

Letter from the Editors



This is our third issue of *al-ʿUṣūr al-Wuṣṭā* (*UW*) in its new (online, peer-reviewed, and open-access) format. To begin, our deepest thanks to Christiane-Marie Abu Sarah, our indispensable managing editor.

We have been fortunate, once again, in attracting contributions of decidedly high caliber; we are forever grateful to our colleagues for their response to our invitations to submit current scholarship, produce reviews of new books and other pertinent items, and participate on the editorial board. It is gratifying to see a spectrum of topic areas represented by the articles themselves and in the books under review. These bespeak a flourishing in the adjoining fields of early and medieval Arabic, Islamic and Middle Eastern studies.

UW stands as a platform from which to bring out significant new scholarship. But our aim, from the onset, has been to rethink the format and role of the academic journal. We are committed, first of all, to publishing submissions in as expeditious a manner as possible (without,

of course, sacrificing editorial care). As most of us know first hand, it is frustrating to devote considerable effort to a written piece only to have it linger, even for years, before publication. We are committed, as well, to producing substantial scholarly articles and book reviews. The current roster of articles, book reviews and conference reports speaks, we believe, to these aims. Finally, we are also determined to promote non-Anglophone scholarship. We anticipate publishing our first article in French in the near future, and we strongly encourage our readers in the Middle East, Europe and elsewhere to submit their work to us. We should add that we are committed to the goal of reviewing non-Anglophone scholarship, in all European and Middle Eastern languages.

As is our practice, we open with a solicited comment by the previous year's recipient of the Middle East Medievalists (MEM) Lifetime Achievement Award. Professor Fred Donner, the 2017 recipient, is a previous president of MEM and the Middle East Studies Association (MESA),

(Photo of Antoine Borrut by Juliette Fradin Photography)

and long-time editor of *al-‘Uṣūr al-Wuṣṭā* (in its previous format). He has for decades set a standard for quality scholarship, mentoring, and collegiality in our related fields. It seems wholly unnecessary to introduce his work here. His comment speaks, in part, to clear writing: we are delighted, as editors, to offer our unqualified endorsement.

Our new issue contains five article-length studies. Digital humanities offers significant promise to our fields, but has not enjoyed the exposure that it deserves. For this reason, we are pleased to include a discussion, by Benjamin Kiessling, Matthew Miller, Maxim Romanov and Sarah Savant, of their ambitious and potentially far-reaching project, the Open Islamicate Texts Initiative. Luke Treadwell’s close discussion of Tulunid mints underscores the value of numismatic evidence, and joins a growing body of scholarship on the Tulunid period per se and ‘post-imperial’ Islamic political history more generally. In a thoughtful and engaging discussion, altogether typical of his scholarship, Michael Cooperson traces the genealogy of the hoary notion of the Abbasid ‘golden age.’ Alison Vacca, in a compelling study of Abbasid-era social history, argues for a closer examination of communal identity and loyalty in the third/ninth century Caucasus. Identity, in this case as it relates to Arab society and history in the Islamic conquest period, is the focus of Robert Hoyland’s detailed discussion.

We are no less pleased to produce eight book reviews. Our intent remains

unchanged: to produce extended reviews that serve their proper purpose, that is, to provide our readers with informed and engaged discussions of new work. We would again note the wealth of scholarship on display in the publications discussed therein. The value of book reviews needs no explanation: we urge our colleagues to keep us posted regarding forthcoming and newly published works, and submit their reviews to us here. In addition, we have two extended reports of conferences held in 2015-2017, and remembrances of Anna Arkadievna Iskoz-Dolinina, a prominent Russian and Soviet Arabist, and Günter Lüling, a German scholar of the Qur’ān and early Islamic history. We are grateful to our colleagues for agreeing to produce shorter submissions of this kind.

We close on two familiar notes. First, we rely on your financial support. Our journal is online, open access, and peer-reviewed, but it is certainly not free. Please keep your membership in Middle East Medievalists up to date: it goes a long way to helping us cover our costs. For information on membership and the fund, please proceed to the MEM home page at <http://islamichistorycommons.org/mem/> and click on “MEMbership.” Second, as we noted in our previous issue (*UW* 24 [2016]), the full run of the journal is available online. Our deepest thanks to Professor Fred Donner for his assistance in this regard. The full archive can be accessed on our website:

<http://islamichistorycommons.org/mem/volume-index/>

Sincerely,

Antoine Borrut and Matthew S. Gordon