

## *Letter from the Editors*

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The contributions to this fourth issue of *al-‘Uṣūr al-Wuṣṭā* (*UW*) in its new (online, open-access, peer-reviewed) format includes, alongside a set of article-length studies, eight book reviews, including a contribution by Peter Brown (Princeton University); three conference reports; a short notice by Sean Anthony; and Elton Daniel’s obituary of the late and much lamented Ehsan Yarshater. We are particularly delighted to introduce a new feature, a thematic dossier guest edited by Maribel Fierro and Patrice Cressier, entitled “Formulating the Caliphate in the Islamic West: Umayyads, Ḥammūdids, and Almohads.” The dossier comprises five full-length articles preceded by a substantial introduction. Given that the Islamic West—the Maghreb, Sicily, and al-Andalus—has seldom received the attention it deserves in Anglo-American scholarship, we are particularly glad to present these studies.

We are, as always, forever grateful to our colleagues for their response to our invitations to submit current scholarship,

write reviews of new books and other pertinent items, and participate on the editorial board. Special thanks are due, once again, to our uniquely talented managing editor Christiane-Marie Abu Sarah. To simply restate our central guiding principle from previous letters, we remain committed to using *al-‘Uṣūr al-Wuṣṭā* as a platform from which to bring out important and groundbreaking new scholarship. We seek, with each issue, to produce the journal in expeditious a manner as possible, thus providing our contributors the opportunity to bring their ongoing work to a broad audience in timely manner. We are no less committed to the publication of longer and more substantial research articles and book reviews. The present roster of articles, book reviews and conference reports speaks, we believe, to these aims. In addition, with the dossier on the Islamic West by colleagues in France and Spain, we are following up on our determination to promote non-Anglophone scholarship. Our hope is to publish our first article in French in the

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(Photo of Antoine Borrut by Juliette Fradin Photography)

near future, and we strongly encourage our readers in the Middle East, Europe and elsewhere to submit their work to us.

We open with a solicited comment by Suzanne Stetkevych (Georgetown University), the 2017 recipient of the Middle East Medievalists Lifetime Achievement Award. Professor Stetkevych, as readers of this journal know well, has played a critical role for years in the production and promotion of scholarship in Arabic poetics and literature. She has also been mentor to any number of students, many of whom went on to join the ranks of our respective disciplines of Arabic, Near Eastern and Islamic studies. I know we speak for the MEM board and membership in extending our warmest appreciation to Professor Stetkevych on the occasion of her award.

The six article-length studies begin with an extended study by Ian Morris on a long-standing problem of identifying the ancient toponym “Macoraba” with Mecca. The dossier on the Islamic West follows. It contains five research articles and an extended introduction by Maribel Fierro and Patrice Cressier. The five papers emerged from what is an ongoing project launched in 2015-2016 under Fierro and Cressier’s directorship, “The Caliphates of the Islamic West” (*Los califatos del Occidente/Les califats de l’Occident islamique*), sponsored by the Casa de Velázquez and the Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas (CSIC).

The first article, by Isabel Toral-Niehoff, considers Ibn ‘Abd Rabbih’s important fourth/tenth-century compilation, *al-Iqd al-farīd*, and its likely connection to the Umayyad court in Cordoba. Jan Thiele, in a discussion of Almohad claims to religio-political authority, underscores the

ideological peculiarities of these claims. In a close reading of the politics of the Islamic West, Javier Albarrán considers the appeal to *jihad* on the part of the Andalusian caliphs, all in the context of seeking legitimation. Pascal Buresi’s topic is the Almoravid caliphate: he argues that, despite differences in the political histories of the Almohad and Almoravid states, it is important to keep in mind critical continuities from one dynastic period to the next as well. The final paper in the dossier, by Almudena Ariza Armada, takes up the significant numismatic evidence regarding the history of the Ḥammūdīd dynasty, a polity little studied in modern scholarship.

Alongside the articles, we are pleased to include eight book reviews. On display is an impressive range of scholarship, in the reviews and in the publications discussed therein. We can only reiterate our plea to colleagues across the disciplines to not only keep us posted regarding forthcoming and newly published works, but to agree to publish their reviews here. In addition, we have three reports of conferences held, respectively, at the American University of Beirut (two of the events) and the Marco Institute for Medieval and Renaissance Studies at the University of Tennessee (Knoxville).

As we continue to develop the journal a new milestone has been reached this year: *al-‘Uṣūr al-Wuṣṭā* will continue its life online but also becomes available in print, through a print-on-demand option. Issues of the new *UW* from 2015 onwards will be obtainable through our website shortly, while hard copies will be presented at MEM’s business meeting in San Antonio.

We close on two familiar notes. First, we continue to rely on your financial support.

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Our journal is 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. Second, as we noted in a previous issue (*UW* 24 [2016]), the full run of the journal is available online. We are deeply grateful to Professor Fred Donner (University of Chicago) 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