

Letter from the Editors



This new issue of *al-'Uṣūr al-Wuṣṭā* (*UW*) marks a turning point. *UW* began in 1989 as a newsletter, edited by Sam Gellens, a co-founder with Richard Bulliet of *Middle East Medievalists*. Fred Donner, as president of MEM (1992-1994), then expanded *UW* into a substantial bulletin, the first issue of which appeared in 1992 (4:1). He added new features: research articles and reviews of books in Arabic and other Middle Eastern languages, thus publications about which many of us would not have been aware. The bulletin has played an invaluable role in this sense, and in continuing to provide news of developments in the discipline.

Our appreciation of the work of Professor Donner – and the many contributors to the bulletin – runs deep. But the time came to consider anew the role, format and content of *UW*. Following much discussion among the editors, board

members and our MEMbership, we have refashioned it into what you find here before you: an online, open access, peer-reviewed journal. Our aim is to make use of the best qualities of online publishing: the flexibility and timeliness that are a hallmark of publications of this kind. We also believe that we will provide colleagues worldwide – especially those without ready access to the best libraries – a means by which to keep abreast of trends in our respective fields.

We will continue where the bulletin left off: we will produce reviews of new publications, written in European and Middle Eastern languages alike; short “thought pieces” and other brief notices of ongoing and forthcoming work; obituaries; and as much news of the field as we can provide. We urge you, our readers and colleagues, to continue sending us material of this kind.

(Photo of Antoine Borrut by Juliette Fradin Photography)

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But we will now rely on a peer review system in producing original, full-length articles. Our aim is attract the best work of colleagues from across the globe, drawing on new research initiatives across the many individual fields that make up Islamic and Middle Eastern studies writ large. It is in recognition of such work, and, it needs to be said, the realities of the tenure system, that we are carrying out these changes.

It is also in light of these changes that we are very pleased to announce the creation of a new *UW* editorial board. The new board consists of colleagues from a variety of institutions and scholarly backgrounds. Their participation, we believe, will ensure high-level contributions and access to a global scholarly network.

The content of our new issue represents scholarship of this kind. We are delighted to have the opportunity to publish Lawrence Conrad's article on Ibn A'tham al-Kufi's *K. al-Futuh*, a significant study known only to the lucky few that have had the opportunity to read it in unpublished form. We are grateful to Dr. Conrad for agreeing to allow us to bring it to print. We are no less pleased to have articles by Michael Cook and Christopher Melchert, neither of whom requires an introduction; their respective contributions here reflect the depth of scholarship for which each of

the two individuals is known. Alongside the three principal articles, and an important short notice by Bogdan Smarandache, are several book reviews, a set of six obituaries of colleagues recently deceased, and the respective texts of comments by Patricia Crone and Steven Humphreys (recipients of the MEM Lifetime Achievement Award).

As a measure of our commitment to remaking *UW*, we would point out that this first issue runs to a total of nearly 250 pages. Our conviction is that *al-'Uṣūr 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.

And one last note: we will continue to rely on your financial support. That *UW* is now an open access journal should not be understood to mean that it is free: it is not. To cover costs of publication and the work of our part-time managing editor, among other expenses, we ask that you keep your membership in Middle East Medievalists up to date, and that you consider a gift to the MEM general fund. For information on membership and the fund, please proceed to MEM's website:

<http://islamichistorycommons.org/mem/>

Sincerely,

Antoine Borrut and Matthew S. Gordon