

JOURNAL OF NEAR EASTERN STUDIES

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This year marked a major transition at the journal: after more than a decade at the helm, Christopher Woods handed the editorship over to James Osborne, assistant professor of Anatolian Archaeology. As James wrote in the introduction to the April 2020 issue:

“Besides marking a decade since my first foray into the world of academic publishing, this same decade from 2009–2019 represents almost exactly the period in which JNES was under the editorial leadership of Christopher Woods, now the John A. Wilson Professor of Sumerian and the Director of the University of Chicago’s Oriental Institute. The present issue will be the final one produced under his editorship. Taking the helm in March of 2009, Professor Woods was responsible for transforming the journal into the format we enjoy today, including an updated and expanded layout, color images, and a revamped cover design, all while maintaining the journal’s intellectual rigor and its role as the world’s leading ‘big tent’ venue for peer-reviewed scholarship in Near Eastern studies. On behalf of the entire faculty in the University of Chicago’s Department of Near Eastern Languages and Civilizations and the Oriental Institute, I thank Professor Woods for his remarkable dedication and service to the Journal of Near Eastern Studies.”

In addition to the editorship, James continues his role as book review editor for the ancient side of the journal; Fred Donner signed on as book review editor for the “modern” side; and Seth Richardson continues as managing editor.

The academic year 2019–20 (issues 78/2 and 79/1) continued the journal’s tradition of excellence. In eighteen articles of original research, JNES authors covered everything from the Early Bronze Age Iran to Umayyad Syria-Palestine; the culture of the Near East seen through its literature, science, archaeology, art, and historical texts. Among others, the journal published works on a newly discovered inscription of the Akkadian king Naram-Sin (twenty-third century BC) about his fabled war against Armanum and Ebla, an analysis of tax practices and symbolism in the Persian Empire; the “anthropology of science” in the cuneiform world, a new list of Sumerian demons, evidence for a second-millennium frontier wall in the Zagros Mountains, women warriors in early Islam, a Babylonian historical omen describing the fall of Babylon in 1595 BC; the ritual “mutilation” of Egyptian gods, and much more. Alongside these appeared twenty-one reviews of books on cyber research and archaeological data, the historical geography of the Hittite heartland, ancient Egyptian pseudo-scripts, child custody in Islamic law, Levantine cookware, and concepts of time in the Seleucid Empire. The journal’s authors, as usual, hail from all corners of the world: Cairo, Ankara, Würzburg, Leiden, Jerusalem, Moscow, Kufa, Bologna, Kermanshah, Cambridge (UK), Belgrade, Tehran, Helsinki, Strasbourg, Kiel, and Lyon.

It is worth pausing to explain the work that goes on behind the doors that allows the journal to get the good results it does: the largely unrecognized work of the anonymous external reviewers to whom we turn to not only evaluate manuscripts and recommend action on them but also provide copious and detailed advice for authors. Our authors thus receive the benefit of a substantial double-blind peer-review process, which helps make their work better, whether it is ultimately accepted for publication or not. In the year running from July 1, 2019, to June 30, 2020, we sent out fifty-nine manuscripts for a full and formal review process to 127 external readers. Our belief that

JNES speaks to a global audience of scholars is reflected in the origins not only of our authors, but of our manuscript evaluators as well: seventy-two of the 127 readers this year work at institutions not in the United States. We would like to extend our most heartfelt thanks to all the colleagues who offered their time and knowledge to advance the quality of what we all read.

While we do not claim the credit of doing much of this formal review work ourselves, we can claim credit for expeditiousness. The speed with which we coordinate the completion of the review process magnifies its benefits, because timely review is crucial in order to get important new work to press and to get advice for revision to authors while their work is still in a formative stage. In the year running from July 1, 2019, to June 30, 2020, the journal received exactly one hundred manuscripts. Of those, forty-one manuscripts were not advanced to the review process after consideration by the editors; the average time-to-decision (TTD, i.e., from date of submission to date of decision) for those manuscripts was seven days. These authors may not have received the answer they wanted, but we make it a point not to keep them waiting unduly.

Of the fifty-nine manuscripts, then, which were sent out the 127 external reviewers, the following results and turnaround time pertain to the same 2019–20 period:

<i>Result</i>	<i>No. of Manuscripts</i>	<i>Average TTD</i>
Accept	14	43 days
Revise & Resubmit	15	69 days
Reject	23	61 days
Currently under Review	7	no decision yet

Thus, for the fifty-nine manuscripts submitted, reviewed, and brought to decision within this year, authors received news of the process in an average of fifty-nine days (eight-and-a-half weeks). In tandem with the fact that accepted manuscripts are moved to publication in under one year from the date of decision, JNES authors get a full peer-review process, a timely decision, and quick publication of their work. We think the advantages for all are clear enough!