

FIME Annual Report 2019

The Finnish Institute in the Middle East (FIME) is an academic institute that focuses on the study of Middle Eastern cultures, religions, societies, and classical and modern languages. The Institute supports Finnish research on the Middle East and offers teaching in this field in cooperation with universities. It also participates in public discourse carried out in Finland on Middle Eastern issues by providing research-based commentary. The Institute's sphere of operations covers the entire Middle East. It is registered in Lebanon and Syria and has a representative in Cairo, Egypt. The foundation that maintains the Institute has an office in Helsinki.

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Message from the chairman

The Finnish Institute in the Middle East celebrated its 25th anniversary in September 2019. It takes a quarter of a century for a person to grow from child to adult or to forge an entire working career. From an academic viewpoint, it takes at least a quarter of a century to perceive the significance of an individual scholar's career and its impact. The same can be said for an academic institute, such as the Finnish Institute in the Middle East, for which the celebration held last autumn provided a suitable opportunity to take a look both backwards and forwards. Looking back is easier because we know and remember where the Institute has been, what it has accomplished, and what kinds of difficulties it has overcome. Thinking of our history, we have reason to be grateful and proud. As for looking into the future, that is impossible for anyone. The Institute's history shows that no matter how good our decision-making, we cannot control the future, but a functioning work community can tackle even big surprises.

The past decade has been a period of growth and flourishing for the Finnish Institute in the Middle East, although our operating environment has been under constant change due to wars and political unrest. The war in Syria forced the Institute to move out of Damascus, first to Amman and finally to Beirut, which has

been a good place to work. In spite of the turbulence around us, the activities of the Finnish Institute in the Middle East and the Foundation maintaining it have increased and diversified. The Foundation has gained a stronger financial base, enabling a greater number of employees in 2019 than ever before.

Once again I have the pleasure of thanking the board members of the Foundation, our executive Inka Nokso-Koivisto, assistant Ella Kaplas, and project worker Kira Pihlflyckt, as well as our employees in the Middle East: Director Raija Mattila, researchers Taavi Sundell and Anu Leinonen, director's assistant Manal Chatila, our representative Said Sadek in Cairo, and our interns Miriam Huovila and Evelina Sironen. In honour of our anniversary, I would also like to thank the former directors of the Institute, Irmeli Perho, Hannu Juusola, and Ari Kerkkänen; our first director Mikko Louhivuori is already beyond my thanks. I would also like to thank my predecessors in the role of chairman, Heikki Palva, Jussi Nuorteva and Jaakko Hämeen-Anttila, as well as the Foundation's earlier executives Aarne Toivanen, Sanna Aro-Valjus, and Heli Oksanen. Finally, I would like to extend my warmest thanks to Honorary Consul General Zafer Chaoui, to whom we are grateful for our home in Beirut, and to wish our friends in the Middle East fortitude in waiting for permanent peace.

Helsinki, 17 February 2020

Martti Nissinen
Chairman, Foundation of the Finnish Institute in the Middle East

Review by the director

My term as the director of the Finnish Institute in the Middle East ends at the end of May 2020, by which date I will have worked in the Middle East for a total of ten years. I was the director of the Institute in Damascus from 2005 to 2008, and from 2014 onwards I have managed the Institute in Beirut.

It is a pleasure to state that research carried out at the Institute has continued to grow and diversify. In addition to the director, there are now two other researchers active on site. The position of researcher-coordinator was established in 2015 and is still ongoing, and a third research position was opened in 2019. We can now invest in studying both the modern Middle East and the history of the region.

The Institute's activities are truly international. In 2019, scholars from 30 different countries took part in our activities. We have good connections with Finnish, local, and international universities and researchers, and our network is constantly expanding. The Institute is a trusted and desired partner in cooperation. Each year, dozens of university students from Finland participate in the Institute's intensive courses in the Middle East. The Finnish Institute in the Middle East is a significant resource for Finnish research in the Middle East. All this is built on the long-term work of my predecessors and everyone active in the Foundation and the Institute.

Beirut, 18 February 2020

Raija Mattila
Director of the Finnish Institute in the Middle East

NOSTO: "We have good connections with Finnish, local, and international universities and researchers, and our network is constantly expanding."

