

UGA Libraries Undergraduate Research Award Application

I first became interested in the Middle East during high school, when I began following news stories about the Iraq War. My interest in the war, and my feeling that most commentators were pretty clueless about what was actually happening in Iraq, led me to begin studying Arabic as a freshman at UGA. I was quickly captivated, not only by the beauty and complexity of the language, but also but also by the pieces of Arab culture I picked up along the way. Since that first Arabic class, I haven't looked back: I have continued to study Arabic and the Middle East through a number of history classes, as well as studying abroad and living with homestays in Morocco and Jordan as a Boren Scholar.

In the summer of 2015, through UGA's Honors in Washington program, I worked as an intern at the Institute for the Study of War in Washington, D.C. My work on the Iraq team was an in-depth crash course in the current situation of the country that had first led me to study the Middle East. I spent the summer tracking and analyzing security and political developments in Iraq using Arabic-language sources, and in the process learned about the country's unique intersection of religion and politics. Even so, I completed my internship with more questions about Iraq than when I began, and knew that I wanted to continue trying to decipher this fascinating place whose fate has become so closely linked with the U.S. In particular, I wanted to understand how recent Iraqi history shaped the consequences of Saddam's overthrow, and where the roots of today's tragic dysfunction and poisonous sectarianism could be found.

In the fall semester of 2015, I began reading everything I could find on modern Iraq in order to choose a topic for my year-long senior thesis project with Dr. Kevin Jones in the History department. In particular, I was interested in learning about the historical role of the Shi'a religious establishment in politics, as well as roots of the Sadrist Movement, a Shi'a populist social movement with a large political following and a powerful militia. I also wanted to explore the role of tribes and tribalism in Iraq – a phenomenon that is still not well understood in the West. The historiography of modern Iraq is relatively small, which meant that I could make a useful contribution to the field; on the other hand, many fundamental questions remain unanswered, and I have been unable to pursue certain avenues simply because there is no base of research on which to build.

In my research meeting with librarians Nan McMurry and Emily Luken, they showed me how to use Index Islamicus and other GALILEO databases to find several relevant book chapters I had overlooked. They also encouraged me to use the Interlibrary Loan system to request Arabic-language materials if needed, and I was able to borrow a copy of Sadr's biography through this system.

Locating Arabic-language primary sources on the Middle East is always difficult: often, there is no paper trail, and if one does exist, it is not available for public scrutiny. These problems are

compounded in Iraq, whose recent history of dictatorship and civil war have made even record-keeping difficult. In the course of my literature review, I found out about an archive of Ba'th Party documents recovered by an Iraqi non-profit in the aftermath of the U.S. invasion in 2003 and currently held by the Hoover Institution at Stanford University. In order to use this archive, I was required to obtain an Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval because of the potentially sensitive information in the documents collected about people without their knowledge or consent who are still living and propose a plan to protect the identities of any non-public figures I encountered during my research. Fortunately, I was able to use funds from a CURO Research Assistantship to travel to Stanford in January and spend a week working in the archive. I hoped to find how the Ba'th viewed and interacted with Muhammad Sadiq al-Sadr, the populist Shi'a cleric who founded the movement carrying his name in the 1990s. During Sadr's early years, the government tolerated his rise, but as he gained a mass following among poor urban Shia in the slums of Baghdad as well as tribes in central and southern Iraq and then increasingly tested the regime's limits, he was assassinated in 1999. However, his movement did not disintegrate: since 2003, his son Muqtada al-Sadr has remobilized the same support base and commands immense influence both in parliament and in the security realm through its large militia.

The Ba'th Party archive was daunting to navigate. It contains over 11 million pages of internal correspondence, which is digitized but not searchable and for the most part, the boxes do not have full descriptions of their content. Of course, everything is in Arabic, and although I had no problem reading the documents, I could not skim as quickly as in English. I quickly realized that studying Iraqi tribes under Saddam was beyond the scope of my project as well as my expertise. The archivist in charge of the Ba'th Party documents pointed me to one reference to Sadr, but otherwise I was on my own. I spent most of my first day trying to orient myself with the archive's organization and familiarizing myself with the format and jargon used in the documents. At first, it was incredibly difficult to discern the pertinent information from the mundane. This was particularly difficult because the bureaucracy generated an enormous paper trail, most of it dealing with everyday issues such as promotions, thefts, and ordinary requests for information from other branches of the party or government. I was also under a strict time limit – a week is not nearly enough for such a vast archive – and needed to skim as quickly as possible while making sure not to miss important information in documents with unremarkable titles like “Report” and “Suggestions.”

