

Union of European Arabists and Islamicists
Union Européenne des Arabisants et Islamisants

NEWSLETTER

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This *Newsletter* appears rather later than usual. The Global Financial Crisis doubly afflicted your editor, and it was not possible in 2009 to write, print and send out a *Newsletter* in the accustomed format and at the accustomed time. Nevertheless the editor hopes that you all had a Happy Christmas in 2009 in spite of the delay in transmitting our greetings, and that 2010 will be an enjoyable year free of the kind of misfortunes brought about by the recent economic instability.

Now that we have a Union website (more on this below), it seemed best to compose a version of the *Newsletter* for publication on that website. It will also be sent out by email, and readers should note a slight change in the editor's email address.



Those who were at Leipzig for the 2008 Congress will not need reminding that it afforded all the intellectual and social satisfaction that our members expect. Since we always experience these satisfactions at our meetings (has there ever been a disappointing Congress? A rhetorical question, to which the answer is "No"), all the editor has to do is to describe the unique features of the Leipzig conference.

There are at least two, one general and one private. Slipping out of my editorial impersonality, I record that this is the first time in my whole career that a conference has ended before I was ready for it. All conference-goers know that feeling you have around the middle of a conference (sometimes even on the first day, especially at EUROMES) that the meeting has already gone on for long enough, but I can document the fact that in the middle of the first morning session on the 27th September I suddenly discovered I was listening to the final papers of the conference when I was still expecting another day to come. It was a genuine surprise, and I left Leipzig regretting that the 24th Congress had ended too early.

To be in Leipzig is always a privilege. It is the city of Bach and of Auerbachs Keller, and it is the original home of the German Oriental Society, as well as the location of one of the most imposing railway stations in Europe, and the place where the first public signs of the downfall of the Honecker régime were manifested. Auerbachs Keller was named after the birthplace of its owner, who, appropriately enough, was also the Rector of Leipzig University, and one of its most famous regular customers

was a student called Goethe. For the Union it is not so significant that the inspiration for *Faust* is connected with the Keller, rather it is Goethe's fascination with the Islamic world as expressed in his *Westöstliche Diwan* which gives Leipzig a special value for us. Remember, the Union has a good eye for exceptional cities, and Leipzig has certainly fulfilled our hopes. Your editor, back in the third person now, recalls how often the name of Heinrich Leberecht Fleischer would appear in 19th century scholarly works in expressions of gratitude for his help by colleagues from all over Europe (in those days you could borrow manuscripts from other countries). This is the spirit of the Union and it has always been the spirit of Leipzig.

The distinctive feature of this conference—seen from the editor's perspective, but one hopes also shared by others—was its intimacy and smoothness: the participants, the hotels, the meeting rooms, the programme, the entertainments, the exhibition of printing, all the ingredients of the Congress blended together in a harmony which is rare even in the Union (but no names will be mentioned, in accordance with the Samaranch principle that every Congress is better than the one before). This has partly to do with the compact nature of the Leipzig city centre but the team-work of the local colleagues must take most of the credit. Symbolic of the calmness and dignity of the Congress was the river cruise on the Saale (our first since the Leuven/Ghent Congress of 1996), and the visit to Naumburg Cathedral: even though the distance from boat to shore is not great, there is an immeasurable tranquility in sailing along a beautiful river in good company with excellent weather and a glass of prosecco in the hand.



The minutes of the 2008 General Meeting will be posted separately on our new website. Here are the officials of the Union as appointed at that meeting, with their email addresses:

President : Silvia Naef (Switzerland)

silvia.naef@lettres.unige.ch (Web: www.unige.ch/lettres/meslo/arabe)

Vice-President : Juan Souto (Spain)

juasouto@filol.ucm.es

Secretary General : Bernadette Martel-Thoumian (France)

Bernadette.Martel-Thoumian@upmf-grenoble.fr

Deputy Secretary General : Urbain Vermeulen (Belgium)

urbain.vermeulen@skynet.be

Treasurer : Arie Schippers (Netherlands)

a.schippers@uva.nl

Auditor: Hinrich Biesterfeldt (Germany)

Hinrich.Biesterfeldt@ruhr-uni-bochum.de

Names and addresses of national representatives can be obtained from the above officials or from the editor.



For those who do not already know, our next meeting is in Naples, 8th-12th September. Although registration closed on the 31st December 2009, it is likely that late applications would be accepted, especially as the crucial date for paying registration fees is not until the 14th March, and hotel bookings can be made up until the 31st May. The email address is <ueai25.unior.it>, or log on to the Union website at <<http://www.ueai.eu/index.htm>>.



Editorial musings. To my surprise, it is seventeen years since I took over the publication of the *Newsletter*, the issue of 1993 being my first production, when John Mattock was President. It was modelled on the *Newsletter* edited by Gautier Juynboll, which appeared only once, in 1989. From my record of the correspondence it appears that when I made the offer to edit the *Newsletter*, Juynboll consulted a number of colleagues, and their opinions were divided as follows, six in favour, twelve against and two undecided. To this day I wonder why I accepted the task against such strong opposition, and I hope the twelve members who did not want a *Newsletter* have at least enjoyed reading it.

Meanwhile there is great progress on other fronts, which may make the physical *Newsletter* redundant. The Union website will soon be the place to which all members will turn for information and contact, and it is the ideal location for the *Newsletter*, which can be posted on the website in a downloadable PDF format. The major burden of preparing the paper copy of the *Newsletter* was the formatting, printing, folding, addressing and posting of the document, and since these labours are considerably reduced by publication on the web, I am willing to continue (but not for ever) producing an on-line *Newsletter*, which I will submit to the webmaster for uploading at the usual two-year interval between Congresses.

So this is not a swan song, more a weary croak from a worn out old rooster who would like to enjoy his retirement. How long I can continue to edit the on-line *Newsletter* is unknowable, but I shall be happy to hand over the responsibility as soon as someone is willing to relieve me of the burden.



Tail piece. In case you thought the previous section was of a valedictory nature, I am using the final paragraph to raise an issue which has come up before. From the time I became editor it has been *Newsletter* policy not to publish announcements of the achievements of individual members (except dying) or institutions (unless threatened with death). Two reasons should suffice (1) the *Newsletter* appears only every two years, and most of the time such announcements would be well out of date and (2) not everybody who has received some distinction or other takes the trouble to tell the editor about it, so there is an element of unfairness. By far the best way to publicise one's success is to come to the Congress and tell your friends about it personally.