



BRISMES

British Society for Middle Eastern Studies

ANNUAL REPORT

*Report of activities from June 2024 – June 2025
prepared for the 2025 Annual General Meeting of the
British Society for Middle Eastern Studies (BRISMES)*



www.brismes.ac.uk



office@brismes.org

Introduction

During the past year, BRISMES undertook a range of activities to advance the society's aims of promoting Middle East studies in the UK, supporting scholars and advancing academic freedom. This included organising events and prizes, publicising new research and publications, disseminating funding, research and employment opportunities, issuing statements and publishing the British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies. A major focus of our activities in the past year has been to stand in solidarity with our colleagues in Palestine, above all in Gaza, where Israel's genocidal war has intensified. We have sought to amplify voices from Gaza, support Gaza universities, and advocate on behalf of those whose rights to free speech and academic freedom have been violated because of speaking out on Gaza. Towards that end, BRISMES has worked with sister associations in the US and Europe. We are also proud to have continued to help to promote the work of the Syrian Academics and Researchers Network, including support for a joint statement congratulating the Syrian people on the collapse of the Assad dictatorship. This report provides more details about the Society's activities since July 2024.

BRISMES activities over the past 12 months fall into 6 main categories:

- 1) Support for colleagues in Gaza, advocacy against scholasticide and genocide;
- 2) Developing the Society;
- 3) Promoting Research in Middle Eastern Studies and Supporting Early Career Researchers;
- 4) British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies;
- 5) Academic Freedom and Advocacy;
- 6) BRISMES Campaigns.

Support for Colleagues in Gaza, Advocacy against Scholasticide and Genocide

BRISMES has worked extensively over the past year, alongside academic experts, legal scholars, our members and others, in support of our colleagues in Gaza, and against the ongoing genocide. Our 2024 Annual Lecture was delivered by Dr Ghassan Abu-Sittah, a British-Palestinian surgeon who has volunteered in Gaza. He provided an eyewitness account of the horrors on the ground, describing Israel's creation of a 'biosphere of genocide' that extends genocidal erasure beyond the immediate bombing.

Another key component of Israel's genocidal assault on Gaza has been scholasticide—the systematic dismantling of the territory's educational infrastructure. All universities and colleges in the Strip have been destroyed or damaged, and over 100 academics—among them internationally respected scholars, deans, and university presidents—have been killed. The obliteration of schools, libraries, archives, and the murder of students, teachers, lecturers, and administrators has devastated both the physical and intellectual foundations of education in Gaza. Yet, educators and students in Gaza have resisted scholasticide, continuing to teach and learn in the ruins of buildings, in tents and on-line. Highlighting this struggle, this year, BRISMES organised a [webinar](#) on scholasticide, featuring the powerful voices of educators in Gaza.

BRISMES also announced the establishment of the [BRISMES Fund for Higher Education in Gaza](#) at our July 2024 Annual Conference. We are proud to report that we have reached our target of £25,000, which will be donated to [ISNAD](#), a scholarship programme run by Taawon, to support students in Gaza. These urgently needed funds will help young people continue their education under extraordinarily difficult circumstances and bolster the universities and staff working tirelessly to keep learning alive.

Meanwhile, the Committee on Academic Freedom (CAF) has continued to advocate for the rights of scholars and students who speak out in solidarity with the Palestinian people. Among its many activities, CAF sent a [letter](#) to all UK Vice Chancellors urging full implementation of the UN Special Rapporteur's recommendations on the rights of freedom of peaceful assembly and association, with regards to Palestine solidarity activism on university campuses. Regrettably, this call was largely ignored or met with vague responses. More recently, CAF issued a [public statement](#) raising concerns about the Higher Education Policy Institute's report on student encampments for Gaza, warning that such reporting risks undermining academic freedom and the right to protest.

In the midst of widespread violence and institutional repression, the global wave of student encampments has been a powerful expression of conscience. These students' bravery and solidarity give us hope, and BRISMES [remains unwavering](#) in its defence of their right to speak, protest, and organise without fear or penalty.

