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FROM THE EDITOR

Although this issue of the journal goes out with my name on the masthead as editor, all the pre-production editing was in the expert hands of my predecessor, Juan R. I. Cole, and his able assistant, Alissa Surges. I want to take this opportunity to thank them for their years of service to the journal and to the profession. Juan Cole guided the journal for five years with a remarkable blend of energy, vision, and attention to detail. We all profited from the breadth of his scholarly background and research interests, which bridge many of the geographical, disciplinary, and cultural divides of Middle East studies. During his tenure as the editor, the journal flourished and fulfilled its mission as a journal of record for our field. Juan Cole also left his particular stamp of engagement with current theoretical questions coupled with high-quality empirical research, as exemplified in the special issue he co-edited in May 2002 on nationalism and the colonial legacy. Thanks to his management skills, and those of Alissa Surges, the journal also moved into the electronic world of the 21st century under his watch. I am very grateful for the time and effort they put into developing the databases, office procedures, and filing systems that streamlined the editorial process. I am inheriting a healthy and thriving operation because of their skills and commitment.

I hope to guide the journal for the next five years, first and foremost by maintaining the excellent organization built by my predecessors and meeting the expectations of the journal's readers. The latter I take to be twofold. First, the content of *IJMES* should reflect current scholarship at its best and most inclusive. Articles and reviews will continue to evoke the geographical reach of Middle East studies, from North Africa to Muslim South Asia, as well as the range of disciplinary and interdisciplinary practices of scholars in the field. The publication of exciting new work, firmly grounded in research from a wide variety of sub-regions and disciplines, will remain the central mission of the journal. Second, *IJMES* strives to represent new developments in Middle East studies by publishing articles and reviews that push against the old parameters of the field. As a multi-disciplinary and interdisciplinary journal, IJMES serves its readers by helping them keep abreast of the ways in which current issues—theoretical approaches, politics, cultural interactions—are having an impact on the ways we design and carry out our scholarship. In brief, it seems to me that *IJMES* should have its finger on the pulse of Middle East studies as it is being shaped and reshaped in the present context.

These are challenging times for our field, in the sense that global attention has never been more focused on the region we study, and we cannot but feel the responsibility we bear to supply the most accurate and constructive knowledge of the area with an eye to furthering understanding. Middle East studies has found itself the object of scrutiny in recent times, under assault in some quarters for the perceived sin of following irrelevant

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or apologetic paths. This issue of *IJMES*, like so many others before it, illustrates what serious scholarship on the region brings to the table: in-depth exploration of the variety of Islamic discourses (the articles by Reynolds, Halldén, and Weismann) and close case studies of the relation between state and civil society (the articles by Özbek and Ali) lend depth and nuance to topics that are too often treated in a simplistic and ahistorical fashion. Surely we need to continue publishing such high-quality work, research that brings the best scholarly practices to bear on diverse aspects of the region and its inhabitants and therefore acts by example to refute critics of the field who would set an overly narrow and policy-driven research agenda that threatens to impoverish our knowledge of the region. In coming issues, I also look forward to lively debate and sober reflection on the approaches, purposes, and goals of scholarly research in Middle East studies today.

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