

## Letter from the Editors

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We are pleased to present the new issue of *al-ʿUṣūr al-Wuṣṭā* (*UW*). As announced in our preceding issue (*UW* 23, 2015), we have expanded the role, format and content of the journal: the transition to an online, open access, peer-reviewed publication is complete. Our aim is to provide a venue for up-to-date scholarship across the variety of fields in Islamic, Arabic and Middle East studies, while remaining a source of news and information on developments in these same fields.

We would be remiss in not acknowledging our debt of gratitude to a number of colleagues for their willingness to act as reviewers. We thus continue where we left off in our previous issue in publishing a set of high-caliber and original research articles. Fred Donner—a former president of Middle East Medievalists (MEM) and a

long-time editor of *UW*—argues in his contribution for a reconsideration of the well-known term *fath*, drawing on his considerable work on the early Islamic period and the Arab/Islamic conquests in particular. Sean Anthony, a member of the MEM board, considers the difficult question of whether Ibn Wāḍiḥ al-Yaʿqūbī, the third/ninth-century historian and geographer, is properly to be considered a Shiʿite author. In his submission, Matthew Melvin-Koushki takes up the arguments regarding writing and written transmission in late medieval Arabic and Islamic scholarship with a discussion of the work of Ṣāʿin al-Dīn ʿAlī b. Muḥammad Turka Iṣfahānī (770-835/1369-1432). The fourth contribution is that of Theodore S. Beers. Turning to the later Persianate literary realm, Beers offers a close assessment of an unpublished manuscript text containing

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(Photo of Antoine Borrut by Juliette Fradin Photography)

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the earliest documentation of the life and career of Ṣāʿib Tabrīzī (d. ca. 1087/1676).

We provide, alongside the four articles, two short notices (Jonathan Brown on Ibn ʿUqda, and Christian Mauder and Christopher Markiewicz on *majālis* in the Mamluk period) and a set of six book reviews covering a range of topics. The appearance of the new volumes under review only underscores the continued vitality of our respective fields. We would reiterate the point that, in its present format, *UW* offers the opportunity to produce extended reviews of this kind. It remains a significant goal of this journal to produce reviews of new works not only in European languages but those of the Middle East and North Africa as well. We urge you, our readers and colleagues, to continue sending us material of this kind.

We are also pleased to include in this issue detailed reports of three conferences held in 2015–2016; a remembrance by Sarah Eltantawi of our much lamented colleague, Shahab Ahmed; and the statement by Richard Bulliet (the recipient of the 2015 MEM Lifetime Achievement Award). We also take advantage of this letter to congratulate MEM's two new honorary members, Denise Aigle (École Pratique des Hautes Études) and Ayman Fuʿād Sayyid (former director of the Egyptian National Library).

The editors also express their gratitude

to Gabriella Hoskin, Alexis May, and Brett Savage, from the Institute for Advanced Study staff, for their help with the copy editing process of this issue of *UW*.

To make the point again, we are convinced that *al-ʿUṣūr al-Wuṣṭā* provides the ideal venue in which to publish new and exciting scholarship on the history of the medieval Middle East. We invite you, our readers and colleagues, to participate by contributing your latest work.

We are also delighted to announce that the full run of *UW* is now available online. We have digitized all of *UW*'s back issues to facilitate access to this unique MEM archive and memory. Please visit our “volume index” page on our website:

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

We will close with what will become a familiar note to faithful readers: we rely on your financial support. Our journal is now online, open access, and peer-reviewed, but it is certainly not free. To cover costs of publication and the work of our part-time managing editor, among other expenses, you provide valuable support by keeping your membership in Middle East Medievalists up to date. For information on membership and the fund, please proceed to the MEM home page at <http://islamichistorycommons.org/mem/> and click on “MEMbership.”

Sincerely,

Antoine Borrut and Matthew S. Gordon