Developing the Society

Nicola Pratt took up the position as the first BRISMES President elected by BRISMES members, in July 2024. A presidential search committee began work in spring 2025 to find candidates to stand as president elect. Unfortunately, no eligible candidates were found and, hence, Nicola agreed to extend her term by 1 year, until July 2027. Between July 2024 and June 2025, we held elections for positions on Council and for the Committee on Academic Freedom. We also solicited volunteers for the Committee to Oversee the BRISMES Fundraiser for Higher Education in Gaza. We would like to take this opportunity to thank all BRISMES members who have engaged with the calls for nominations and have volunteered their time. We would also like to encourage members to put their names forward as a range of positions will open in the 2025-26 academic year, including the position of president elect. We are aware that more changes to BRISMES's internal processes may be needed as we respond to new challenges, but believe we now have a solid foundation as we head towards the future.

BRISMES currently has 488 members, for whom we continue to create and develop initiatives to share research and to advocate on issues that are relevant to our work of encouraging and promoting interest in Middle East Studies. 26% of our members come from the Global South and 48% are students. Our BRISMES Membership Subcommittee, formed by Wassim Naboulsi and Yara Zebian, has proposed and worked on changes to the membership area of the BRISMES website, aimed at improving the user experience and encouraging members to update their details during renewals. To bolster membership, the Membership Subcommittee has recently organised the event titled "Connecting Social Psychology with Middle Eastern Studies" in collaboration with the BRISMES Graduate Section. This initial networking event aimed to foster connections between social, political, and community psychologists and Middle Eastern Studies scholars, to familiarise participants with BRISMES as an organisation for interdisciplinary engagement, with a view to expanding membership and advancing future dialogues within and across disciplinary boundaries.

In October 2024, BRISMES Manager Amy Brickhill began her parental leave. To ensure continuity during her absence, we were pleased to welcome Rosa Sansone, previously BRISMES Conference Coordinator, as her cover until Amy's return in October 2025. Stepping into this role is no small task, and Rosa has done an excellent job navigating its many challenges with dedication and professionalism. We are grateful for her capable stewardship during this period and look forward to welcoming Amy back in the autumn.

Promoting Research in Middle Eastern Studies and Supporting Early Career Researcher

The Annual Conference

The BRISMES conference is the largest and most prestigious annual UK gathering of scholars and practitioners focusing on the region, and it is the most important event of the BRISMES calendar. This year's conference, 'Destruction, Loss, and Recovery in the Middle East' (July 1-3) is rich, vibrant and diverse. We have 450 registered delegates with 396 speakers (compared to 392 registered delegates and 329 speakers in 2024) and over [80 panels and roundtables](#), an excellent line-up of [keynote and invited speakers](#) and an exciting mentoring event. Many thanks to all those involved in organising the conference: the conference co-chairs, Sharri Plonski and José Ciro Martínez, the conference hosts from Newcastle University, Mohamed El-Shewy, Soudeh Ghaffari, Mark Griffiths, Craig Jones, Olivia Mason, Una McGahern, Silvia Pasquetti, Mori Ram, Jemima Repo, Burak Tansel and Deniz Yonucu, the BRISMES manager Rosa Sansone, the conference coordinator Amar Elaydi and our student volunteers.

BRISMES contributed over £8000 for the [Solidarity Fund](#), which helps low-paid and precariously employed members to attend the conference. In comparison to 37 requests for financial assistance received in 2022, just under 100 in 2023 and just above 100 in 2024, this year the number of requests soared to 163. Many thanks to all those who generously donated to the fund. If anyone is interested in volunteering to help establish a Solidarity Fund endowment, then please get in touch at office@brismes.org.

