The Study of Islam
American Academy of Religion

The American Academy of Religion is the world’s largest learned society and professional association of scholars and teachers in the field of religion. Through academic conferences, publications and a variety of programme and membership services, the American Academy of Religion (AAR) fosters excellence in scholarship and teaching. It also aims to advance publication and scholarly communication on religion; to welcome multiple perspectives on the study of religion; to support racial, ethnic and gender diversity within the Academy; and to seek ways to contribute to the public understanding of religion.

The AAR’s annual meeting is held every year in late November and provides a lively and enabling context for free inquiry, disciplined reflection and scholarly exchange on the world’s religions. The Study of Islam section is one of fourteen programme units of the AAR and was officially recognized in 1986. It is one of the major sections of the AAR with a long-standing and committed participation of more than a hundred active members. One of the most diverse groups in the AAR, the section’s presenters, panellists, and audience represent scholars at all stages of their academic careers. The section also features regular attendance and participation of international scholars from countries including Egypt, Malaysia, Indonesia, South Africa, and China.

The Study of Islam section serves as a forum for current research on Islam. The annual meeting of the AAR sponsors at least five sessions related to the study of Muslim faith and practice as well as additional individual presentations on Islamic topics in other programme units and sessions. The cultural and linguistic diversity, the regional and historical range, and the varieties of methodologies currently used in Islamic Studies make the section’s offerings rich and diverse from year to year. The themes of the sessions fall under the following categories:

1. The study of Islamic texts and scriptures;
2. The study of lived Islam in various regions and cultures;
3. Methodology and approaches to the study of Islam;
4. Issues such as gender, liberation theology, human rights;
5. Subfields of Islamic studies including Mysticism, Law, Theology, Philosophy, Shi’ism.

Our policy is to encourage methodological sophistication, ideological diversity and interdisciplinary discussion in our programme. Shared sessions with other programme units of the academy have encompassed fields such as Islamic Ethics, Gender, Islamic and Judaic Studies, and Islam and Academic Teaching, and the Study of Religion. Given the importance of scripture in Islam, the Study of Islam section regularly sets aside one session for discussion of scripture in Islam; the Study of Islam section also has an e-mail list for its members called ‘Islam-AAR’. The list facilitates communication about scholarly topics and disseminates information about grants, employment, workshops and AAR business. Recent topics of discussion on the list have ranged from the best software for studying the Qur’an to the pros and cons of using novels in undergraduate teaching. In addition to the e-mail list, a special leaflet informing members of all papers and panels with content of special interest to Islamicists is mailed to the membership before the annual meeting. As the premier international forum for the study of religion, the AAR plays a key role in influencing the way that scholars and teachers of religion in North America and abroad construct their curricula and discipline. Within this context, the Study of Islam section has a unique and important role to play in shaping the academic study of Islam. Considering its growing importance as the world’s second largest faith and its social, economic and political relevance in contemporary life, the Islamic world has not received the attention it deserves in higher education. Thus, the study of Islam section’s goals are to anchor the study of Islam centrally within the wider academic study of religions; to provide a disciplined forum for critical inquiry and high quality, original scholarship in Islamic Studies; and to encourage comparative and inter-disciplinary study of Islamic history and societies.

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For more information, please consult the following Internet address: http://www.aar-site.org/