Thankfully, I realized which two party branches collected the majority of information on Sadr: one was based in Najaf and covered both that city's Shia clerical class and Kufa, where Sadr was based; the other, which often took charge in surveilling religious activities, was based in a suburb of Baghdad where a major Shi'a shrine was located. In the correspondence of these two branches in the years 1998 and 1999, I found numerous reports on Sadr, the massively attended Friday prayers he held, and his representatives and lay followers (in addition to countless pages about irrelevant information such as car thefts, the price of fruit, and lines at gas stations). Because of

the archive's IRB stipulations, I could not make copies or take photos of any documents, and had to paraphrase key information in my handwritten notes and in some cases transcribe word-for-word the most essential parts of those documents with unclear phrasing or sections I would directly quote in my research.

The historiography of Iraq after the Gulf War and imposition of international sanctions argues that Saddam's rule was totalitarian and that the regime maintained a firm grip on power until its collapse during the U.S. invasion. What I found in the archive supports a different conclusion: the Ba'th Party's handling of Sadr's movement suggests that it felt nearly unable to check its growth, and the choice to assassinate Sadr was not a demonstration of power, but a demonstration of the government's inability to effectively constrain the development of social movements outside the purview of the state. My larger argument demonstrates that by the 1990s, the Ba'th Party was embracing policies of "sectarianism, racism, and tribalism," ideologies the party had set out to eradicate when it took power in 1968. Promoting these three -isms unintentionally played a major role in preparing Iraqi society for the tone and content of Sadr's message and catapulted him to the top of the clerical establishment.

I am currently in the process of writing my thesis, and coming to understand just how difficult it is to construct sound historical arguments when sources are incomplete and the topic's historical legacy remains relevant – not to mention highly politicized – in contemporary Iraqi politics. My own experience has given me more respect for those historians who are able to tease out a thread of cause and effect from a jumble of events, but also willing to admit when the historical record cannot offer a definitive version of how changes took place. I'm trying to piece together Ba'th Party documents with events recorded elsewhere to determine how closely the bureaucracy's views reflected reality, while also recognizing that sometimes the mild phrasing used by Party officials such as "guidance" or "suggestion" was backed by the threat or reality of coercion or torture. While I am writing more of a traditional political history, I hope to integrate a consideration of social conditions in Iraq at the time and avoid the common focus on figureheads to the exclusion of the many unnamed people who actually set history in motion.

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Understanding the Rise of the Sadrism Movement in Iraq

When the Ba'ath Party came to power in Iraq in 1968, Saddam Hussein spelled out the party's opposition to "sectarianism, racism, and tribalism." By the mid-1990s, however, the Ba'ath regime was itself a proponent of those three -isms, whether openly or indirectly. This study demonstrates that government policies promoting sectarianism, racism, and tribalism contributed to the rise of a populist social movement led by Muhammad Sadiq al-Sadr which endured past his assassination by the regime in 1999. Sadr took advantage of Iraqi Shias' growing feelings of alienation due to state oppression to create a public space for expressing Shia religious identity; used Saddam's long-held desire to see an Arab cleric rather than one with "Persian" links leading the Shia religious establishment to quickly grow in influence, initially with government consent; and appropriated the regime's revival of tribal identity to build a parallel network of tribal support across central and southern Iraq. Analysis of internal Ba'ath Party documents shows that despite the image of Ba'athist Iraq as an all-powerful totalitarian state, the government felt unable to control the growth of Sadr's influence. While the regime assassinated Sadr after he began to publicly challenge government oppression, it was unable or unwilling to dismantle the movement's entire network, and Sadr's representatives remained active after his death. This study contributes to scholarship debating the totalitarian nature of Saddam's Iraq and also helps explain the rise of Muqtada al-Sadr, son of Muhammad Sadiq al-Sadr, as a major political and militia leader in Iraq today.

Although the Victorian appropriation of Shakespeare has been explored widely in recent scholarship, less attention has been paid to the specific appropriation of *Othello*, a tragedy, by way of oil painting during the middle-Victorian period. Although Shakespeare's plays were popular literary subjects from which many artists drew, it was during this period that Shakespeare's tragedies and history plays garnered the least amount of appropriation; however, these plays provide the types of striking moments of narrative crisis that many artists frequently modeled their work after. As such, oil paintings derived from *Othello* in particular deserve to be observed as works that both memorialize moments of narrative crisis and provide commentary on the inspired artists' own Victorian society in reaction to the Elizabethan period in which *Othello* was written.