Our [Conference Policy on Land or Territorial Acknowledgment](#) continues to apply to all participants affiliated with institutions located on occupied or colonised land. Participants are required to acknowledge the traditional owners of the land where their institution is based and/or where their research was conducted. This year, we found that almost all eligible participants initially failed to provide a land acknowledgement statement. Accordingly, all participants were reminded to comply with the policy before the final programme was published. As many did not respond with a statement, it was decided to remove their institutional affiliations from the programme.

Annual Lecture

The BRISMES Annual Lecture provides an opportunity for members and non-members to hear from a distinguished scholar or expert within the field of Middle Eastern Studies and is also a major event in the BRISMES calendar. Last year's annual lecture was held online in November. As mentioned above, British-Palestinian plastic and reconstructive surgeon Dr Ghassan Abu-Sittah delivered a powerful talk titled "[Witness to Genocide - In Conversation with Dr Ghassan Abu-Sittah](#)". This year we have invited historian and political scientist Ilan Pappé to deliver the annual lecture, and we will publicise the date and title of the talk in due course.

Promoting Research in Middle Eastern Studies and Supporting Early Career Researchers

Prizes

The Early Career Development Scholarship and the Conference Student Paper Prize were awarded for the first time in 2021 and will continue to support new voices in the Middle East Studies community. The prize amount for both awards was increased in 2024 and BRISMES would ultimately like to create an endowment for these prizes to ensure their sustainability in the years ahead. As part of this goal, the prize committee has been working towards developing named prizes and endowments. The Committee has recently introduced a new named prize called 'The Council Award'. This award is an attempt by the Council to recognize and support an actor, individual or a collective, that is responding to an urgent event and/or moment in the region over the past 12 months. The award will launch in 2026.

We also continue to administer and co-fund the Leigh Douglas Memorial Prize for best PhD in Middle Eastern Studies. We would like to recognise and thank our Prizes Committee - which includes Sabiha Allouche, Hanaa Almoaibed (chair), Marianna Charountaki, and Wassim Naboulsi - as well as the external reviewers for the time and effort they have dedicated to these prizes.

Prizes awarded in 2024-2025:

The prize committee received 15 submissions for the 2024 [Conference Student Paper Prize](#) and awarded it to:

- **Hüseyin Göcen** (University of California, Davis), *Witches, Vampires, and Amulets: The Mental Worlds of Peasants in Early Modern Ottoman Odessa as Seen Through an Early Seventeenth-Century Provincial Jurisconsult's Fatwa Collection*
- **Abdullah Alahmari** (University of St Andrews) received honourable mention for *To Be a Man: Childhood, Coming of Age, and Masculinity in the Literary Works of Yūsuf Idrīs*

The prize committee received 12 submissions for the [Leigh Douglas Prize](#) and awarded it to joint winners (each receiving £300):

- **Asma Abdi** (University of Warwick), *Towards a Decolonial Feminist International Political Economy of Sanctions: Social Reproduction, Labour and Survival in Iran*
- **Sara Abdelmotaleb** (University of Warwick), *The Making and Unmaking of Resistance through Narratives of Violence: The Case of "Revolutionary" Egypt*

Promoting Research in Middle Eastern Studies and Supporting Early Career Researchers

Two Runners-Up Prizes (each receiving £125) were also awarded:

- **Eirik Kvindesland** (University of Oxford), *On Islands of Oil: Jews and Zionism in the Persian Gulf, 1880-1948*
- **Kristine Sheets** (University of Exeter), *Third-Generation Voices: Memory and Identity in the Palestinian Diaspora*

The Prize Committee also adjudicated 24 submissions for the [Early Career Development Scholarship](#) and awarded two prizes of £3000 each to: **Farida Soliman** and **Dirwar Zawity**.

In the fall, we will also be awarding our 2025 Conference Student Paper Prize and encourage all students attending the conference to consider submitting their work (to be eligible for the prize, you need to be a student member of BRISMES and have presented a version of your paper at the 2025 conference). The prize winner receives £300 and is mentored through a review process at the British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies (BJMES) by a senior member of the BRISMES academic community (and have their work waived through desk review). Papers must be 8000-10,000 words long (including bibliography), based on original research, and not have been submitted anywhere else for publication.

