Introduction to the *Journal of Islamic Archaeology*

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It is my pleasure and great honor to be able to pen these words, introducing a journal that should have come to light years ago. This is not the first journal dedicated to the archaeology of the Islamic world. Some, fortunately, continue to be published; others, to our discipline’s loss, have been discontinued. There has been a palpable gap in publication venues, as a result, which archaeologists in the field lament at nearly every conference, workshop, and professional meeting we attend. There is no single place to go to read about developments in the discipline, to share ideas and methods and project concepts. Most field reports and ceramic studies—which have constituted the core of our publications—are to be found in dispersed, regional journals of limited distribution. There has been, until now, no venue which covers the Islamic world in its broadest chronological and geographical extent. This journal fills these gaps and offers even more. We are pleased that Equinox is looking after its layout, publication, and distribution. The *Journal of Islamic Archaeology* could not be in more able hands!

When I began my own university studies in the 1980s, there was no “Islamic archaeology” in which to specialize. In the following decade though, Islamic archaeology grew into a field of study and research of its own, holding on to many of the conceptual categories and methods of Islamic art history and history, from which it had its roots, and has come to embrace the vision and interpretive framework of anthropology, where many of its practitioners today feel most at home. In North America, it is considered a form of Historical Archaeology, maintaining a necessary, but uncomfortable, relationship with traditional textual analysis. The field is producing scholarship today on topics as varied as agricultural politics and peasant resistance, “socialized landscapes” and communal identity, and the medieval sugar industry and iron-working as triggers of social change.

The archaeological study of Islamic societies, and societies under Muslim hegemony, has witnessed visible growth in recent years—a burst of energy expanding academic curricula, producing a flood of publications, and becoming more of a presence

Keywords: Islamic archaeology, socialized landscapes, ASOR, ICAANE, transdisciplinarity
in academic conferences. A survey of recent national and international archaeological conferences bears witness to this incremental growth. It has become quite visible, for example, at the Annual Meeting of the American Schools of Oriental Research (ASOR), the flagship professional organization for Middle Eastern archaeology in North America. In 2010, after years of several smaller panels dedicated to the archaeology of the Ottoman Levant, the “Archaeology of Islamic Society” was introduced as a regular offering of the Annual Meetings. That year there were two full sessions, with a total of ten papers, in addition to a handful of others placed in the panel on the Byzantine–Early Islamic transition. Together, the papers represented a rather traditional mix of field reports and ceramic studies. The following year, a member-designed session on Islamic frontiers was added. In 2012, there were three full sessions on Islamic archaeology, with seventeen papers in these and other panels. Many new themes were offered that year, ranging from technology and environmental history, to diet, methodology, and urban-rural relations.

Similar trends can be discerned in surveying the changing profile of recent bi-annual meetings of the International Congress on the Archaeology of the Ancient Near East ICAANE—Europe’s equivalent of ASOR. Islamic archaeology has a longer history at these meetings: the first papers on the topic were presented at Copenhagen in 2000. In 2008, papers with “Islamic” themes were presented in six different sessions; a total of 36 papers that year were offered, covering topics ranging from surveys and excavations to state-of-the-field, methodology, and topics more properly deemed architectural and art history. As with ASOR, the first stand-alone Islamic sessions were introduced in 2010. Eight panels with thirty papers total. The topics were diverse, with a notable increase in the number of papers on landscape studies and surveys. With the reorganization of sessions at the 2012 conference, all Islamic panels were grouped into one section devoted to Islamic archaeology, in which a total of thirty papers were presented.

There has been in the last decade, as well, a marked increase in the number of major publications in the field, with textbook-style monographs and those on specialized topics (and particularly ceramics and final field reports). A discipline has really come of its own, when “state-of-the-field” works are produced. This year Springer’s *Encyclopaedia of Global Archaeology* (with its multi-chapter section on Islamic archaeology) appeared and by year’s end Oxford’s massive *Handbook of Islamic Archaeology* is scheduled for publication.