In order to do so, I will analyze Shakespeare's tragedy *Othello* in relation to the oil paintings the play inspired throughout the middle-Victorian period as a cross-period examination of gender politics. As such, focus on the extent to which the Victorian paintings compete with or support the gender roles and domestic values made present in the original Elizabethan text is imperative. *Othello* presents its heroine Desdemona in a way that invites study of woman's submissive evolution from daughter to wife through analysis of the marriage plot and the subsequent treatment of women as property.

In their appropriation, painters of scenes from *Othello* confront how Desdemona deserves to be translated to a visual medium in which she will be forever memorialized in accordance to the ideals from which the artist works. In order to examine the ways in which the Victorian artists supported or competed with Shakespeare's ideals, I will observe how the ideals of Victorian society concerning gender roles may have influenced each artists' rendering of scenes from the play. I have selected three oil paintings from the middle-Victorian period to analyze: Charles West Cope's *The Life's Story, Othello, Act I Scene III* (1868), James Clark Hook's *Othello's Description of Desdemona* (1852), and William Salter's *Othello's Lamentation* (1857). Each of these works were selected due to their title's references to both moments of narrative crisis and to Othello's possession of Desdemona specifically through his actions in which she is forced to react.

The conditions by which women were treated as a result of the period's gender politics will, therefore, become apparent in a manner that suggests the ways in which Victorian society engaged with Shakespeare's plays as a source of moral instruction for women.

As a student passionate about both the history of art and literature, I was interested in composing a multifaceted research project for a course on Shakespeare that could bridge the gap between both visual and literary expressions of gender politics, as well as incorporate my ever increasing interest in the Victorian period. My creation of an interdisciplinary project was not without intent, as I plan for my future studies as a graduate student to focus on the Victorian period, so I wanted my project to be a reflection of my desire to understand the Victorian period to the fullest extent. As such, I desired to devise a way in which I could link each of my interests, and the study of Shakespeare is such a diverse body of scholarship that I found it to be quite possible. Victorian appropriation of Shakespeare's works is a popular subject within the realm of Shakespearean scholarship, but I found that many of his tragedies are often neglected in such study, especially in relation to appropriation by way of visual arts.

The ongoing research for my project concerning Victorian appropriation of Shakespeare's *Othello* developed from two different branches of research: the first concerning gender politics within the primary text itself and the second regarding Victorian oil paintings inspired by the text. First, however, I chose to consult texts that could provide information concerning Victorian appropriation at large. These books, mostly collections of essays, were instrumental in providing a strong groundwork on Victorian appropriation from which I could work and, eventually, be applied to the more specific branch of appropriation concerning Victorian oil paintings inspired by *Othello*. Many of these first reference texts were found by way of the GIL catalogue with keywords such as "Victorian appropriation of Shakespeare" and "Shakespeare and the Victorians," and from there, I consulted each books' bibliography or section of suggestions for further reading. It was through cited reference searching that I began seeing reoccurring patterns of authors and book titles, and I made sure to incorporate those texts into my research as I found them to be provide both accurate and comprehensive perspectives on the topics my research requires. In order to double check that I was finding resources that were of recent scholarship and would be specifically helpful to my research, I cross referenced the list of materials found in the books' bibliographies with the **World Shakespeare Bibliography Online** database. Doing so

ensured that each source had been published in the relative recent past and contained information specifically related to my interests before I physically located each book in the library.

Once I created a base of knowledge concerning general Victorian appropriation of Shakespeare, I began researching gender politics within *Othello*. First, I consulted the **GIL catalogue** once more in order to find a scholarly edition of the primary text that combined both quarto and the First Folio versions of *Othello* from which I could search for quotes appropriate for the framing of my interpretation of gender politics within the play. As I needed to find information concerning Desdemona's submissive evolution from daughter to wife, I was interested in consulting scholarly journal articles for *Othello* specific criticism. I initially used both **Project Muse** and **Literature Online (LION)** with success, and I eventually used the same keywords to search for bibliography entries of related sources in the **World Shakespeare Bibliography Online**. Bibliography entries for books that seemed relevant to this strain of my research were then used to locate these books through the **GIL catalogue**.