For details about all of our prizes and prize winners, please visit:

<https://www.brismes.ac.uk/awards>

Graduate Section Activities

In the past year, our Graduate Section Co-Presidents Motasem Abuzaid and Yara Zebian have worked hard to expand outreach activities for graduate students, PhD students and Early Career Researchers (ECRs) and for ensuring that the voice of BRISMES students and ECRs is represented on BRISMES Council. To support this effort, the Graduate Section developed a questionnaire to help shape future events and priorities for student and ECR members. The results highlighted three key areas of interest: postdoctoral applications, publications, and grants. In response, the Graduate Section organised a well-attended [event](#) in May 2025 on postdoctoral funding opportunities, aimed at students and early-career scholars. A list of the Graduate Section's previous events can be found [here](#), where there are also video links to many of our former webinars. We encourage our student members attending the conference to attend the graduate section event on *Pathways to Publishing: Navigating Early Careers in Middle East Studies* on 2 July 2025. The Graduate Section continues to invite members to collaborate.

Promoting Research in Middle Eastern Studies and Supporting Early Career Researchers

Outreach and Pedagogy

The Outreach and Pedagogy Committee currently comprises Sabiha Allouche (chair), Sophie Chamas and Wassim Naboulsi. Our guiding principles are to highlight the work by younger/lesser-known scholars and scholars working in the Middle East, to contribute to debates on current affairs and to contribute to the field of MENA studies in the UK and beyond. This year, the Outreach and Pedagogy Committee has organised important events, including:

- A [webinar](#) on scholasticide featuring voices of educators in Gaza
- A [webinar](#) on funding opportunities for scholars in Middle Eastern Studies at the British International Research Institutes (BIRI)
- A [webinar/book launch](#) of Dr Rahaf Aldoughli's first book, *Romanticizing Masculinity in Baa'thist Syria*

Our events are free to attend and open to all. Many thanks to those who have volunteered their time to speak at our events, which are fully listed [here](#). Many of our past events can be watched on the [BRISMES YouTube channel](#). Finally, we welcome suggestions for collaborative events with other research centres and academic organisations.

BRISMES Comms

After the successful 2024 Instagram campaign showcasing our members' latest scholarship and making MENA cultural and political research accessible to non-specialists, the BRISMES Communications Committee - chaired by Feras Alkabani - continued this momentum in 2024-25 by growing our X (formerly Twitter) following from just over 10,000 to 10,200. Our Facebook followers have steadily increased from 7.9k to 8.2k, while our Instagram followers have grown from 660 to 1.1k. Just recently, we have opened a BlueSky account, which now has almost 100 followers.

Over the past year, we have continued to feature research and publications from members in the BRISMES Newsletter, on the website and on social media, but mostly we have been using social media for our advocacy work primarily related to attacks on academic freedom and the scholasticide carried out in Gaza. Our [online calendar](#) lists external MENA-related events taking place in the UK and online and the [opportunities](#) page of the website details calls for papers, vacancies and other opportunities related to Middle East Studies.

Promoting Research in Middle Eastern Studies and Supporting Early Career Researchers

We have also been collaborating with the communication teams of our partners such as the AHRC-funded Syrian Academics and Researchers' Network (SARN) in the UK and the Middle East and North Africa Centre at Sussex (MENACS), both of which have been promoting our events within their own networks and vice versa. At the BRISMES Annual Conference this year (2025), we will continue to cover the event on social media and hold brief interviews with members and delegates, which will be posted online to promote their work and maximise their networking opportunities.

British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies

The British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies, under the leadership of General Editor Lloyd Ridgeon, Book Reviews editor Alam Saleh and a strong [editorial board](#), has continued to publish cutting edge research and expand its reach and impact. The journal continues to improve in terms of downloads and numbers of submissions, and it remains the foremost UK journal in the field of Middle Eastern studies.

