

R. Stephen Humphreys

FROM THE EDITOR

It is with great relief and some sadness that I come to this point. I have learned an enormous amount—about Middle Eastern studies, about journal publishing, about myself—during my five years as editor of *IJMES*. From those perspectives, the experience has been invaluable and irreplaceable, and I am very glad I had the opportunity to do it. On the other hand, it is time to return to my own research program and to pay better attention to the needs of my students and colleagues at UC–Santa Barbara. Fortunately, *IJMES* will have a skilled pilot during the coming years. Professor Juan R. Cole of the University of Michigan brings to the task a distinguished record of scholarship and substantial editorial experience. All of us are grateful that he has been willing to shoulder this burden, and we can look forward to a journal of truly outstanding quality under his leadership.

There are, as I conclude my term, many people to thank. I am deeply grateful to MESA's Executive Director, Dr. Anne Betteridge, and the Board of Directors for their constant support, good counsel, and infinite patience throughout the last five years. They did much to ease the anxieties and frustrations which are an unavoidable part of the job. I must also mention the staff members in the editorial office whose efforts have kept the enterprise going in spite of my best efforts. The key figure is the editorial assistant, who not only manages the enormous paper flow in the office but must also be a skilled diplomat and negotiator. I was very fortunate to have the assistance of Gunilla Rohdin-Bibby for four years (September 1994–June 1998), and then of Liz Montana for the last year of my term. Without them I could not have functioned at all. Throughout my tenure, I have been able to draw on the knowledge and business-like habits of our assistant editor, Prof. James Lindsay. He has developed the preliminary lists of outside readers for manuscripts, drafted much of our correspondence with authors, corrected and collated proofs, and offered solid advice in a host of difficult cases. Among our graduate assistants, I will name only Anna Bigelow, who has given indispensable support over the past two years, and Dr. Gerald Carpenter, who has done yeoman work in editing the mountain of book reviews we receive.

At this point, I would like to turn to three points. One is the process by which manuscripts have been received, evaluated, revised, and accepted or rejected. Early on, I decided that the best way to obtain effective revisions of projects that seemed promising but flawed was to require authors to do the job themselves. I have felt it essential for an author to decide on his or her own how to respond to the reports from external readers and any general guidance that I might offer in returning a manuscript for revision.

Although this process has driven authors to make two or even three revisions before obtaining a final acceptance, it has meant that in the final analysis they could speak in their own voice. We have stuck rigorously to a double-blind process; senior authors are not always eager to subject themselves to this procedure, but I think it has yielded a high-quality set of articles, many of them from authors who could not have passed the “established reputation” test.

Point two would be the relationship of the editorial board to policy and the editorial process. In many journals, articles are vetted chiefly by the editorial board (perhaps with one or two outside readers), and sometimes editorial boards vote on the articles to be accepted. *IJMES*, however, is an editorial autocracy, although the autocrat likes to believe that he has consulted widely. I have used members of the editorial board in several ways, but almost always on an individual rather than collective basis. Obviously, I owe the members of the editorial board a profound debt for their service; some have gone far beyond the call of duty in providing prompt and detailed evaluations of a cloud of manuscripts, and from their dedication (which has obviously cost scores of hours that could have been devoted to other tasks) both authors and *IJMES* have profited enormously.

I should also mention the book review editors; they are not part of the editorial board, but they carry a substantial burden. Apart from the thankless job of finding reviewers for 100–120 books per year, they advise the editor on which books merit review, and which can safely be laid aside. They have also helped us design and carry out a slight broadening of scope in books chosen for review.

Finally, I come to *IJMES*'s editorial policy. I stated at the outset of my tenure that I would attempt to represent a cross-section of the most interesting work being done across the several disciplines that make up Middle Eastern studies. I also hoped to include both innovative and traditional approaches, while avoiding the merely trendy and the solid-but-stodgy. I speculated that it might be possible to design focused issues out of the myriad of manuscripts that we receive, without getting into the problems created by “special issues.” I was determined at all costs to maintain *IJMES*'s role as a scholarly research journal which would bring new material, and new ways of thinking about it, to our readers. The first two goals I hope I have achieved, although it is up to *IJMES* readers to determine that. The third has been difficult to bring off, but I think I did succeed in designing a number of issues that would deal with a coherent problem or set of problems. I also believe that I have maintained the research focus of *IJMES*. The articles published here often have important policy implications, and they are informed by a wide range of ideological perspectives, but they focus on the presentation and analysis of original research.

