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Memories of an Editor

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Memories of an Editor

I recently stepped down after fifteen years as an editor of the *Comparative Civilizations Review*. This was an enjoyable but heavy task, and one that I will certainly miss.

When I first signed on as an editor under the leadership of Joe Drew, we were in complete agreement about what sort of journal we wanted to see. Both of us had other writing and editing experience over the years, and for us both, we believed that even scholarly articles should be readable. Too many scholarly journals are so rigorous that it requires real motivation to wade through some of the overly-footnoted materials. We realized that scholars need to publish in refereed journals for their career promotion, but at the same time, readers should also be considered.

Editing *Comparative Civilizations Review* brought another problem that single-issue journals do not have: multiple disciplines. Our readers are not necessarily reading articles in their own areas of expertise. We had to make the assumption that our intended audience was liberally educated, able to make sense of articles not overly specialized. Our mission was to explore those issues that extended over the globe and throughout history.

Producing our journals twice a year required a non-ending process of soliciting papers (many from our annual conferences), sending them out for peer review, getting the reviews, and tactfully guiding the authors into making the needed corrections to their manuscript (or suggest that they submit to another journal). We then needed to get a revised paper back from the author in a timely fashion; edit it (often three editors carry out this task for each paper), then create a final document that would go to the publishers. The publishers would typeset the articles in the journal, and then Joe and I would go through the laborious task of line by line editing to make certain everything was correct.

We did this twice each year, year after year, for the past 15 years. We hope that the journal was and continues to be read and enjoyed by not only our own members, but others through libraries and now online, as well.

Several colleagues were a particular delight to work with--most especially, the late Matt Melko, who is my model for a perfect scholar and gentleman. He was an early and scholarly believer that mankind's proclivity to general warfare has greatly declined. (His work on warfare offers astonishing statistics that make peace a larger part of the human experience than we might imagine.) Melko was also a superb Peer Review editor; he seemed to know everybody--a roster of extremely diverse experts.

Another colleague that I particularly enjoyed was the late Steadman Noble, who became a scholar late in his life. He worked as a civil engineer in Washington, DC, and, upon his retirement, he seemed to have moved into the Library of Congress and read everything!

Steadman was our best specialist on prehistoric mankind. He claimed to be bored by anything later than 300 AD, and definitely preferred the Caves of Lascaux to ancient Rome. An example of pure Steadman can be found in the Spring 2001 journal: “How Humans Domesticated Themselves, Invented Agriculture and Became Civilized.”

In that same journal, by the way, is my own offering on how a work of literature can become the vehicle to a nation’s identity: “The Shahnameh of Ferdowsi: An Icon to National Identity [Iran].”

One of the most fascinating series we published was by Robert Duncan Enzmann and Donald Thomas Burgy: “Reading Europe’s Paleolithic Writing.” We had several editorial meetings to decide whether to print this series because it was so original, and I am happy to say that we took a chance. The fact that one of the authors was a code breaker by trade was a deciding factor. See the Fall 2004 issue for one of these articles.

Until we got our journals online (thanks to Editor Connie Lamb and her school, Brigham Young University), we had materials that only a dedicated few were able to read. Now we are available to what I believe will be a greatly growing audience.

Best of luck to my replacements. I will happily keep reading.

Laina Farhat-Holzman