Finnish Institute in the Middle East

The Institute's academic activities consist of the research carried out by the director, researcher, and researcher-coordinator, academic cooperation in the form of conferences, workshops, and research projects, as well as helping Finnish researchers and building academic contact networks in the Middle East.

The Institute supports cooperation between researchers and universities and furthers the internationalization of Finnish research and higher education, as well as the openness of research.

The Institute organizes teaching in connection with universities and participates in public discourse on the Middle East in Finland.

Research

The Assyrian Empire

The director of the Institute, Raija Mattila, focuses her research on the Assyrian Empire, which ruled the Middle East in the first millennium BC. Mattila is especially interested in Assyrian administration and population diversity. In 2019, she organized a research workshop on minorities in Mesopotamia, studied the composition and situation of the Assyrian elite, and participated in the publication of cuneiform documents found in excavations carried out by the British School of Archaeology in Nimrud, Iraq, in the 1950s. Mattila is also interested in the significance of animals in ancient societies, and she organized a workshop dealing with animals in Lebanon in cooperation with local researchers.

Language policies in Turkey

Dr Anu Leinonen, FIME's researcher, began her postdoctoral research in June 2019. Her research deals with language policies in Turkey concerning minority languages, with a special focus on Kurdish in the beginning of the project. In the autumn of 2019, Leinonen interviewed language activists active in Turkey, such as publishers, teachers, and researchers. They reported severe pressure on the Kurdish language and setbacks in the implementation of language rights after the fall of the peace process in 2015. The promising development achieved earlier has almost come to a standstill. Language activists worry about the gradual disappearance of Kurdish language skills, demand that Kurdish be taught as a native language in comprehensive schools, and criticize Kurdish politicians for understating language issues.

The political economy of higher education in Jordan and Finland

Master of Social Sciences Taavi Sundell, FIME's researcher-coordinator, is currently finishing up his doctoral dissertation in world politics on the political economy of higher education in Jordan and Finland. His article-style dissertation is based on discourse theory and critical political economy, and it examines how various actors articulate the border between private and public in higher education and what understanding of the social role of universities and higher education they base their actions on. The part of the dissertation dealing with Finland is based on existing documentary material, and the part dealing with Jordan will be supplemented with interview material collected by Sundell in Jordan from 2013 to 2017.

Academic cooperation

Breaking and Creating Boundaries, Helsinki, 13 to 16 August

The Nordic Society for Middle Eastern Studies organizes an international conference every third year. In 2019, a total of 186 researchers focusing mainly on modern issues in the Middle East, North Africa, and Islam met in Helsinki. The presentations and discussions covered societies in the MENA area and the changes they have undergone in recent decades from the viewpoints of gender, identity, migration, and religion, among other things. FIME organized the conference in cooperation with the University of Helsinki.

From the Mountains to the Sea: The Relations between Animals and Humans in Lebanon through Time, Beirut, 13 to 14 September

This workshop covered the historical fauna of Lebanon and the relationship between people and animals by means of archaeology, iconography, and text studies. FIME arranged the workshop in cooperation with the Department of History and Archaeology at the American University of Beirut (AUB) and the Lebanese University.

Minorities in Mesopotamia Workshop 2, Beirut, 8 to 10 April

This was the second workshop in the project surveying population diversity and the social, economic, and cultural positions of minorities in the Assyrian and Babylonian Empires in the first millennium BC. The workshop focused on the current state of research and vital research questions that are still open, and it was organized in cooperation with the Ancient Near Eastern Empires and Changes in Ancient Texts and Traditions Centres of Excellence of the Academy of Finland.

Emigration and Diaspora, Beirut, 23 May

This one-day seminar discussed the question of refugees and emigration from the viewpoint of the countries of origin. It was arranged as a part of cooperation between FIME, the Finnish Institute in Madrid, the Finnish Institute in Germany, and the Migration Institute of Finland.

Formative Tendencies in Near Eastern Religions and Ideologies, Beirut, 15 to 16 April

FIME hosted this workshop organized by the Centre for Oriental Studies of the University of Tartu and dealing with the development of religions in the ancient Near East.

