

# **Nordic Society for Middle Eastern Studies**

## **Board Meeting, 20-21 April 2023, onsite and Zoom**

Present: Mark Sedgwick, Charlotte Lysa ([link](#)), Olof Heilo, Thorir Jonsson Hraundal, Laura Wickström, Kirstine Sinclair, Tiina Hyypä, Jacob Høigilt, Kjartan Orri Þórrsson, Oliver Scharbrodt ([link April 20](#)).

Minutes: Laura Wickström

### **1. Opening (15:50 EEST)**

- a) Approval of the agenda: no additions.
- b) Review of minutes from last meeting:
  - 1. Contacting people didn't solve the problem with lost or non-paying members.
  - 2. Web site: extending the social media presence to Instagram. Further discussed under 2 b.
  - 3. EURAMES Newsletter: we will continue to send the newsletter to our members. Perhaps a Nordic newsletter besides the EURAMES would increase the Nordic sense of community. Further discussed under 2 b.
  - 4. General brainstorming: what to do when the field of the Middle Eastern studies is changing. Decided to change website text to say "researchers in the Nordic countries working on the Middle East and Islam", and in the next conference call for papers an addition should include studies on Islam

### **2. Reports**

- a) Membership (Laura): the Society has lost a total of 24 members since the conference in Reykjavik in September 2022. The overwhelming majority of the lost members were corresponding members who had applied for membership to attend the conference from non-Nordic countries. There is a great difference between the countries with Norway having excellent member statistics, followed by Denmark and Sweden. The particularly low number of ordinary members from Finland remained as a discussion. Laura and Tiina will contact the missing members for their country personally. The upcoming PhD school will hopefully increase the Finnish memberships since attendance requires membership.

Oliver reported the existence of a well-attended network of Swedish scholars of Middle Eastern studies, SWEMENA, most of the members of which are not members of NSMES. Oliver will approach the network to establish how it and NSMES can best relate to each other.

There was concern that the DKK membership fees might look very high to those who are used to euros. Kirstine will look into the possibility whether euros can be included on the membership form in addition the DKK.

- b) Website and online presence (Tiina): Facebook and Twitter are the society's main information channels. Facebook has 100 followers and Twitter 93. Less young people use Facebook so the board decided to extend the social media presence of the society to Instagram. Tiina will do this.

A discussion of a Nordic newsletter took place. The idea is to provide with information of events and publications from the five countries. After a discussion the board concluded that since it is difficult to gather and send out relevant information on time, the newsletter will not take place.

After a short break of sending out the EURAMES newsletter the feedback was that scholars had noticed it to be missing. The board concluded that we will continue to send it out to our members. Laura is forwarding it from Jürgen Meier every week.

### **3. Finances**

- a) Accounts for 2022–23 (Kirstine):  
The conference surplus was 5,841 DKK. The extra memberships in connection with the conference in Reykjavik made the membership fees higher this year. The society has not recently paid for the Mideast Wire, but the amount involved is small. The overall situation of the accounts is good. Due to high banking fees from Danske Bank, the board raised the question whether we really need an account with them – what are the benefits? Kirstine will look into this.

Accounts were approved unanimously.

- b) Budget for 2023-24 (Kirstine):  
As always on conference years, the current surplus is largely due to the conference surplus passed to the society. The 2,700 DKK in the budget for useful initiatives is allocated to the PhD course and PhD school in Istanbul. Kirstine will use what is needed for the PhD course, the rest is left for the course in Istanbul.

### **4. PhD courses (Kirstine)**

- a) Online networking (progress):  
Kirstine coordinated earlier a meeting for PhD students and mapped what wishes the students have. The three main topics for PhD courses are intersectionality, gender and media. The list of students is not complete and Kirstine will make an updated list. Seven students participated in the meeting and they were happy to have the meeting and that the society was ready to organize something additional for them. The PhD students requested an informal event where they could discuss among themselves and they were asked to consider different formats (driven by themselves). Nothing happened, so Kirstine will email all the PhD students she receives contacts to from the other board members in order to start up the online networking again.

- b) Online workshops (proposal):  
PhD students appreciate the PhD school and wish there were more offered in between. It was decided that an actual PhD school should continue to be offered physically every three years, not online.
- c) Online courses (plan):  
Online courses should be organized by the society and should carry recommended ECTS.  
Suggested topics: intersectionality and Muslims in the West. Jacob and Kirstine form a committee to organize online courses and will decide the topics and find lecturers. A more general topic such as theory and methods in Middle Eastern Studies would be more inclusive and attractive to a larger group of students. Volunteers will be asked to lecture. The course needs to avoid overlaps with MESA that takes place in November. There will be an announcement in the fall.

## 5. Coming events

- a) Thesis award (Charlotte): The committee for the thesis award 2022 consisted of Charlotte, Oliver and Laura. The winner of the MA Thesis Award 2022 is Maiken Omnes Frydenlund (University of Oslo) for the thesis "Meddling with my Dough-Baking Hands! Protest Language and Stigma in Contemporary Turkey".  
The next committee for the thesis award 2023 consists of Charlotte, Thorir and Oliver. The theses need to be written either in a Scandinavian language or in English.
- b) 2024 PhD school in Istanbul (Olof): The dates for the PhD school at the Swedish Institute in Istanbul will be 19-22 August, with arrival on 18 August, board meeting in the afternoon of the 20th, and with departure on 23 August. On the arrival day there will be a reception in the evening. Not all board members need to stay for the entire PhD school but everyone make sure to be on site for the board meeting.  
Optimal would be that the PhD school is planned for 5-10 students due to limited space in the guest house. There will be city walks and study visits to relevant sites.  
The guest house of the Swedish Institute has places with nine rooms, which will be used by PhD students. Board members will need to stay at hotels but are offered free food by the Institute and might get help with accommodation. Their travel is on own expense.  
PhD Students are asked to pay for their flights/travels but accommodation is provided for. There might be some subsidies for some student flights but this will be confirmed later by Olof.  
Call announces a theme on Mobility and Migration; anybody that is working in the Nordics is welcome to apply, whether or not their topic fits the theme. Their work will be commented on by board members with experience of PhD supervision.  
Criteria for selected participants: Quality, relevance to theme, coherence.  
Olof will write the call that will be announced in mid-September.  
Olof, Jacob and Mark will go through the applications.  
Deadline for proposals December 1st, notification in February.

c) 2025 conference in Oslo (Jacob, Charlotte): The call for the conference will be ready after Istanbul. The conference dates are set for three full days on 23-25 September, 2025.

The old board will have its last meeting on 22 September, 2025.

The new board will have its first meeting on 26 September, 2025.

## **6. General brainstorming**

In the future, the board network can be used for the benefit of local students as it was done in Åbo. Laura organized open lectures at Åbo Akademi University in Åbo/Turku on 19-20 April where Thorir, Kirstine and Mark lectured from the board. In addition, Yafa Shanneik, visiting Professor of Islamic Studies at the University of Lund/Sweden was invited.

For the next board meetings, the minutes from the previous meeting will be attached together with the agenda by the secretary. Since the board only meets once a year a reminder of the previous decisions and discussions is appreciated.

## **7. Any other business**

There was no other business.

## **Meeting ended (11:20 EEST)**

Minutes done by Laura Wickström.