

IISMM
LUCETTE VALENSI

The IISMM, a research centre of the École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales (EHESS), is devoted to the study of societies and cultures in the Muslim world. It is organized around a group of scholars representing all the social sciences of the regions where Islam is present: anthropology, history, anthropology and history of law, political science, linguistics, and sociology. Its goal is to simultaneously amplify and mobilize existing resources by providing support for research projects conceived by specialists of Islam and societies of the Muslim world.

The IISMM is not intended as a replacement for the already existing research groups in universities or in the Centre National de la Recherche (CNRS). It intends, rather, to provide assistance to specialists in completing projects under way and in preparing events (e.g., round tables, seminars, colloquia, etc.) that will highlight and disseminate this research. Mobilizing the resources in this field is done by lifting the routine-based barriers that have, on occasion, so rigidly compartmentalized research on the Muslim world.

The IISMM intends to organize seminars and encourage research focused on broader topics than those that have usually been studied, where specialists of a particular period or region can enrich their thinking through exposure to other approaches, developed in different areas of Muslim studies or through the analysis of other civilizations.

This call for an association of energies is imposed by the evolution of the research subject itself. Without breaking with the long tradition of oriental studies of which France may be justly proud, the IISMM seeks to free research from the tendency to confine Islam to a discourse so particularist as to make the object into a kind of irreducible reality, incommensurable, regardless of how it is approached, with any other reality.

The profound changes of the past century combined with the improved knowledge of the societies and cultures of the Muslim

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world have returned that world to its history, a history that is being both made and unmade. Former oppositions are fading away or being rearranged. Nevertheless, 'Islam' remains a fully valid topic of study. It constitutes the only common feature defining the domain that the IISMM intends to cover, extending from Senegal to North-west China, from the Balkans to Indonesia. The weight of religious tradition and the search for renewal cannot obliterate the multiplicity of references – political, scientific, aesthetic or cultural – in the Islam of today or yesterday, that fall outside of a strict Koranic genealogy. Islam is not the sum of its commandments. Whether it has been so remains a question of paramount importance to the IISMM.

The role chosen by the IISMM is to coordinate research and specialized instruction, and to open a venue of training and information to a wide, non-specialized public. It proposes a programme of research and teaching activities.

Research training

Weekly or bimonthly seminars

These seminars are given within the context of specialized courses concerning Muslim societies at the EHESS. The courses lead to the DEA (postgraduate diploma), a doctorate or the EHESS Diploma. The programmes and admission requirements will be announced by the EHESS.

Summer schools

Every year, in a Muslim country and in collaboration with the higher educational establishments in that country, the IISMM will organize study cycles bringing together

about 30 students preparing for doctorates in France and in the host country around a broad academic theme, allowing for exchanges and field visits. Applications should be addressed to the Institute, accompanied by a statement of purpose.

The first study-cycle will be held in Morocco, in collaboration with the Faculty of Arts and Human Sciences of Saïs-Fès, from 13-22 September 2000, around the theme 'Memory/Memories: Forms, Functions, and Customs'.

Postgraduate workshops

The Institute supports and initiates meetings intended to encourage contacts and discussion between postgraduate students working in the same cultural area and on the same period. These sessions, in which teaching staff also participates, will be led by the students.

Research and teaching skills

Parallel to the research programmes of external teams supported by the IISMM, the Institute is also developing its own academic programme of cross-disciplinary seminars linking different disciplines and cultural areas.

Research subjects

The following are the research topics designated for the academic year 2000 and 2001:

Islam in the Feminine; Faces of Islam; Internationalization of the Religious; Orientalism and Social Sciences; and Contemporary Artistic Creation in the Islamic Countries.

Occasional one-day seminars

These special events allow a wide public to benefit from the presence of scholars invited by the EHESS to discuss research in

progress. The first of these seminars concerned 'The Figure of the Literati in Islam' (May 2000).

'One Book/One Event'

The series of meetings entitled 'One Book/One Event' are open to an invited public. The first of these focused on Nasr Abu Zaid, Egyptian professor in exile in the Netherlands and the author of *A Critique of the Religious Discourse*, which has been translated into French. The next meetings will feature French specialists on modern Iran.

Continuing education

Annual courses, summer schools, and intensive courses are organized on specific themes and disciplines for groups and institutions that request them. ◆

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