Recreating Pluralism & Syrian Refugees, Lebanon, 7 to 11 July

This three-day seminar examined the meaning of interreligious dialogue and religious tolerance to refugees, and it was preceded by visits to Tripoli and Akkar in North Lebanon. The seminar was organized by Creating Pluralism in Post-Ottoman Societies, Orient Institut, and FIME.

The history of diplomatic relations between Finland and Iran

An account of the diplomatic relations between Finland and Iran, dating back to over a century, was initiated in cooperation with the Ministries of Foreign Affairs of Finland and Iran. The account is based on the archives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Iran and carried out by Joonas Maristo, MA.

Open Research: The digital archiving and publishing of the scholarly remains of Hilma Granqvist

FIME is a partner in cooperation in the project led by the Society of Swedish Literature in Finland (SLS) aiming to digitize and publish the scholarly remains of Hilma Granqvist, a pioneer of Finnish anthropological research. The digitization and digital publication of Hilma Granqvist's archives are an essential part of FIME's contribution to the Open Research Data project of the Finnish academic institutes. During 2019, the rest of Granqvist's work was published in a digital format, as well as a significant body of photographic material. The material can be found at granqvist.sls.fi.

Open access publication

FIME continues to cooperate in open access publication in connection with the *Studia Orientalia Electronica* series published by the Finnish Oriental Society.

Courses

Lebanon 2019: Political dynasties, sectarianism, and the position of refugees, Beirut, 19 to 25 May

This course taught by Professor Hannu Juusola allowed students to familiarize themselves with current issues in Lebanon. The course included visits to local research centres and presentations by Lebanese scholars analysing their country's situation. FIME organized this course in cooperation with the University of Helsinki and the Finnish Association for Students of Middle Eastern and North African Studies.

Training course for teachers in Lebanon, 9 to 15 June

The Association for Teachers of History and Social Studies in Finland arranged a course providing a versatile look at modern and historical Lebanon. The course included a one-day seminar on the Lebanese education system and a visit to a local school.

Course on the history of antiquity by Trier University in Lebanon, 13 to 22 September

FIME assisted a group of professors and students of ancient history from Trier University in Germany in planning and carrying out a course in Lebanon.

Participation in public discourse

The Institute takes communications into account in planning all its activities and actively disseminates information to representatives of the media. The Institute also attempts to gain media coverage for its operations and is active on social media. In 2019, FIME organized the following public events related to the Middle East:

- **The Future of Iraq: Will it Rise or Fall?**, *Helsinki, 14 August*
- **A public talk on the impact of the Arab Spring**, *Lieto, 5 November*
- **The situation in Syria and its effects on the Middle East**, *Helsinki, 26 November*
- **A Century of Life and Conflict in Palestine**, *Helsinki, 29 November*

Lähi-itä NYT (Middle East NOW) blog

www.lahi-itanyt.fi

This blog contains articles that clarify and summarize the torrent of news dealing with the Middle East and provide background information on current events. The multivoiced platform straddles fast-moving news broadcasting and analytical academic research, offering various broad, critical perspectives on the Middle East and the region's events. The blog's editor-in-chief is Professor Hannu Juusola, the vice-chairman of the board of the Foundation, and the guest authors are experts in their fields. The blog's Paikan päältä (On the Spot) section provides readers with a diverse picture of everyday life in the region behind news headlines.

Lukemista Levantista (in Finnish)

www.fime.fi/category/lukemista-levantista

The institute continued to publish *Lukemista Levantista* ("Readings from the Levant"), a series of articles in Finnish written by experts presenting a broad range of academic research related to the Middle East and aimed at a general readership.

Communication

The Institute communicates actively about its own events and other news on its website, Facebook, and Instagram, as well as in its Finnish-language newsletter, which comes out six times a year. The summary of the 2019 annual report will be published in print in Finnish and English.

Culture

Accordionist Kimmo Pohjonen performed in Lebanon, Chateau Ksara, 16 and 17 May

Kimmo Pohjonen's Solo performance delighted listeners in two concerts organized by FIME in cooperation with the Embassy of Finland in Beirut and the Honorary Consulate General of Finland in Beirut. The concerts took place at the Ksara winery in the Beqaa valley.