At this point a more concrete review of our efforts seems in order. *IJMES* is highly selective: out of 624 manuscripts received during my tenure, we have published 101. A fair number of manuscripts sent to us are revisions of earlier versions, but an overall acceptance ratio of one to five seems reasonably accurate. *IJMES* is also a genuinely international journal, as its name proclaims: one-third of our submissions come from Middle Eastern, Asian, or African countries, and one-third of those published are from the Middle East. Israel is of course the largest Middle Eastern contributor, but Turkey and Lebanon are also well represented. A rather small proportion of our submissions come from Europe, but of course authors there have many opportunities to

reach an international audience. As to male versus female authorship, women constitute slightly less than one-fourth of the authors in the overall pool of manuscripts we receive, but slightly more than one-third of those whose articles were selected for publication.

In accordance with its mandate, *IJMES* attempts to address all aspects of the societies and cultures of a vast region stretching from Morocco to Pakistan and the Central Asian lands bordering Iran and Afghanistan—from Agadir to Tashkent and Kashgar, if you like. In time, *IJMES* covers a span from 600 C.E. to the present. Altogether an ambitious agenda. It is fair to ask how far we have succeeded in meeting it.

The answer, I hope, is “not badly,” although certainly not as well as I had hoped at the beginning. The fact that I am principally a medievalist certainly encouraged a larger number of good submissions dealing with the periods between 600 and 1500 than earlier editors had been able to garner. On the other hand, it was no medievalists’ paradise: although I was inclined to be sympathetic, I was also in a position to be highly critical. Articles published on the formative and middle periods (600–1500) represent almost 20 percent of the total. I also believe that these articles constitute a good cross-section of the best work, using both traditional and innovative approaches, being done in this area.

We were unable to publish as many articles on the early modern era (1500–1850) as the exceptional importance of this period merits, but the number is probably representative of the proportion of scholars who now specialize in this subject. Interestingly, and sadly, all our early modern articles dealt with the Ottoman lands. We had *nothing* on Morocco, Mughal India, or Safavi and early Qajar Iran, simply because we received almost no submissions concerning these areas.

In the folklore of the profession, *IJMES* is usually regarded as a journal of modern and contemporary studies. There is more than a little truth to this stereotype: 75 percent of our articles focus on the Middle East since 1850, and more than one-third deal with contemporary topics.

As to regions, some are obviously more privileged than others. I have had to stay alert to prevent *IJMES* from becoming a journal of Palestine and Israeli studies, but this little corner of the region—a rather neglected transit zone before the 20th century, albeit one with some classy tourist sites—attracts a lot of scholarly interest, and *IJMES* cannot fail to reflect that fact. One-sixth of the articles we have published focus on Palestine and Israel, and more than half of these deal with Israel since the establishment of the state. But the real winner by a substantial margin is Egypt, with one-fifth of the total. The losers are the Arabian Peninsula, Spain and North Africa, and Afghanistan and Central Asia. Given their size, populations, and historical weight, both Turkey and Iran are seriously underrepresented, although Turkey makes up some ground among the many articles on Ottoman history.

Finally, the topics covered. I was determined that *IJMES* should not be either a journal of modern political history or a clone of *Der Islam* (a splendid journal, but not our *Fach*). To some degree, of course, one can achieve this goal simply by the artful devising of categories, and no doubt I can be indicted on this issue. In any event, the dominant topic has certainly been “political thought and ideology,” to which we could add several articles under the heading of “political Islam.” Ideology (religious and secular) accounts for almost one-quarter of the articles published by *IJMES* during my editorship.

However, I have tried to counter the notion that Islam is politics with several articles on religious thought and practice. I am particularly pleased that I was able to publish many articles on literature and other forms of cultural production (film, cartoons, architecture), and would gladly have taken more if they had come to me. I also published a number of pieces on major aspects of women's and gender studies, and these were among the most interesting (and no doubt controversial) articles in the journal. The only serious disappointment was the field of political economy—it is almost impossible for economists as they are now trained to write a piece that is readily intelligible to the majority of *IJMES* readers. In this field we were confronted either with rather impressionistic work or with a forest of mathematical symbols. I very much hope that my successor will find some way to resolve this conundrum.

To conclude, I have tried to select articles which represent the best work across the many disciplines that make up Middle Eastern studies, although no doubt I have slipped more than once. I have looked for things which were both theoretically sophisticated (though theory could never be an article's *raison d'être*) and empirically solid and informative (although I have avoided things that just dumped new facts on an already overlarge pile). I have tried to allow scholars to speak in the varied dialects of their own disciplines, while screening out trendy and obscurantist jargon. Finally, I have whenever possible sought to assemble thematically coherent issues. Where the ingredients at hand did not permit this, I have at least tried to lay out a good smorgasbord. I hope I have succeeded in some measure, and I wait with eagerness to see the new directions which *IJMES* will take under the guidance of Professor Cole.