Our global circulation has increased by almost 500 subscriptions over the past five years and downloads are up to 20% compared to the late 2023, continuing a healthy trend that has led to an increase of 97% in article downloads since 2019.

This year the editorial board has continued publishing five issues per year, with thirteen articles per issue. In an effort to reduce the environmental impact of the journal, BRISMES has successfully implemented an 'opt-in policy' for receiving print copies of the journal. Currently, 90% of our members access the journal online instead of receiving a printed copy.

Academic Freedom and Advocacy

Committee on Academic Freedom

The Committee on Academic Freedom (CAF), chaired by BRISMES Co-Vice President Lewis Turner, has been working to monitor and defend academic freedom in the research, study and teaching of Middle East Studies in the UK and anywhere in the world, including in academic institutions in the Middle East and North Africa. Like 2023-2024, this past year has been particularly busy, in large part due to the repression that staff and students have faced as they attempt to speak out about Palestine.

Much of our work includes issuing public communications (letters and statements) in defence of academic freedom and freedom of expression, as they relate to Middle Eastern Studies. Some of these communications - especially those dealing with students - remain private and are not published on our website. What is detailed below is therefore a summary of the public activities of the committee.

This past year we have been particularly engaged in issues of freedom of expression and academic freedom as they relate to Palestine, in the UK and further afield. In August 2024 we released a [statement](#) condemning the recent wave of repression by university administrations directed at students involved in encampments and other protests opposing Israel's war on Gaza. In October 2023 we released a statement welcoming the recent [statement](#) by the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and association Gina Romero, calling upon all UK universities to implement the Special Rapporteur's recommendations immediately and in full, and [wrote](#) to Universities UK and all Vice-Chancellors asking them to implement the recommendations in full. In June this year, we released a [statement](#) responding to the Higher Education Policy Institute's recent report on the encampments and responses to them, outlining our concerns about the approach taken, and how the analysis itself risks undermining academic freedom and freedom of expression.

This past year has also seen numerous talks and events cancelled, in particular in relation to Palestine. We have supported the colleagues affected and written to numerous institutions, including the [University of Highlands and Islands](#), the [University of Sheffield](#), the [Free University of Berlin](#) and the [Technical University of Darmstadt](#) challenging these violations of academic freedom. In a similar vein, we have written to German authorities and politicians on numerous occasions (for example [here](#) and [here](#)) challenging their resolutions and policies on antisemitism, which have profoundly concerning implications for academic freedom.

What unites many of these approaches taken by universities is a troubling understanding and application of health and safety risk assessments, and the notion of risk more broadly.

Academic Freedom and Advocacy

In October 2024, we released a [statement](#) on such abuses of risk assessments, and how they have been used to curtail academic freedom and freedom of expression.

One further and particularly troubling case with which we have engaged extensively this year is the University of St Andrews' proceedings against its Rector Stella Maris, in a series of events dating back to her release of an October 2023 statement on the situation in Palestine. We have written to the university on numerous occasions (for example [here](#) and [here](#)) and spoken to the [media](#) about this issue and strongly welcome the Rector's [successful appeal](#) against her removal from the University Court. We continue to be engaged in the issues arising from this case, and the deeply concerning revelations that suggest the possibility of undue donor influence in the university's response to Rector Maris' statement.

Simultaneously, we have been attempting to remain engaged in other important questions of academic freedom and freedom of expression within the Middle East and as they pertain to the study of the Middle East. In August 2024, for example, we [wrote](#) to Bahraini authorities to express profound concern about the ongoing imprisonment of Bahraini academic Dr Abduljalil al-Singace and the violations of his academic freedom. More recently (June 2025), we [wrote](#) to the UK Prime Minister and Foreign Secretary demanding that they immediately intervene and lobby the Egyptian government for the immediate and unconditional release of British-Egyptian citizen Alaa Abd El-Fattah.

