

CDEISI

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The famous Hadith 'seek knowledge, even in China' expresses a passion that true scholars will always have, although the ways and means of seeking knowledge have changed greatly over the centuries. The hajj was for centuries an important means for Muslims to learn about the world and Islam beyond the local *madrasa*. Steamship, rail, and air travel made Western scholarship on Islam and Muslim scholarship in the West far more accessible than when this Hadith first began to circulate. Computers and the Web have added a whole new dimension of accessibility. Among institutions, consortia of scholars and departments of Islamic Studies, such as those associated with ISIM, are creating fields such as Islamic Studies across many universities into single venues of study. Another example of inter-institutional cooperation in Islamic religious studies in the south-eastern United States is the Carolina Duke Emory Institute for the Study of Islam (CDEISI).

The idea for CDEISI arose out of a circumstance of serendipity in the spring of 1996 in Durham, North Carolina. Three chairs of departments of religion, who also happened to be specialists in Islamic Studies – Bruce Lawrence (Duke University), Carl Ernst (University of North Carolina – UNC), and Richard Martin (Emory University) – along with Gordon Newby (Chair of Middle Eastern Studies at Emory), met at the home of Bruce Lawrence to discuss ways to combine the resources of the three universities. Present at that first meeting was also Vincent Cornell (Duke).

The Need for a Graduate Consortium

The need that brought together five historians of religion who specialize in comparative studies of Islam was the fact that few North American universities train scholars in Islamic

Consortium for Islamic Religious Studies in South-Eastern United States

religious studies. One of the founding scholars of Islamic religious studies in North America, Prof. Charles J. Adams, studied history of religions with Joachim Wach at the University of Chicago, then turned specifically to Islamic Studies. In 1967, he concluded ruefully: 'As time has gone by, it has proven increasingly difficult to see a direct and fructifying relationship between the activities of Islamicists and those of historians of religions.'¹

By the 1980s the situation had begun to change,² but even at the end of this century specialists in Islamic religious studies are relatively rare in the nearly one thousand departments of religious studies in North American colleges and universities. In order to offer students instruction about Islam, departments of religion typically cross-list courses on the Middle East in departments of history, anthropology, political science, *inter alia*. The absence of

Islamic religious studies at the doctoral level has also been striking. Departments of Religion at the top universities have relied heavily on departments of Middle Eastern Studies to guide graduate students who wished to specialize in Islam.

Since the Departments of Religion at UNC, Duke and Emory were among the few in North America that had hired two or more specialists in Islam, the question the five of us asked ourselves in 1996 was: Can we accomplish more together than separately? Can we combine the resources in Islamic religious studies in our three universities in practical ways that would greatly benefit our colleagues and attract the best students? Can we create a national, indeed an international, centre to train historians of religion in the comparative study of Islam? That afternoon was the nascence of CDEISI.

excellent way for us to communicate our current research and have critical responses among wider circles of colleagues in Islamic Studies than exist at our own institutions, and on a regular basis. The next stage may be for Emory to join Duke and UNC in producing telecourses on Islam. Broadcast from studio-classrooms at each of the universities, such courses could offer students at several institutions lectures by a cast of experts on many aspects of Islamic civilization.

In the nearly three years since CDEISI was formed, colleagues at universities across the country and in Canada have expressed interest in CDEISI. At a conference last year at the University of Washington on teaching Islamic Studies in the undergraduate curriculum, participants discussed the idea of forming several regional consortia, such as the CDEISI in the south-eastern United States, which might then link up with each other through an umbrella organization that could affiliate with a professional society, like the American Academy of Religion or the Middle East Studies Association. That is a project for the beginning of next century. Such consortia must be conceived and developed, however, at the local and regional level. We hope colleagues in Islamic Studies in many regions around the world will have serendipitous moments, such as ours in North Carolina in May of 1996, when they discover how much more they can do programmatically if they can establish a structure and the means to share human, material, and electronic resources in Islamic Studies.

Please visit our new web site, which is still a work in progress: <http://www.unc.edu/depts/cdeisi>. Inquiries and insights may be sent by e-mail to rcmartin@emory.edu. Relevant information will be shared with the CDEISI executive committee, which includes Bruce Lawrence and Carl Ernst. ♦

CDEISI Programmes

The CDEISI consortium actually builds on prior local cooperative arrangements among universities in the Research Triangle area of North Carolina, linking Duke, UNC, and North Carolina State University in Islamic and South Asian Studies. Administrative arrangements have now been made among CDEISI universities for graduate students in religion at Duke, Emory or UNC to study at one of the other member institutions for one semester. This enables students to work with additional faculty during their residencies or research phases of their doctoral studies. Their tuition and fellowship arrangements at their home institutions remain unchanged during that term. Thus, for example, a UNC student may choose to study Shi'i texts with Devin Stewart and/or Islam and international human rights with Abdullahi an-Na'im for one semester at Emory; an Emory graduate student can now spend a semester in North Carolina and study Islam in South Asia with Bruce Lawrence at Duke and Carl Ernst at UNC, or Maliki law with Vincent Cornell at Duke.

A second feature of the consortium is the exchange of faculty for guest lectures and faculty colloquia. On two or three occasions each semester (four to six times per year) each department of religion will host a faculty member from a member institution for a couple of days for the purpose of delivering a guest lecture in a graduate or undergraduate class as well as participate in a faculty colloquium on an issue in Islamic Studies and/or a recent scholarly book. Usually a more informal gathering in the evening includes graduate students and colleagues who do not specialize in Islamic religious studies. The exchanges give graduate students brief access to faculty at the other universities and thus opportunities to decide on the possibility of spending a semester working with that professor and his or her colleagues. The faculty visits have become an

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Notes

1. Charles J. Adams (1967), 'The History of Religions and the Study of Islam,' *The History of Religions: Essays on the Problem of Understanding*, ed., Joseph M. Kitagawa, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, p. 177.
2. See Richard C. Martin, ed. (1985), *Approaches to Islam in Religious Studies* (e.g., the Foreword by Charles J. Adams and the Introduction by Martin), Tucson, Ariz., University of Arizona Press.

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