



Dominican Institute For Oriental Studies

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The IDEO Today

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A little more than fifty years later, the IDEO carries on with its task. Today, the Institute's team is made up of roughly fifteen members, to which are added another fifteen associate members and from whose research the Institute benefits. The recent arrival of several younger Arabist brethren has refreshed and enriched the team. After Georges C. Anawati, o.p., (d. January 1994), the IDEO'S director is now Régis Morelon, o.p., also a researcher at the CNRS (Paris) on a program of the History of Arabic Astronomy.

Since the beginning, the IDEO's work has remained in check with what was established in the previously quoted act of foundation: a scientific study of Islam and the Arabic culture, led by Christian Religious who present themselves as such and who live in community, showing solidarity and friendship with this complex world that surrounds them, without any proselytising whatsoever. A few signs of this:

1. To receive and welcome to our house: the Institute is a large building made up of the Priory, a church, meeting and study rooms, and a large library which is one of the Institute's essential elements: primarily turned towards the Arabic world, it currently contains around 90,000 volumes and more than 600 periodicals, including those in process of publication. Open to the public, it attracts many researchers:

Egyptians, both students and professors, as well as Orientalists visiting Cairo. According to the latter, the IDEO's library is one of the best throughout the whole Middle East! Maintaining this library and making it available to the public is one of our services offered locally. Furthermore, the IDEO has always welcomed trainees, for periods of a few months or a couple of years, depending on the case. The Institute does not dispense lectures, but offers a proper work atmosphere and the appropriate tools to those who share our area of research.

2. The Periodical *MIDEO*: since 1954, the *MIDEO (Mélanges de l'Institut Dominicain d'Etudes Orientales)* has been the expression of the work of IDEO's members and it has acquired an international audience. Twenty-six volumes have been published thus far.

3. In Egypt: the work accomplished by the very first team was quickly recognized and given support by the Egyptian authorities: the President of the Academy of the Arabic Language, several writers, as well as certain Muslim officials. A few years ago, a journalist from "October" magazine, close to the government, wrote

that the IDEO was one of the important centres of the Arabic culture in Cairo. The Director of the Institute is a member of the National Egyptian High Council for Culture and many of its members are involved in various publishing committees (linked to the Academy of the Arabic Language) or on thesis examination boards in local universities. Friars Anawati and Jomier were members of the Institute of Egypt. The inauguration of the IDEO's new library (October 2002) allowed us to better appreciate our standing in Egyptian society, as the following people warmly accepted our invitation : the Minister of Religious Affairs, the Mufti of the Republic of Egypt, Al-Azhar University, Pope Shenouda III.

4. Within the Arab world: as regards Arabic culture, apart from the periodical *MIDEO*, suffice it to mention the following publications by a few of the Institute's members. The works of:

- Georges Anawati, o.p., on Muslim Philosophy and Theology, editions of texts, studies and commentaries, or on the History of Arabic Science; of Jacques Jomier, o.p., on modern commentaries of the Koran and contemporary Egyptian literature (it was he who, as early as 1956, was the first to publish in a Western language studies on Naguïb Mahfûz, winner of the 1988 Nobel Prize for Literature);
 - Serge de Bearecueil, o.p., on Muslim mystics of Persian and Arabic traditions;
 - Jacques-Dominique Boilot, o.p., on the life and scientific achievements of al-Bîrunî ;
 - Guy Monnot, o.p., on the religious links between the Persian and Arabic worlds, or on the Muslim perception of other religions;
 - Emilio Platti, o.p., on Arabic Christian authors;
 - Angel Cortabarria, o.p., on Albert the Great's Arabic sources;
 - Régis Morelon, o.p., on the history of Arabic astronomy;
 - Joseph Dreher, o.p., on the mystics in Andalusia;
 - Michel Cuypers, pfj, on the rhetorical analysis of the Koran;
 - Christian van Nispen, sj, on the dialogue between Islam and Christianity.
- All of these, and more, bring credibility to our presence as Christian Religious in the Muslim world.

5. Within the Church: work geared towards mutually opening to one another two great universal religions. Work recognized by the Vatican by 1) the appointment of Georges Anawati, o.p., to the Pontifical Council of Culture and then 2) of

Jacques Jomier, o.p., followed by Emilio Platti, o.p., to the Secretariat for Non-Christians (which has since become the Pontifical Council for Inter-religious Dialogue). The Institute receives trainees - some of whom today play an important role within the Church as regards inter-religious dialogue - such as Msgr Henri Teissier, Archbishop of Algiers. Also worthy of mention are Jacques Jomier's publications on introducing Christians to Islam and to the Koran, and also his *Life of the Messiah*, an essay which offers a Christian presentation of Jesus to Muslims (translated in Arabic and many other languages); the initiative taken by Georges Anawati to create a forum, *les Journées Romaines*, where Christians involved in the Muslim world assemble every two years in Rome; the active participation of the IDEO's members in international Islamic-Christian colloquia. Many Patriarchs of Eastern Churches, thus showing us their support, also visit the IDEO, on a regular basis.

The present world state of affairs shows the IDEO's approach as ever more relevant. Given the current religious and socio-political situation of the Middle East, and considering the rise of problems posed by Islam's presence in the West, the IDEO's work is of great importance both for society and for the Church; its voice must be heard within the present political, cultural and religious crisis of the Middle East, where the three great monotheist religions meet. That being said, this crisis is also the West's crisis, as the events of September 11th have shown. Until its civil war flared up, Lebanon was an ideal location for such studies. Today, this type of reflection also exists in Cairo. More than ever, the IDEO has a unique role to play within this context. We can better appreciate this by the ever-growing number of readers and visitors that we welcome to our Institute.