowledge is Jeffrey Riegel’s vision: students who feel compelled to learn more and more of a language because it becomes a gateway to other explorations. After all, he is now the Head of a School of Languages and Cultures – and, as he says, “it is the and which is important”. It is the conjunction between language and the study of culture which is most exciting and challenging.

“Language learning is not an end in itself but is a beginning, whereby students become linguistically equipped to explore whatever it is about a culture that fascinates them...”
Competition under the Faculty of Arts Research Support Scheme brought good news for the School of Languages and Cultures. The aim of this Scheme is to seed and support research of high quality and impact in the Faculty of Arts by awarding funding for 2007. The criteria included two tenets of scholarly research culture: excellence of the project, and strength of the researcher’s track record in terms of previous experience and outcomes.

Over eighty percent of the applicants from the School of Languages and Cultures were funded, outdoing by a significant margin applicants from elsewhere in the Faculty. This result attests to the quality and interest of the projects, and the calibre of the researchers within the School. A glimpse at the topics reveals the breadth of research underway.

Issues of gender inflected with cultural difference lie at the heart of Michelle Royer’s research project on Marguerite Duras’s work. The French writer, filmmaker and public intellectual contributed widely to the media on political and social issues. Michelle Royer will study these public contributions in the context of French feminist thought. She plans to analyse a corpus of interviews from 1965 to 1990 to assess Duras’s gender politics, her positions about feminism, notions of femininity and feminine writing.

The intersection of gender and culture is evident in Panayiota Nazou’s project on Greek ‘proxy brides’ in Australia. Subtitled “From Life Experience to Artistic Expression”, this project examines the experience and representation of women who immigrated as so-called ‘proxy brides’ from Greece during the 1950s and 60s. Based upon personal interviews, written testimonies, and literary accounts, Panayiota Nazou’s work has already featured in a public exhibition in conjunction with Marrickville Council and the Greek Festival of Sydney.

The complexity of gender as it relates not only to culture but also to religion is the basis of Bronwyn Winter’s work on Muslim women in transnational contexts. This project will involve research in France and North Africa and examine how various meanings of “Muslimness” – religious, ethnic, national[ist], transnational, cultural, political – within and across different countries and regions of the world inform Muslim women’s self-identification, discourse and community activism.

Two projects focus on recent social and cultural developments in Asian societies. Chun-Fen Shao will assess an aspect of national public policy and determine the impact it has had on China’s recent development. She will examine China’s strategy of sending intellectual elites abroad to further their education in developed countries. On return to
China, these intellectuals are often given prominent positions and play important roles. The objective of this project is to understand the relevance of China’s international education policy to its economic and social development.

Seiko Yasumoto will study regional cultural flows from adjoining communities in East Asia as they impact upon Japanese popular culture. Based on the fact that the 1990s were a period of transition in Japan toward a more global culture, the focus of this project will be on cultural flows and transferences between Japan and Hong Kong as imaged in Japanese television dramas produced during this time. The ultimate aim of this research is to gauge the extent of Japanese influence on Asian modernity from the 1990s through to the present.

Asian history is a growing research area in the School of Languages and Cultures, and two projects funded under the Research Support Scheme reflect this. Matthew Stavros’s interest lies in pre-modern Japan, and he posits a unique connection between political legitimacy and architectural pageantry. The rise of the samurai is normally depicted as a forceful toppling of the traditional imperial order by unruly provincial warriors. Drawing on textual, pictorial and archaeological sources, Matthew Stavros will argue that the armed men who invaded the capital of Kyoto and established a military government used urban planning as a means for insinuating themselves into preexisting capital power structures. He will demonstrate that the warrior elites sought to infiltrate the traditional order rather than destroy it.

Pankaj Mohan engages with history as a discursive construct in his project on ‘history war’ and resurgent nationalism in Korea. South Korea has recently witnessed a resurgence of interest in ancient Korean history, because of Chinese claims that the early Korean state of Koguryo was part of China’s map. Pankaj Mohan will study this revival, focusing on the significance of Koguryo for Korea’s national identity, and the perceived threat from ‘New Sinocentrism’ or the rise of restorationist nationalism in China. He interprets this ‘history war’ as part of the process of redefining national identities in these two countries.

