Guest Editor’s Preface

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The topic of the archaeology of Islamization in Africa is the focus of this special issue of the Journal of Islamic Archaeology. Since this author wrote on the archaeology of Islam in sub-Saharan Africa (Insoll 2003), research on the subject has expanded, as indicated by the first issue on Islamic archaeology in Africa to be published by the journal (cf. Journal of Islamic Archaeology, 2017, volume 4.2), but a gap in exploring the archaeological indicators of Islamization remained, and North Africa was omitted from the discussion. This was addressed through a conference held in the Institute of Arab and Islamic Studies, University of Exeter, in December 2019 on the theme of Archaeological Perspectives on Conversion to Islam and Islamization in Africa and held under the auspices of the Becoming Muslim project funded by the ERC (BM694254-ERC-2015-AdG) of which the author was PI. The four papers included here developed from this conference and explore Islamization in coastal East Africa (Anderson), North Africa (Fenwick), West Africa (Insoll, MacDonald), and the Horn of Africa (Insoll). They highlight the diversity of Islamic archaeology in the continent and indicate that although similar material markers can recur archaeologically, Islamization is contextually specific reflecting differences in lifeways, environment, historical circumstances, ethnicities, pre-Islamic backgrounds, and local outcomes and agency.

Reference