LETTER OF INTRODUCTION FROM THE EDITORIAL COLLECTIVE

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I am delighted to introduce the first issue of Islamic Africa to the scholars of Islam in Africa and to the broader academic community. To avoid any doubt, Islamic Africa is an academic journal devoted to the publication of scholarly materials, not religious propaganda. As its mission statement proclaims, this journal is old and new at the same time, for it continues the excellent traditions of its precursor and builds on those traditions in new and exciting directions. The founding editors envisaged Islamic Africa as the premier academic journal in its field. To achieve this ambition, the journal is organized as a collegial endeavor not dependent on any one particular person, but on the collective efforts of individuals willing to serve on the editorial board and in other capacities as well as on the continuing interests of the many and diverse readers it hopes to serve. It is being published by a major university press in order to reach as wide a readership as possible and electronically in order to be accessible to audiences beyond the big university libraries. As an electronic journal, Islamic Africa hopes to reach more readers than those traditionally served by university libraries in Western Europe and North America.

The intellectual origins of the journal stem from the Institute for the Study of Islamic Thought in Africa (ISITA), established in 2000 by Professor John O. Hunwick of Northwestern University and Professor R. Seán O’Fahey of the University of Bergen. Institutionally located at the Program of African Studies of Northwestern University, ISITA has produced several publications on various aspects of Islam in Africa, hosted visiting
scholars from Africa and beyond, and organized several conferences at Northwestern University as well as at African academic institutions, creating in the process an international network of intellectual excellence connecting scholars of Islam in Africa in many parts of the world. ISITA was initially conceived to dispel the erroneous but widespread notion that the practice of Islam in Africa south of the Sahara has been devoid of intellectual dimensions—an idea originating largely from the colonially sponsored studies of “Islam Noir/African Islam.” Apart from producing impressive scholarship that demonstrates the richness of the Islamic intellectual traditions of Africa, ISITA’s research endeavors have also highlighted the many complex connections between Africa and the wider world of Islam. Similarly, the initial ISITA focus on the Islamic intellectual traditions of Africa has since expanded to elucidate the cultural, religious, literary, historical, social, political, and other dimensions within which the now well-documented Islamic intellectual traditions of Africa have been embedded. The exciting scholarship produced under ISITA auspices has been published in major reference works, edited volumes, working papers, and thematic issues of journals. Among the journals, *Sudanic Africa* has been more organically linked with ISITA’s intellectual and institutional growth, and *Islamic Africa* incorporates and builds upon this relationship. These organic links will continue to grow and flourish because of the vital elements connecting the two journals, most notably the kind willingness of both the main editor of *Sudanic Africa*, Professor Knut Vikør, and the book review editor, Professor Scott Reese, to serve on the editorial board of *Islamic Africa*.

The intellectual vision of *Islamic Africa* seeks to expand the long-standing traditions of outstanding research and publication about Islam in Africa. To realize this vision, *Islamic Africa* takes advantage of its institutional relationship with Northwestern University, with its formidable assets and unique strengths within its globally famous Program of African Studies, as evidenced, for example, in the award-winning careers of renowned scholars of Islam in Africa, who have also trained dozens of doctoral students in the field. Apart from Northwestern’s unmatched library on Africa in general and on Islam in Africa in particular, Northwestern University Press, which has published thirteen volumes in its series on *Islam and Society in Africa*, plans for permanent publication of the journal beyond the initial period of generous seed-funding provided by the Mellon Foundation. Given this excellent intellectual pedigree and prestigious institutional heritage, *Islamic Africa* is poised to extend the frontiers of