Scholarship in European Studies is integral to both the research and teaching platforms of the School of Languages and Cultures. Maria-Cristina Maucer
will identify the most common stereotypical representations of migrants that appear in recent Italian literature written by Italian-born writers (in the period 1990-2006); and ascertain whether the stereotypes exist in literary texts by migrant writers of the same period, and whether they reflect stereotypical images spread by the mass media in Italy.

A fascinating nexus of European and Australian studies can be seen in Andrea Bandhauer’s work on German missionaries and their narratives of contact with Australian Aborigines. In the context of gender and intercultural contact, she will examine textual materials produced by the German Lutheran missionary couple, Carl and Frieda Strehlow. This research will provide a sophisticated understanding of the impact of missionaries on the life and culture of Australian Indigenous peoples.

The funding a university awards to its own academics is an important sign. Internal research funding – particularly if it is awarded on a competitive basis – is an indication of scholarly development within an institution. It fosters the talents of individual researchers and develops their expertise. It indicates the projects that are considered to be of value by colleagues and peers. Ultimately it highlights the research strengths within a university.

The outcomes of the exciting projects underway in the School of Languages and Cultures will range from scholarly articles and books to public lectures and exhibitions. These will attest not only to the quality of research undertaken within the School but the impact of it, both within and beyond the University.

Research Institute for Humanities and Social Sciences (RIHSS) writing fellowship 2007

Dr Birte Giesler in Germanic Studies was recently awarded a writing fellowship for “Constructions of Identity and Gender in Modern German Drama and Prose”. Birte Giesler will work on the finalisation of several articles on constructions of identity and gender in selected modern German dramatic and prose texts. Western civil society is ideologically based on certain concepts of identity being coined around 1800, yet it is radically questioned by new technologies, globalization, multiculturalism and the decline of traditional ways of life. Her work will bridge the gap between current debates about cultural and individual identity and discourses on gender and identity during the establishment of the European modern civil society around 1800.

Chiang Ching-kuo Foundation Research Grants

Professor Helen Dunstan and Dr. Eddy U in Chinese Studies were recently awarded Chiang Ching-kuo Foundation research grants. These grants are highly competitive and prestigious. Winning a grant from the Foundation is an honour as well as an acknowledgment of the recipient’s record of research quality and productivity.
The University of Sydney will host two prestigious international Semitic conferences...

**NAPH 2007 International Conference on Hebrew Language, Literature and Culture**
2 - 4 July

This conference will bring together the National Association of Professors of Hebrew (NAPH), a US-based organisation of scholars and university teachers who specialise in Hebrew language, literature and culture of the ancient, medieval and modern periods. Over the past twenty-four years, the NAPH conferences have become a major event and have contributed greatly to the advancement of the study and teaching of Hebrew in institutions of higher learning. Previous conferences have been hosted by such notable institutions as NYU, UCLA, Brandeis University, Emory University, the University of California at Berkeley, Ben-Gurion University of the Negev, Stanford University and many others. Professor Rifaat Ebied, the University of Sydney’s foundation Professor of Semitic Studies, has a lengthy association with NAPH and it is through this involvement that the 2007 conference is to be hosted in Sydney. Dignitaries and key leaders within the Jewish community will attend and Professor Ebied, who will also Chair the conference, considers it a great opportunity to promote Hebrew studies and looks forward to the interaction between international scholars and members of the community.

**International Conference on Mandaean Studies**
8 - 11 July

It is due to the standing of the department of Hebrew, Biblical and Jewish Studies in the field of Semitic studies in general and Mandaean studies in particular, that it was deemed appropriate to host the International Conference on Mandaean Studies in Sydney. The University awarded the first PhD thesis in Mandaean studies in Australia in 2005. Sydney has a large Mandaean community of more than 3,000 people, most of whom came to Australia to escape persecution in Iraq. In his meetings with newly arrived migrants, Professor Ebied has learnt that a large number are keen to participate in the conference and exchange ideas with leading academics and scholars in the field.

