

THE EDITOR'S DESK

With this issue, my tenure as the first Editor-in-Chief of the *International Journal of Middle East Studies* comes to an end after eleven years. I would like to thank all those who have contributed in some way to its success over the years: I. William Zartman, Secretary-General of the Middle East Studies Association during most of my tenure as Editor; the brilliant and devoted staff of the Cambridge University Press, including Ronald Mansbridge, Jack Schulman, and Euan H. Phillips, directors of the New York office; the publisher, Michael Black; director of production, Peter Burbidge, and his associate in the New York office Richard Hollick; Gillian Page in London and Sue Potter in New York, in charge of business matters; and the new staff in Cambridge, Dennis Forbes, Mrs. Hilary Moore, Jill Walden, and Rosemary Tennison; my Assistant Editor during the last five years Teresa Joseph; the members of the Editorial Board and Book Review Board; the directors of MESA; and our patient, helpful, and understanding contributors and readers.

IJMES was founded in 1969 to provide a vehicle for significant research in Middle East studies produced by scholars throughout the world. The primary emphasis has been research into the Middle Eastern source materials themselves. The use of Western-language sources has been acceptable only as a supplement, or when they have related to the activities of Westerners and Western nations in the Middle East. Analytical and interpretative articles also have been published when based on intimate knowledge of the local sources. Issues consisting of invited articles concerning particular topics have been avoided because of my distaste for sponsored or directed research. An attempt has been made to balance each issue among the more important areas of interest as well as the major disciplines, although this has not always been possible because of insufficient articles of quality in certain areas of study. In choosing articles, I have secured the advice of members of the Editorial Board as well as other specialists, but have made the final decisions myself.

When first assuming the editorship of *IJMES* over a decade ago, I was somewhat pessimistic about the possibility of attracting articles of quality sufficient to fill its pages on a quarterly basis. How wrong I was! Almost from the start I have been overwhelmed with the quality of research in most of the articles submitted for publication, and my overriding problem over the years has been that of securing a balance among the different disciplines and areas and publishing the articles expeditiously without subjecting their authors to unreasonable delays. Despite constant effort, the backlog of unpublished articles has risen steadily, however, to as much as two or even three years in areas particularly rich in scholarly production.

A matter of constant concern has been the Book Review section. The ideal of assigning reviews to mature scholars of proven competence in the field of each

book, and of securing reviews that present the contents and objectively evaluate contributions has been extremely difficult to achieve because of the concentration of many specialists on their own research and the inclination of some to use the reviews as occasions to promote their own concerns. My own efforts to solve the problem by personally handling the book reviews were succeeded by a Book Review Board of specialists in the different areas and disciplines and, later, by Book Review editors nominated by the British Society for Middle Eastern Studies. Though the new arrangement lightens the burden of the Editor-in-Chief and provides increased efficiency, the securing of competent book reviews that reflect the works reviewed more than the idiosyncracies of the reviewers and add perspective to scholarship remains a recurring problem.

Another important problem of increasing concern has been the tendency of political action groups, and some of their members and supporters within the academic community, to view scholarship as an instrument of publicity as well as political action and to contribute and evaluate books and articles in the same light. The result, inevitably, is a debasement of scholarship.

I am pleased to announce that I will be succeeded as Editor by my colleague at the University of California, Los Angeles, Dr. Afaf Lutfi al-Sayyid-Marsot, Professor of Modern Middle Eastern History and currently president of MESA. I wish her success, and ask for her the same support and encouragement that has sustained me over the years.

Los Angeles, California

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