Introduction to *Letters from the Sands*

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And the journal keeps on growing.

In the inaugural issue of the *Journal of Islamic Archaeology* our editor, Bethany Walker, opened on a very positive and optimistic note, to which I am happy to subscribe. In that address she also mentioned the forthcoming launch of the blog *Letters From the Sands*, which is the topic of this short note.

Very soon after the journal started to gain its present form, Bethany offered the Board members the opportunity to shape its further development through various initiatives. One of them, the blog, was particularly appealing to me: an on-line venue in which the latest field- and laboratory-based work could be shared. In our field one often gets the impression of working in relative isolation. We frequently lack opportunities to dialogue with specialists of Islamic culture, who have archaeological training and are working in the same geographical regions or chronological periods. That Islamic archaeology has developed from several different academic traditions and in a range of regions with very varied historical conditions necessarily produces very particular ways of looking at the archaeological record. If Islamic archaeology is going to develop as a common endeavour, open lines of communication among us are needed, which can foster debate on methodology and perhaps even of the epistemology of the disciple. We should take every possible chance to debate and build links. One way to accomplish this is to share data quickly, and to openly discuss in a more informal venue. These are the goals of *Letters From the Sands*.

The name of the blog is a way of honoring the work of the pioneers of the field in a somewhat evocative fashion. Islam, of course, has spread far beyond the desert, and sands are not necessarily the most relevant component of the landscapes of our work environments. In recognizing the efforts of these pioneers, on whose foundations we build today, we acknowledge that our own contributions, as important as they are individually, gain relevancy and potency only if we work collaboratively.

The blog is now soliciting contributions from scholars developing projects related to the archaeological study of Islamic societies, including the minorities within them.
It is open to those who wish to share their interests, cumulative knowledge, and methods. The ultimate aim of the blog is to help us to build a scholarly community around the practice of Islamic archaeology. To this effort, reviews of and references to conferences related to Islamic archaeology, or of exhibitions of the material culture of Islamic societies of any historical periods, are most welcome. Finally, posts that advertise new research groups, graduate programs, and institutes, and their scholarly aims and programs, as well as “conversations” between or among individual scholars on a specific area of interest or debate in the field, will find a home here.

The format of the posts in the blog is purposely short, in order to give visibility to the largest possible numbers of contributions, and to allow for easy reference. Further details on topics discussed in the blogs can then be obtained by contacting directly the authors of the posts. Please find the guidelines for contributors to the blog in the website of the journal, and send your posts to jose.c.lopez@ucl.ac.uk. The final decision on publication rests with the Editor of the Journal and the Editor of the Blogs, who are both willing to receive news from all of you!