We have also been building links with our sister associations in Europe and North America, and issued multiple joint communications with them, including a September 2024 [joint letter](#) with the Italian Society for Middle Eastern Studies (SeSaMO) and the Middle East Studies Association (MESA) to Iranian authorities, protesting the persistent violations of academic freedom and freedom of expression in Iran. In November 2024 we sent a [joint letter](#) with the Société d'études du Moyen-Orient et du monde musulman (SEMOMM) and SeSaMO to Tunisian authorities regarding the ongoing detention of PhD student Victor Dupont. In March 2025, we wrote a [letter](#) with SEMOMM SeSaMO to the University of Lausanne to express grave concern about the treatment of Prof. Joseph Daher. Simultaneously, we have been working with colleagues in Germany to support their attempts to establish a Committee on Academic Freedom for the German Middle East Studies Association (DAVO).

At the AGM in Newcastle, the terms of three current members will come to an end. These are Bronwen Mehta, Andrea Teti and Neve Gordon. BRISMES is extremely grateful to all three for their extensive contributions to CAF in recent years. There is an ongoing nomination process to fill these and other vacant positions on the Committee, and we hope to confirm the appointment of five new members at this year's AGM.

BRISMES Campaigns

In October 2024, BRISMES Council made the decision to initiate discussions among its members, concerning the closing down of BRISMES Campaigns. The reasons behind this were both administrative and political. On one hand, much of the last four years of operations had been mired by ongoing financial and bureaucratic burdens, despite an extensive record of campaigns and advocacy, on the issue of BDS. On the other, the context in which BRISMES Campaigns was created has shifted; with the ongoing genocide and the growing support for boycott across UK institutions, there was a consensus among Council that BRISMES the Charity is already involved in parallel efforts to those being initiated by BRISMES Campaigns and should bring the remainder of its activities in-house.

An emergency general meeting was held on 17 December 2024 with BRISMES members, where members voted (almost unanimously) to dissolve BRISMES Campaigns and transition its activities to BRISMES the Charity. On 14th March, BRISMES Council ratified the decision. Following which, the directors of BRISMES Campaigns completed all necessary bureaucratic actions and procedures to close down the organisation. Over the next year, BRISMES will continue to follow up on activities initiated by BRISMES Campaigns, develop structures to take charge of these and other campaigns that might have previously fallen under BRISMES Campaigns and complete the transfer/archive of all materials from the website to BRISMES the Charity.

We would like to thank BRISMES Campaigns' past directors and activists for their incredible work.

Priorities for the Future

In the year ahead, BRISMES will continue to build on the momentum of recent work while responding to ongoing challenges within and beyond academia. We aim to find eligible candidates to stand for election for president, to become president elect in July 2026. Strengthening our advocacy around academic freedom will remain a central priority, particularly in defending scholars and students whose work or activism faces institutional or political repression. We are also committed to deepening member engagement through new initiatives and improved communication, ensuring that our growing and diverse community feels supported and connected. Supporting early-career scholars remains a cornerstone of our mission, and we will continue to provide opportunities for visibility, mentoring, and development. As part of our long-term vision, we will renew our efforts to establish a BRISMES endowment, to secure sustainable funding for our core activities and strategic priorities and to better understand the potential impact of increasing journal open access agreements for BJMES revenue. Following the success of the BRISMES Fund for Higher Education in Gaza, and in light of the incorporation of BRISMES Campaign activities into BRISMES the charity, we will continue to support initiatives that assist educators, researchers, and students in Gaza and stand in solidarity with colleagues in Palestine.

BRISMES Officers

On behalf of BRISMES Council

26 June 2025



BRISMES

British Society for Middle Eastern Studies



www.brismes.ac.uk



office@brismes.org



British Society for Middle Eastern Studies is a charity and a company limited by guarantee registered in England & Wales.

Company Number: 08747770

Registered Charity Number: 1161206

VAT Registration Number: 828 5681 90

Registered Office: 71-75 Shelton Street, Covent Garden, London WC2H 9JQ