For more information on both conferences please contact Professor Rifaat Ebied: Rifaat.Ebied@arts.usyd.edu.au

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**The death of a monk**

Israeli dramatist and novelist Alon Hilu spoke at a recent seminar organised by the Department of Hebrew, Biblical and Jewish Studies in collaboration with the Department of English. Hilu’s first novel, *The Death of a Monk*, recently received the Israeli Presidential Prize for Literature, and has been translated into several languages, including English, French and Italian. The work is based on events associated with the blood libel against the Jews in Syria in the 1840s. Hilu spoke about his interest for this novel and how it grew out of the intriguing details contained in the surviving records of those events as well as his own family origins which trace back to Damascus. Following accusations that Jews had ritually murdered a Franciscan friar, the Jewish community in Damascus responded in a variety of ways. Details of the story led Hilu to the conclusion that one of the central characters involved in the allegations might be gay and he composed the novel from this man’s point of view. Hilu commented that he had deliberately chosen to write in a style in Hebrew which reflected an earlier stage of the language.
The Sydney Arthurian Colloquium
“New Approaches to Old Problems”
10 – 14 July

Dr Andrea Williams of the department of French Studies is hosting The Sydney Arthurian Colloquium, with sponsorship from School of Languages and Cultures, the Faculty of Arts, the Sydney Centre for Medieval Studies, and the World Universities Network.

This conference will bring together more than 20 of the most internationally distinguished medievalists in the field of Arthurian Studies, from institutions as diverse as Berkeley, Bonn, Oxford, Utrecht, UWA, and others. Plenary lectures will be given by Emeritus Professor Peter Field (current President of the International Arthurian Society) of the University of Wales (Bangor), Professor Norris Lacy of Penn State University, and Professor Keith Busby of the University of Wisconsin (Madison).

Buddhist Studies:
Australasian Contributions
3 – 4 December

The Australasian Association of Buddhist Studies (AABS) will convene its 2007 conference at the University of Western Sydney in December. Provisional themed panels include contemporary expressions in Buddhism, doctrine and methodology, historical studies, and studies in Buddhist meditation. Paper presentations and proposals for panel discussions are invited in any subject area connected with Buddhist studies. Early submission of abstracts is encouraged; the deadline for submission of abstracts is 30 July 2007.

AABS is offering up to 4 postgraduate sponsorships of $500 each to assist interstate or New Zealand based students with travel and accommodation expenses. Sponsorship will be awarded competitively based on submission of draft paper. For more information contact Judith Snodgrass at J.Snodgrass@uws.edu.au or Drasko Mitrikeski at drasko.mitrikeski@arts.usyd.edu.au.

Pictured: Oxford, Bodleian Library ms Douce 215, f35r

For registration and further details, please contact:
Dr Andrea Williams (andrea.williams@usyd.edu.au).
Each year, the department receives a generous contribution from the Italian Government to mount in-service courses for Italian teachers. The first, Viaggio nella nuova realtà sociale italiana, was presented on Saturday 17 March 2007. Dr Paolo Bartoloni, Dr Cristina Mauceri and Francesco Ricatti explored topics ranging from the perils of part time employment to the bodies of footballers and politicians.

On Friday and Saturday, 27-28 April, Dott. Lett. Paola Marmini, Dr Antonia Rubino and Dott. Lett. Nicoletta Zanardi, together with our Italian Government Lecturer Dr Antonio Da Rold and the DET Italian Language Consultant Giuseppina Wilmot, presented a two-day in-service course preparing teachers for language certification exams. The program brought together an exceptional range and depth of expertise attracting very positive evaluations from both the participants and our sponsors, the Italian Consul General, Dott. Benedetto Latteri, the outgoing Director of the Italian Cultural Institute, Dott. Gerlando Butti, the incoming Director, Dott.ssa Anna Maria Lelli, and the Italian Language Consultant, Dott. Sergio Rapisardi.

The last weekend in April was also the occasion of the annual Italian Camp involving two of our tutors, Sandra Pitronaci and Francesco Ricatti, who organised themselves and fifty students from Sydney, Macquarie, UTS, UWS, ANU (2) and Melbourne (2) to get to the Elanora Heights Conference Centre for 48 hours immersion in Italian: from yoga at sunrise to Italian idol, from bocce and scopa to trekking. Once again, the evaluations are outstanding, and if the tutors recover from their superhuman efforts, they may think about organizing another next semester.

Finally, on Friday 11 May, we welcomed Dott.ssa Lelli and Dott. Rapisardi to lunch at the University. We look forward to a strong and productive relationship with the Italian Institute of Culture (ICC) and with the Consulate. The department was associated with a range of activities sponsored by the IIC in conjunction with the Sydney Writers’ Festival, including the visit of Italian novelist and satirist Stefano Benni. Nerida Newbigin introduced Mr Benni at the Italian Cultural Institute on 1 June, and at the SPC Rehearsal Room, Sydney Opera House on 2 June.
From the department of Indonesian Studies

In March, Michele Ford (Indonesian Studies) was invited to speak at a public forum and expert symposium on temporary labour migration in Perth. The forum focused on Asian experiences of temporary labour migration and their relevance to Australia. The expert symposium, which drew together speakers from Australia and across Asia, examined economic restructuring and its impact on workers in the Asia-Pacific region.

