

R. Stephen Humphreys

FROM THE EDITOR

With this issue I am halfway through my term as editor. Not an easy journey at certain moments, but *IJMES* has survived and I hope even flourished. Altogether, it seems an appropriate time to take stock of where the journal has traveled under my care, and where it may go in the next two years. Since February 1995 we have published forty-eight articles; these deal with an extraordinary array of subjects from an equally impressive range of disciplinary and methodological perspectives. I believe that we have fulfilled *IJMES*'s charge to represent, as fully as possible, current trends in research and interpretation throughout the arena of Middle Eastern studies, in a form that will be readily accessible and useful to the journal's very disparate readership. In striving to achieve this degree of breadth, of course, there is a real danger of diffuseness, of creating assemblages out of randomly selected pieces. We have not always avoided that problem, but we have increasingly been able to build each issue around a pair of themes or topics. (I will confess that I have preferred to leave these unstated, since it is more fun for readers to guess what I may be up to.)

If the last two and a half years are taken as a whole, it is fair to say that a few discernible trends or patterns have emerged. In terms of chronological focus, the 20th century continues to attract the bulk of our contributors' attention: twenty-two articles out of the forty-eight we have published. But the earlier periods are not neglected; we have had eight articles centered on the formative and middle periods (ca. 600–1500), six on the early modern era (ca. 1500–1800), and twelve on the 19th century. I might comment that the articles on medieval subjects are the opposite of antiquarian; they deal with some of the most hotly contested issues in contemporary Middle Eastern life and thought—for example, the reliability of our data on the life of Muhammad, the positioning of women in Islamic law and popular culture, the nature of religious leadership and authority in Islam.

As to the topics discussed by *IJMES* authors, these can be analyzed along many lines. However, I would identify four main areas of concern. First, the later Ottoman Empire is certainly the favorite political entity, and it leads all other areas with ten articles. Second, we might put another cluster of nine papers under the rubric of "premodern Islamic thought" (including the transitional figures of ʿAlī Mubarak and Rifaʿa Rafīʿ al-Tahtawi). Third, political Islam continues to attract scholarly interest; in this group there are eight papers, and several of these focus not on the militants but rather on moderate or modernist voices—a body of writers and activists whose very existence has been almost obliterated by our obsession with the militants. Finally, we have published seven contributions on women and gender; as a group, I

think, these are among the journal's most interesting and original papers. Some areas have received only limited attention, although that has been of very high quality. Here I would point especially to studies on early Orientalism in Europe, contemporary literature, and religious practice. I very much hope that other scholars will feel encouraged to submit papers in these and other "under-represented" areas. We are certainly interested on this end.

I will close with two brief remarks. First, several of our authors have tackled extremely sensitive and controversial issues. They have done so in a nonpolemical manner and in accordance with high standards of scholarship, but they have also done so with frankness and courage. It is only right to acknowledge their achievement here. Second, *IJMES* continues to be wonderfully served by the editorial staff. The summer of 1996 brought a number of disruptions, although many of them were happy ones—two new babies, a new job, and a move of the editorial offices from one building to another. We got through it all somehow, although our contributors were subjected to some inevitable delay and confusion. I continue to be extremely grateful to my associates—Gunilla Rohdin-Bibby, James Lindsay, Gerald Carpenter, and Deborah Gerish—and I hope that sentiment will be shared by the readers of *IJMES*.