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CONGRESS

Middle East and Muslim Worlds
Studies

28 June - 2 July 2021



Panel 45

Historical-critical studies on the origins of Islam : what reception in French-speaking Muslim circles?

In recent years, research on the early days of Islam has experienced an unprecedented academic and intellectual ferment. The discoveries to which it gives rise often call into question the main lines of the traditional Muslim narrative, which is silent on the historical issues that are seen in the context of proto-Islam.

Although the recent knowledge acquired on this subject is far from negligible, there is nevertheless an undeniable lack of dissemination, especially between the research world and Muslim circles, which are often unaware, ignorant or disdainful of the reality of this research.

However, it is essential to identify how men and women who speak out publicly about Muslims in France take into account the contemporary achievements of research if only to be able to take an overall historical look at the Muslim traditions that feed into terrorist discourse internally.

The objective of this workshop is to understand and identify these gaps in knowledge and to propose new dynamics for the articulation and transmission of research results. This would also allow for an analysis of how Muslim milieus take ownership of the work carried out by researchers and teachers.

People in charge : Hocine Kerzazi and Anne-Laure Zwilling (University of Strasbourg)

Discussants : Dominique Avon (EPHE), Steven Duarte (University Paris 13) and Antoine Pérusse de Montclos (IRD)

Program

Robert Kerr (University of the Saarland)

The origins of Islam: between history and mythography. Mecca as the holy site of Islam

The link between history and religion is often taken at face value. Religion, however, especially the origins of faith works on a different plane than does history; only once the latter has been constituted can it be adjoined to the former. Historical-critical research has shown this to be the case with, for example, Judaism and Christianity. The other "Abrahamic" Faith (to employ a somewhat dubious anachronism), namely Islam, is often seen as having emerged "in the full light of history". This, as is the case with its two sister religions, only has validity when later hagiographic sources are used. In my presentation, I wish to address how and approximately when Mecca became the holy site of Islam, and its relation to a "Muhammad" and the Qur'an. Does the Qur'an refer to Mecca, and was it the native city of Muhammad? The Quranic text itself (sans later exegetical tradition), as well as contemporary evidence, plead against the scenario portrayed by posterior Islamic traditional literature. It would rather seem that a Christological controversy and an apocalyptic crisis in seventh century Arabic Christianity lay at the roots of what would later become Islam. Only two one-and-a-half to two centuries later would Islam emerge as an independent religious Entity in Abbasid Baghdad, when Mecca replaced Jerusalem as

the cultic focus of this creed.

Éléonore Cellard (EPHE)

The manuscripts of the Koran

The study of the ancient manuscripts of the Koran occupies a growing place in current research on Islam. It arouses the interest of specialists but also of a much wider public, Muslim and non-Muslim alike. My talk will be devoted to the presentation of the research that has essentially developed in the West since the 19th century, the current work on the manuscripts and their reception. Finally, I will give an overview of the challenges and future projects in the French and international context.

Frédéric Imbert (Aix-Marseille)

The Koran of stones and research

The epigraphic research that is currently being carried out on Arabic graffiti from the first centuries of the hegira (7th-9th century) has raised new issues about the history of the Qur'anic text. Indeed, the discovery in the Arabic Peninsula and the Middle East of several extracts from the Qur'an, engraved by anonymous Muslims from the beginning of Islam, sheds new light on this question. Does the 'Qur'an of stones' reflect the 'Qur'an of paper'? Through a few inscriptions, we will try to understand what the contribution of this corpus may be to our knowledge of the Qur'anic text. Epigraphy, a discipline often considered secondary, places itself at the frontiers of Islamology and Qur'anology. Beyond the scientific results, figures and statistics, how to reconcile this research with the data of the Islamic tradition, how to transmit them?

Michel Younes (Catholic University of Lyon)

Research on the origins of Islam: what reception in Muslim circles?

In recent years, research on the early days of Islam has experienced an unprecedented academic and intellectual ferment. The discoveries to which it gives rise often call into question the broad outlines of the traditional Muslim narrative, which is silent on the historical issues that are seen in the context of proto-Islam.

However, if the recent knowledge acquired on this subject is far from negligible, it nevertheless suffers from an undeniable lack of dissemination, particularly between the research world and Muslim circles, which most often ignore, misunderstand or disregard the reality of this research.

However, it is essential to identify how men and women who publicly express Muslim views in France take into account the contemporary achievements of research if only to be able to provide an overall historical view of the Muslim traditions that nourish terrorist discourse internally.

The objective of this workshop is to understand and identify these gaps in knowledge, and to propose new dynamics for the articulation and transmission of research results. It would also allow for an analysis of how Muslim milieus appropriate the work carried out by researchers and teachers.