From the department of Japanese Studies

Noh Performance: On Wednesday 23 May the school was honoured to host a very special performance and information session of the traditional Japanese performing art of Noh. It was jointly organised with the Japanese Consul in Australia, the Agency for Cultural Affairs in Japan and the Japanese studies Department at the University of Sydney. During the performance, Mr Sakae Terai, a master of the art of Noh who has been visiting the department, gave a history of Noh, as well as performing an exquisite piece from the Noh drama Funa Benkei. He also gave a demonstration of the intricate process of donning the costume of his character, which is a piece of theatre in itself! Mr Terai’s daughter, Chikage Terai, provided information about Noh, and gave a brief performance. Other members of the troupe included a traditional band, who demonstrated and talked about their instruments. The subtle, refined beauty of Noh was demonstrated during the performances.

From the department of Spanish and Latin American Studies

More and more people around the world are choosing to learn Spanish as a second language. Perhaps this is due to the attractiveness of the vibrant and diverse Hispanic cultures, or the emergence of new business opportunities as South America looks to trading partners other than the United States. Certainly there is a significant community in Australia who speak Spanish. All this may go some way to explaining the large number of students enrolled in the department of Spanish and Latin American Studies. In the short time since it was officially established in 2006, the department has grown to become the third largest in the School in terms of student numbers. In response to this demand, the department is pleased to announce that from 2008 it will offer an Honours program which will include seminars on Spanish and Latin American culture and society, advanced language, and a thesis on a subject area chosen by the student (with the agreement of the department). For further details contact Dr Vek Lewis, vek.lewis@arts.usyd.edu.au
The School would like to congratulate...

Ms Yuri Takahashi from Japanese Studies who was one of the two recipients of the Faculty of Arts 2007 awards for excellence in tutoring. Yuri has been involved in language education for the past twenty five years and believes in the provision of quality language teaching from an introductory level in order to inspire students and lead them to deeper cross-cultural understandings. According to Yuri, the “pursuit of the artistry of language teaching is an endless challenge”.

Professor Rifaat Ebied from Semitic Studies who was awarded an “acknowledgement for contributions as a past Convenor of the NAATI NSW Regional Advisory Committee, and a current member of the Arabic Examiner Panel”. The award was given at NAATI’s (National Accreditation Authority for Translators and Interpreters) 30th Anniversary Celebration, held in Sydney on Thursday 17 May. Professor Ebied served as Chair of NAATI’s Arabic Examiner Panel from 1982 until recently (2006) and is currently a member of the Panel. Over the 30 year period, NAATI has accredited 23,560 practitioners to deliver translation and interpreting services across 104 languages.

The five students in first year Italian who attended Parliament House on Wednesday 6 June to receive prizes for their performance in HSC Italian. The students are: Lara Johnson (Open High School) and Jonathan Hon (Sydney Grammar School) for their performance in HSC Continuers, and Edwina Tidmarsh Queenwood), Jane Favretto (Queenwood) and Trina Del Vecchio (Kincoppal) for their performance in HSC Beginners. The prizes, totalling more than $14000, and including return flights to Italy and language study scholarships, were donated by members of the Italian business community in Sydney and presented by the Italian Consul General Dott. Benedetto Latteri and the State Member for Drummoyne, Angela D’Amore.

Inaugural Inoue Yasushi Award for Outstanding Research in Japanese Literature in Australia

Entrusted by the Inoue Yasushi Memorial Foundation with the establishment of the Award in 2006, the department of Japanese Studies announced Dr Tomoko Aoyama as the winner for the inaugural Award on Monday 21 May. Dr Aoyama, from The University of Queensland, was selected for the article ‘Appropriating Bush Tucker: food in Inoue Hisashi’s Yellow Rats’ Journal of Australian Studies, 2006, in a Special Issue No. 87 entitled Culinary Distinction. Dr Aoyama received the award of $1,000 from the Inoue Yasushi Memorial Foundation with generous additional support from The Japan Foundation, Sydney.

The Department sincerely acknowledges the efforts made by the judges, and by Mr Masanori Ohtani who helped to organize the ceremony.