



MENA Studies Centre
Brown Bag Research Talks, Programme Winter 2022
Theme: **Foodways of the Middle East and North Africa**

This winter the Middle East and North Africa Studies Centre will host three brown-bag talks via Zoom:

Thursday, Jan. 27, 12:00–1:30pm

Dr. Jean Li:

"A Thousand of Bread, A Thousand of Beer..." Exploring the complexities of the staples of the ancient Egyptian diet

Abstract: Images from ancient Egypt depict processions of offering bearers and lavish offering tables laden with an abundance of food and beverages necessary to sustain the living, dead, and divine. Of vital importance are the two staples of the ancient Egyptian diet: bread and beer. This presentation explores the historical and cultural importance of bread and beer in ancient Egypt.

Jean Li received her PhD in Egyptian art and archaeology from the University of California, Berkeley. Currently she is Associate Director of the el-Hibeh, Egypt, project. Her research focuses on the Third Intermediate Period (ca. 1069-664 BCE) in Egypt, on which she has written chapters in the forthcoming *The Oxford History of Ancient Egypt* (3rd edition) and *The Oxford History of the Ancient Near East*.

Thursday, Feb. 17, 12:00–1:30pm

Val Lem:

Food in MENA Diasporic Writings in Canada in English

Abstract: As with many other "ethnic" groups that settled in Canada, it took decades before MENA immigrants began to publish literary works and memoirs in English. Many recent immigrants and Canadian-born generations are now entering the literary landscape. Identifying these writers was an important step before digging into their output to uncover how food, the theme of this lecture series, figures in their writings.

Val Lem is the university's liaison librarian for History, English, Caribbean Studies, and Languages, Literatures and Cultures. His research interests include bibliographical studies, children's literature, and book history. He created the *Asian Heritage in Canada* website hosted by the library and published more than 170 reviews of children's literature in *CM Magazine* (online).

Thursday, March 31, 12:00–1:30pm

Dr. Ann McDougall:

The Hidden Ties that Bind: Slavery, wet-nursing and milk-kinship in Mauritania (Northwest Africa)

Abstract: In Mauritania, sharing a mother's milk creates a kinship bond that is as strong and long-lasting as a blood relationship. It entails the same intimacies and responsibilities. But unlike most blood ties, milk-ties cross-cut class, historically making brothers and sisters of slaves and freeborn and, in contemporary times, creating networks among rich and poor. Milk kinship continues to shape what is understood as 'family'. Yet these 'ties that bind' are all but invisible to outsiders. Today, as tradition and memory reside increasingly among a dwindling generation of elders, even young Mauritians find themselves strangers to their own family history.

Ann McDougall is Professor of History in the Department of History, Classics and Religion at the University of Alberta. She is a founder and former Director of U of A's program in Middle Eastern and African Studies. Her research covers a wide range of topics in the social and economic history of Northwest Africa (southern Morocco and Mauritania) with a particular focus on labour, desert salts, slavery and women. She is currently researching a social history of workers in the Mauritanian iron ore industry with particular attention to 'invisible people' known as *haratine* (SSRHC 2018-22).