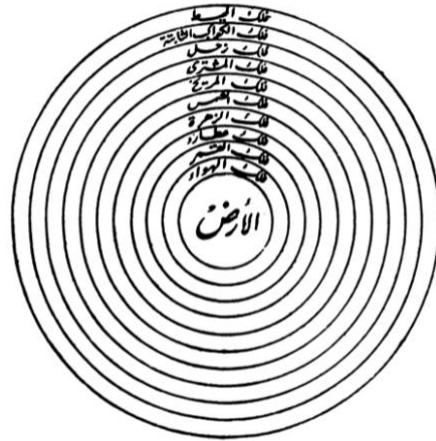


Call for Participation

Towards a History of the Circle in the Middle East

Middle East Studies Association (MESA) Panel
Washington DC, October 10-13th, 2020



Proposed Session Description:

That circles (*dawā'ir*) are a central metaphor in various strands of Middle Eastern thought and indeed can be found in different spheres of knowledge from architecture, design, and geography to theology, mysticism, and theories of governance is well known. As a way of thinking, the circle frames ideas from large-scale cosmic phenomena and theories of time, space and economy to conceptions of society and selfhood. Scholars have investigated the meaning and function of circles as powerful symbols, heuristic tools and instruments of visualization in different contexts such as medieval cosmographical charts, the building of centers of power like Mecca and Baghdad, imperial doctrines of justice, and modern historicities of nationalism. Working with and through circles has become a necessary component of the researcher's skill set. Yet, no attempts have been made to address the question of circularity as a unitary historical phenomenon across epochs and geographies. This panel considers the multitude of ways in which circles have provided an intellectual infrastructure for ideas and practices of knowledge-making, craft, and spirituality. Approaching them as such, circles become simultaneously tools of investigation as much as objects of inquiry in their own right. Starting with circles as material objects, we aim to broaden the scope of analysis to address metaphors of circularity as they are instantiated in daily practices and spheres experience. Our panel will gather scholars from a diversity of disciplines and time periods in order to generate new methodologies in the study of visual and textual cultures in the Middle East by bringing celestial charts, spiritual handbooks, discursive traditions and ritual practices together in a conversation.

We welcome submissions on any time period and regions of the Middle East broadly defined. The final deadline for submitting abstracts (300-500 words) for Middle East Studies Association Conference is February 18th. We request abstracts and short bios to be sent to us by **February 10th, 2020**.

Please send abstracts to Adrien Zakar azakar@stanford.edu and/or Amer Ibraheem ani2110@columbia.edu.