In order to find materials that related to gender politics in the period in which Shakespeare was writing, I consulted **WorldCat** in order to find sources of historical information that were not necessarily specifically concentrated on Shakespeare, but that could be helpful in an eventual cross-period analysis concerning the society in which Shakespeare was inspired to incorporate such dynamic gender politics in his work. I also utilized the **GIL Express Request service** in order to request one of these texts that was unavailable for checkout at the library.

The digital media side of my research yielded little overlap between databases, and it was necessary to devise a system that categorized the paintings I encountered in a way that suited my literary focus. I began with the **Folger Shakespeare Library Digital Image Collection (LUNA)**, a specialized digital image collection housing thousands of Shakespeare related images, ranging from photographs of set designs to scans of folio and quarto pages of the texts themselves. In using this database, I was responsible for creating specialized keywords that would narrow my search down to images only of paintings of *Othello* created by English painters during the 19th century. I specifically chose to incorporate

oil paintings into my cross-cultural comparison because of their appeal of being viewed as independent works, as opposed to prints of engravings that may appear in an edition of the primary text itself. This way, I am able to approach each painting as the original audience received it as an independent work of art meant for decorous display, but with a refined literary perspective that is able to understand the translation of the text from which the artist is inspired to a visual medium that reflects any and all social influences.

Although LUNA was immensely helpful in providing images of Victorian paintings, it seemed to lack a truly furnished catalogue of Victorian painters' borrowing from *Othello*. I then consulted **Shakespeare Illustrated**, a resource devised by the English department at Emory that works to collect images specifically of artwork related to Shakespeare. Each of these images are organized by play, but the user also has the option of searching the gallery by artist name. Because I was solely concerned with paintings of *Othello*, I was quickly able to locate the four works that **Shakespeare Illustrated** has collected. Interestingly enough, only one of the works listed in the **Shakespeare Illustrated** listing of *Othello* was also available on LUNA: Charles West Cope's copperplate engraving entitled *Othello Relating His Adventures*. Unfortunately for my purposes, this work by Cope was not in my preferred oil on canvas medium; however, my prior studies in art history proved useful as I remembered that often, artists would often create oil paintings of a scene that were also translated into engravings. My search then began to find an oil painting of the same subject created by Cope, but neither LUNA nor **Shakespeare Illustrated** yielded a successful result. I then consulted ART UK, a joint initiative between the United Kingdom's Public Catalogue Foundation and thousands of museums and art collections. Despite its broad range of subject matter, I was able to refine my search in a way that only resulted in artwork by Cope concerning *Othello* as its subject. Fortunately, I discovered that Cope also illustrated the same scene in oil on canvas in 1868. Although it was one of the first databases I utilized, I must mention that ARTstor was not useful in my search for images, as none of the paintings pertaining to my specific requirements could be located in the database, even with carefully constructed search terms.

Due to the lack in overlap of the digital images found across three different databases, it was necessary that I create an Excel document that could account for the following information related to each image: artist name, title of work, year of creation, medium, subject of the work, and the source or database from which the image was found. After I organized the images in this manner, I began to recognize patterns across my selection of paintings, despite their various artists and the dates in which they were created. Many of the titles feature possession of some degree of Desdemona by Othello and are also indicative of a moment of narrative crisis within the text. After noticing this pattern, I was able to narrow down the works in which I was to analyze to those that possessed both of these aforementioned qualities, furthering my intention to discuss the domination of Desdemona and the trials in which she undergoes within the original text.

In order to aid my technical analysis of the oil paintings, it was important to find resources concerning styles of Victorian painting and any helpful biographical information about the artists of the works I chose. I began with "The Arts in Victorian England" bibliography provided by **The Victorian Web** to generate ideas for sources, which were later refined and checked for validity via the **Bibliography of the History of Art**. I also consulted **Art Source** and the **International Bibliography of Art**, but this search yielded no valuable results pertaining to my specific interests. The **Oxford Art Online Encyclopedia** was also very helpful in providing biographical information of one of the artists I selected in relation to Victorian domesticity and the ideals imposed on women.

Although this research endeavor was initially created to fulfill a requirement for my Shakespeare course, it has proven to be an exciting exercise in independent research in the way that it has encouraged me to refine my research skills and strategies. The ability to combine the subjects I am passionate about into one interdisciplinary project has affirmed my love for research, and I am excited to employ my ever evolving research skills in the future.

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