A survey of the kinds of topics presented and published in these venues illustrates certain trends. The push towards multi-disciplinarity in archaeology, given impetus by the processual movement of the 1970s, has intensified in all fields of archaeology the last decade. A growing interest in the archaeological site within the larger contexts of its landscape and hinterland has led to regional surveys that are as much concerned with the natural world as the social one. This is an area of real growth in Islamic archaeology today. More students of Islamic archaeology today have special training in Arabic texts and anthropological and sociological theory. The field, as with “other” archaeologies has been gravitating towards the natural and social sciences, while holding fast to its ties to art and textual history.
The Journal of Islamic Archaeology is a product of these exciting developments. Dedicated to the archaeological study of Islamic societies, the journal embraces the study of non-Muslim communities, as well, under the hegemony of Muslim regimes. The chronological coverage is deliberately wide—the rise of Islam to the establishment of the modern nation-states (roughly the end of the Ottoman Empire)—and is equally broad geographically—the global world of Islam. Not limited to the archaeologies of particular countries or regions, the journal offers a venue for fruitful comparisons of widely dispersed societies, long-distance international trade (and other global networks), and long-term socio-cultural change. It is also consciously multi-disciplinary, with the hope of facilitating the publication of scholarship that is truly trans-disciplinary (in the very literal sense of “transcending disciplines”). When I agreed to launch and edit this journal, I had one goal in mind: to produce a journal that I would want to read, that I had always wanted to be available to me. The guiding concept is simple: to place at the reader’s disposal in one place, under a single cover, scholarship of interest to archaeologists of the Islamic world. The editorial board reflects this vision: they represent the disciplines of Islamic archaeology (from the western to eastern extents of the Islamic world), Islamic art and architecture, medieval Islamic history, historical geography of the Islamic world, Islamic numismatics, and the environmental history of the Middle East. While field reports and ceramic studies will have a presence in every issue, the journal will also offer studies from related disciplines that either make use of archaeological material or in some way struggle with issues that are of direct concern and interest to archaeologists.

The collection of articles in this, the inaugural, issue illustrates this philosophy and the mix that can result. The four essays cover a range of archaeological and art historical methods. The volume opens appropriately with a critical review of cumulative fieldwork in Islamic Cordoba, considering the physical and functional development of the urban core, its suburbs, and the agricultural hinterland, from Late Antiquity through the Almohad Caliphate. It highlights long-term research by Spanish archaeologists on Islamic Andalusia, which is growing exponentially and has been largely inaccessible until now to non-Spanish speakers. The second essay in this issue is an object study: glass bangles from intrusive burials in central Jordan. This category of material culture is acquiring greater visibility in Islamic archaeology, primarily for its chronological potential and possible associations with tribal society. The remaining articles contribute in different ways to the ever-evolving field of Mamluk studies. The first is an archaeological-historical analysis of two fifteenth-century architectural inscriptions identified in secondary context during archaeological surveys on the Amuq Plain. The inscriptions are “read” against the backdrop of the Mamluks’ continued commercial development of its northern frontier, at a time of military conflict and political crisis. The final contribution to this issue is an art historical study on a topic that is attracting greater interest today in archaeological circles: the materiality of pilgrimage and holy sites. The study explores the history of collecting and displaying the footprints and other relics of the Prophet Muhammad in Mamluk-era Cairo, raising important questions about their ultimate intent and meaning in a specific spatial context.
Readers will soon notice rapid development of the journal and varied efforts at public outreach. Future issues will include, in addition to four or five articles, book reviews (in both the print and online forms) and the brief field and lab report blog section entitled “Letters from the Sands” (online version only). A monograph series is in the planning stages and will be announced shortly. The journal website will keep readers updated on such developments: https://www.equinoxpub.com/journals/index.php/JIA. Manuscripts, which are blindly peer-reviewed, are also submitted through an automated system at this website. The Journal of Islamic Archaeology will be published twice a year, in the spring and fall.