

Letter from the Editors



We are very pleased to publish the newest issue of *al-‘Uṣūr al-Wuṣṭā* (*UW*). We remain, as ever, committed to the ideal of providing a venue for up-to-date scholarship in the disciplines of early and medieval Islamic, Arabic, and Middle East studies, while remaining a source of news and information on the current work of our colleagues and students.

On a personal note, the two of us, Antoine and Matthew, are delighted (and, yes, relieved) to announce that we will be turning over editorship of the journal to our esteemed colleagues Alison Vacca (UTK) and Zayde Antrim (Trinity College). To effect the transition, we asked Alison to join us in producing this issue (*UW* 29); Alison and Zayde will be taking over as coeditors from this point forward. We cannot think of two colleagues more likely to sustain the high standards of both scholarship and editing that we have pursued over these past years.

The editorial adventure of turning MEM’s long-established bulletin into an online, peer-reviewed, and open-access journal began almost a decade ago, when Antoine became secretary of MEM (November 2011) and Matthew MEM’s president the following year. By then, MEM’s bulletin was reaching its end. Although two new issues came out (in 2012 and 2014), it seemed clear that the bulletin—established in 1989 and expanded by Fred M. Donner from the 1990s on—was no longer sustainable in its original format in our digital age. MEM approved the idea of turning *UW* into a full-fledged journal at the November 2013 MESA meeting in New Orleans. Antoine and Matthew volunteered to become coeditors, thus embarking on a journey whose many challenges we perceived dimly, if at all.

We presented the first issue of the newly conceived journal at the MESA meeting in Denver in November 2015, the same meeting at which Matthew stepped

(Photo of Antoine Borrut by Juliette Fradin Photography)

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down as MEM's president. Seven years, forty-five articles, fifty-eight book reviews, and assorted other submissions later, we have published 2,261 pages. Along the way, after thousands of emails exchanged with authors and reviewers, the journal finally made its way to the [Directory of Open-Access Journals](#) and to a new home. As announced in our previous issue, and thanks to the efforts of Manan Ahmed Asif (Columbia University), *UW* is now on a new platform, Academic Commons, a program of the Columbia University library system. We would like to direct all potential authors and contributors to that site (<https://journals.library.columbia.edu/index.php/alusur/index>).

Our efforts throughout would have fallen short had it not been for the contributions of four colleagues. Christiane-Marie Abu Sarah, now assistant professor of history at Erskine College, has served as managing editor from the onset and was instrumental to the success of the journal. We are deeply grateful for her consistent and excellent work. To Hanna Siurua, our lasting appreciation for equally consistent and fine editing. Warmest thanks, as always, to Malika Dekkiche (University of Antwerp) and Luke Yarbrough (UCLA), our book review editors, for again bringing together a set of extended reviews on topics in a variety of disciplines.

The new issue begins with a statement by Prof. Michael Cook, recipient of the 2020 Middle East Medievalists Lifetime Achievement Award, regarding his intellectual training and the fields to which he has devoted a rich and illustrious career as author, educator, and mentor. Among the many honors accorded to Prof. Cook in recent years was the Norwegian

government's Holberg Prize (2014) and the [Balzan Prize](#) (2019), awarded by the International Balzan Prize Foundation in recognition of "the exceptional impact of [Professor Cook's] work on several research areas in Islamic Studies." Our [previous issue](#) featured a special dossier of six papers by emerging scholars in Arabic, Islamic, and Middle Eastern studies developed in the Holberg Seminar (2015–18), directed by Cook and Borrut alongside Jack Tannous (Princeton) and Khaled El-Rouayheb (Harvard).

What follows is a set of six full-length research articles on a range of topics. Each evinces the high quality of the scholarship of which our colleagues, in their respective disciplines, are capable. Ahmad al-Jallad has produced a well-illustrated and technical study of what he proposes was a particular orthographic feature of seventh- and eighth-century Arabic script. In an equally close study of the set of texts known typically as the *pseudo-Aristotelian Hermetica*, Liana Saif argues for a third/ninth-century dating of these texts, which purport to record conversations between Aristotle and Alexander the Great. Katja von Schöneman, in a feminist, discourse-analytic reading, treats Arabic commentaries on Qurʾān 4:1 produced by twelve premodern Shīʿī exegetes. Joshua Mugler's submission contains a study, translation, and edition of *The Life of Christopher*, a tenth-century Greek-Arabic Christian hagiography produced in Baghdad. This is our second Arabic edition, the first having been published by [Jelle Bruning](#) in 2020 (*UW* 28). In a study of women in the medieval and premodern Islamic world, David Durand-Guédy's contribution examines an Arabic inscription from an Anatolian caravanserai

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built by the Georgian wife of a thirteenth-century Rum Saljuq ruler. The final piece, by Gohar Grigoryan Savary, considers the life—and the problematic historiography that surrounds it—of Queen Mariun (d. 1377?), a significant figure of fourteenth-century Cilician Armenia and Mamluk Jerusalem.

The issue turns next to a pair of substantial review essays by, respectively, Michael Pregill and Alejandro García-Sanjuán. Pregill discusses two recent works by Aaron W. Hughes on “the Jewish-Muslim encounter” in the premodern and modern Islamic world. García-Sanjuán, for his part, in a wide-angle reading of Charles Hirschkind’s *The Feeling of History: Islam, Romanticism, and Andalusia* (University of Chicago Press, 2021), takes on the questions surrounding the legacy of Islamic Iberia in modern Spain. The two essays are then followed by a report on a conference, “Pre-modern Comparative Literary Practice in the Multilingual Islamic World(s),” organized by the Oxford Comparative Criticism and Translation Research Centre (OCCT) at the University of Oxford, 22–24 July 2022. Our thanks to Clarissa Burt (United States Naval Academy) for the report.

We close with the book review section. The nine reviews treat recent publications dealing with such topics as *jihād* as a legal-doctrinal issue; archaeology and the Arab-Islamic conquest of Iberia; the Greek-to-

Arabic translation project of the medieval Islamic period; medieval Damascene book culture and letters; and new approaches to the study of Islamic art, as well as sacred space and sacred time in medieval Islam. We are forever grateful to those of our colleagues who took on the invaluable if sadly under-appreciated task of producing the reviews. As with the articles, the disciplinary topics of the publications treated in the reviews, alongside the expertise manifested by the reviews themselves, speak volumes of the vitality of the scholarly community to which we belong.

As is our custom, we close with the following two reminders.

First, we rely on your financial support. Again, although *UW* is online, open access, and peer-reviewed, it is certainly not free. To cover the costs of publication and the work of our staff, 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:

<https://www.middleeastmedievalists.com/membership-form/>

Second, the full run of the journal, in its several iterations, is available online. To access the archive, please go to:

<https://journals.library.columbia.edu/index.php/alusur/issue/archive>.

Sincerely,
Antoine Borrut, Matthew Gordon,
and Alison Vacca