In connection with the Nordic Conference on Middle Eastern Studies, a night of Middle Eastern culture was organized at the KoKo Jazz Club in Helsinki. The event was held on the Night of the Arts, 15 August, and it was open to the public. Meera Band played Arabic, Persian, and Kurdish music, and the Iraqi-born, Helsinki-based poet Muhaned Durubi recited his poetry. A total of 290 people attended the event, which was arranged in cooperation with the Finnish network of the Anna Lindh Foundation.

Cooperation partners and networks

Activities in 2019 were carried out in cooperation with numerous partners in Finland and the Middle East. These partners include the following: The University of Helsinki and its various departments and units (such as the Changes in Sacred Texts and Traditions Centre of Excellence), Åbo Akademi University, the Nordic Society for Middle Eastern Studies (NSMES), the American University of Beirut (AUB), Université libanaise, the University of Tartu, Trier University, Institut français du Proche-Orient IFPO, Salahaddin University – Hawler Department of Archaeology, Lebanese Association for History, Centre for Lebanese Studies, Lebanese American University, Husameddine Hariri Highschool, UMAM Documentation and Research Organisation, AUB Neighbourhood Initiative, Carnegie Middle East Center, Lebanese Center for Policy Studies, KAFA organisation, Fighters for Peace, Beit Atfal Assumoud, UNWRA, the Creating Pluralism in Post-Ottoman Societies programme, the Melammu Project, Finland's other academic institutes and cultural institutes with academic activities, the Institute of International Affairs, the Migration Institute of Finland, the Finnish National Agency for Education, the Finnish Association for Students of Middle Eastern and North African Studies, the Finnish Oriental Society, the Association for Teachers of History and Social Studies in Finland, the Association of Finnish Foreign Affairs Journalists, MONIKA Multicultural Women's Association, the Society of Swedish Literature in Finland (SLS), the Anna Lindh Foundation, Svenska teologiska institutet, Suomen kirkon pappisliitto ry (the Lutheran priests' association), Teologian Ylioppilaiden Tiedekuntayhdistys (the faculty association of theology students), the Embassy of Finland in Beirut, and the Embassy of Finland in Tehran, as well as Zafer Chaoui, Honorary Consul General of Finland in Lebanon, and Dr Rakan Rshaidat, Honorary Consul General of Finland in Jordan.

Finnish Academic Institutes Abroad

FIME was an active participant in the Finnish Academic Institutes Abroad forum. On 11 January, in connection with the Science Forum, the Finnish Academic Institutes Abroad forum arranged a workshop called "Build your own mystical ritual". FIME also presented its activities at two events organized by the forum under the title "Opportunities for university staff" at the University of Oulu on 20 November and the University of Jyväskylä on 21 November.

Finnish Cultural and Academic Institutes Association (SKTI)

FIME took an active part in the Finnish Cultural and Academic Institutes Association. The chairman of the board of SKTI is Sakari Karjalainen, who is also a board member of the Foundation of the Finnish Institute in the Middle East.

Network of experts and students focusing on the Middle East

The Finnish Institute in the Middle East coordinates a network for Finnish researchers, other experts, and students focusing on the Middle East. Its activities include gathering and disseminating information and communication by means of e-mail and regular network meetings. The network organized one student meeting and two researcher meetings in 2019.

Institute personnel

Director: Adjunct Professor, Dr Raija Mattila, Beirut
Researcher: Dr Anu Leinonen, Beirut (starting from 1 June)
Researcher-coordinator: Taavi Sundell, M.Soc.Sc., Beirut
Assistant to the director: Manal Chatila, Beirut (part-time)
Representative: Dr Said Sadek, Cairo (part-time)

Interns funded by the Finnish National Agency for Education:
Miriam Huovila, BA, Beirut (5 months)
Evelina Sironen, M.Soc.Sc. Beirut (5 months)

Foundation of the Finnish Institute in the Middle East

The Foundation's office is in Helsinki, and the Foundation's personnel in Helsinki also participate in operational activities, especially in organizing public events in Finland. The year 2019 marked the 25th anniversary of the Foundation, which was celebrated on 19 September by organizing a reception in Helsinki.

Grants

The Foundation of the Finnish Institute in the Middle East awarded grants totalling 10,944 euros to eight researchers and students for research in countries within the Institute's sphere of operations, for related travel, and for Arabic language studies. The recipients of the grants spent altogether almost 7 months in the Middle East.

