

**R. Stephen Humphreys**

## FROM THE EDITOR

It is with some trepidation that I assume the editorship of *IJMES*, both because of the responsibility toward my colleagues which this position entails, and—even more—because of the very high standards set by my four predecessors. *IJMES* is the principal forum in North America, and perhaps in the world, for the interdisciplinary exchange of research and ideas on the Middle East. The primary job of the editor, as I envision it, is to ensure that a productive scholarly conversation goes on in the pages of *IJMES*—that we have a genuine forum and not a Tower of Babel. That is no easy task, for Middle East specialists are trained in very disparate disciplines and deploy a bewildering assortment of theoretical and methodological orientations. In the end, the success of such a forum depends on our ability to find a common language, or at least a functional lingua franca. In practice, such a common language means that students of literature must feel that they can understand and make good use of the contributions by economists which appear in these pages—not that everyone will read every article in every issue (would that we had so much time in our lives!) but that in principle they could do so. The balance between theoretical sophistication and broad intelligibility is a delicate one, but it is the editor's job to pursue it unceasingly. To a really remarkable degree, the previous editors of *IJMES* have found and preserved that balance. In this regard as in many others, I can only hope to follow the path they have laid down.

My immediate predecessor, Leila Fawaz of Tufts University, has given a very helpful if rather self-effacing account of her stewardship in the previous issue (26:4). In general, I expect to stick with the main lines of policy which she describes there: (1) reliance on peer review, with a concomitant effort to encourage work by younger scholars; and (2) a search for contributions in new or relatively neglected fields. Like her, I would encourage scholars working on the medieval and early modern periods to consider *IJMES* a friendly venue; in every realm of human activity—geography, economics, politics, literature, and art—historical depth is an essential dimension of our understanding. In spite of her very sensible caveat, I do hope to be able to build some issues around one or two broad themes, not by soliciting contributions but by drawing on the large pool of submissions that *IJMES* receives. Finally, although *IJMES* may not be the obvious place to submit comparative studies, authors of these should certainly consider us when they have

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something which it is important for a wide spectrum of Middle East specialists to see. We do need to ensure that work in our field is more widely noticed and integrated within the disciplines at large.

All transitions are awkward and uneven, and this one has been no exception. That it has gone as well as it has is due to the efforts and support of many people. First of all, I must thank Leila herself, an unceasing source of sorely needed encouragement and solid advice. Second, I am indebted to Anne Betteridge and her associates at the MESA Secretariat; her contributions to every aspect of our profession are well known to many, and I am fortunate to have benefited from them as well. James Alexander and Anna Halász of Cambridge University Press have done everything possible to facilitate the transfer of editorial offices, and to help me find my way through the intricacies of the job. Finally, for help with this issue I want to thank my graduate assistant Kirsten Hawkins; without her organizational skills and good humor it could not have happened.