Administration

The Foundation of the Finnish Institute in the Middle East is a foundation registered in Finland whose highest power of decision lies with the board of trustees. The board and the managers it appoints are responsible for the administration of the Institute governed by the Foundation. In 2019, the board met four times and consisted of the following experts:

Professor Martti Nissinen (chairman)

Deputy member: Tom Kankkonen, journalist

Professor Hannu Juusola (vice-chairman)

Deputy member: Professor Jutta Jokiranta

Dr Teija Tiilikainen, director

Deputy member: Dr Toni Alaranta

Iiris Kivimäki, director of communications until 26 March; Tero Norjanen, expatriate director

Deputy member: Rolf Steffansson, ThM

Adjunct Professor, Dr Sakari Karjalainen, secretary general

Deputy member: Samu Seitsalo, director

Dr Pekka Lindqvist

Deputy member: Professor Antti Laato until 26 March; Dr Lotta Valve

Adjunct Professor Jyri Komulainen

Deputy member: Dr Elina Hellqvist

Ambassador Risto Veltheim

Deputy member: Kari Norkonmaa, M.Soc.Sc.

Adjunct Professor, Dr Teuvo Laitila

Deputy member: Professor Serafim Seppälä

Ambassador Maria Serenius

Deputy member: Patrick Lindgren. LL.M.

Adjunct Professor Saana Svärd

Deputy member: Dr Aini Linjakumpu

Foundation personnel in Finland

- Executive officer: Dr Anu Leinonen, Helsinki (until 31 May, on research leave starting from 1 June) (part-time)
- Deputy to the executive officer: Dr Inka Nokso-Koivisto (from 1 June)
- Administrative and communications assistant: Ella Kaplas, MA (part-time)
- Project worker: Kira Pihlflyckt (Hilma Granqvist project) (part-time)

Funding

The Foundation's total expenditure in 2019 was 539,264 euros. The Foundation's income consisted of an operational subsidy and special subsidy of the Ministry of Education and Culture (72%) and funding for the coordination of the Finnish network of the Anna Lindh Foundation (10%), as well as other subsidies, own income, and donations (18%). The Foundation's financial situation is stable.

Friends of the Finnish Institute in the Middle East (SLIY)

The Friends of the Finnish Institute in the Middle East also celebrated its 25th anniversary in 2019. In honour of this, the association organized a trip to Lebanon in cooperation with the Institute. In addition, the association organized various public events with cooperation partners and awarded a scholarship for a master's thesis dealing with the Middle East.

www.sliy.fi

Coordinating the Finnish network of the Anna Lindh Foundation (ALF)

The Anna Lindh Foundation (ALF) is a network of networks within the framework of the Union for the Mediterranean that has over 4,000 member organizations in 42 countries. It aims to promote understanding between people in EU countries and on the southern side of the Mediterranean, as well as to foster cooperation between the region's non-governmental organizations, cultural networks, and other actors. Each member country has a national network and a network coordinator. In the beginning of 2019, FIME started its two-year term as the coordinator of the Finnish network of the Anna Lindh Foundation after a break of eight months. The funding for coordinating the Finnish network is provided by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Finland and the Anna Lindh Foundation.

At the end of 2019, the Finnish network included 106 members, most of which are non-governmental organizations. As the coordinator of the network, FIME represents the ALF in Finland, provides information about its activities, develops and extends the Finnish network, encourages cooperation between NGOs, and aims to increase general knowledge of the cultures and civic societies of the Middle East and North Africa in Finland. The ALF coordination produces its own strategy and annual report (www.annalindhfinland.fi), but some of its events are organized in cooperation with FIME. In 2019, for example, FIME organized two panel discussions in cooperation with other members of the network at the Finnish Social Forum (4 May) and a discussion on social media in the Middle East at the World Village Festival (25 May). The main event of the Finnish Anna Lindh network was the Celebrating our Diversity forum organized in cooperation with the Swedish network and held in Helsinki from 9 to 11 October. Active members of civic society from 14 different countries participated in this forum.

www.annalindhfinland.fi

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Layout: Anne-Mari Ahonen

Photographs: