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RESEARCH ON MOROCCAN JEWRY

The Center for Research on Moroccan Jewry (CRJM) was founded in May 1994, on the initiative of Mr. Robert Assaraf, after long months of planning, discussions and preliminary studies.

The Center is an international institution, with a university and scientific vocation whose main goal is to promote all forms of knowledge and investigation of the history of the Jews of Morocco. This history goes back more than 3,000 years. It can be traced to the destruction of the first temple in Jerusalem, and has been shaped and battered by the major events which have shaken the Jewish world, the Arabic-Moslem world and Christian Europe from Antiquity to current times – the advent of Islam, the *Reconquista* and the expulsion from Spain, the rise of the Sharifian dynasties, European expansion, followed by French colonization, World War II, the creation of the State of Israel, Moroccan independence and the first migrations.

This is the history, in all its wealth and complexity, that the CRJM aspires to study, with the help of experts of all nationalities and from all fields: historians, linguists, ethnologists, anthropologists, musicologists, specialists in rabbinical literature, economists, etc.

This is an ambitious goal, but one which the scientific director of the CRJM, Michel Abitbol, wishes to pursue in conjunction with universities the world over, in particular with scholars from Morocco, France and Israel who obviously did not wait for the opening of the Center to begin researching this vast domain.

Organized in Marrakech and in Paris in September 1995, the first CRJM conference had the specific goal of stressing this global – interdisciplinary and “interfaith” – aim of the Center. The theme was “Judeo-Moslem relationships in Morocco.” In Marrakech the organizers chose to emphasize Andalusian music, a heritage shared by Jews and Moslems of Morocco. In Paris, the participants heard three days of very high level presentations on the nature of the relationships between Jews and Moslems throughout the centuries – scholarly papers presented by researchers affiliated with Moroccan, Israeli, French, American and British universities. Three other international round tables have

been organized since that date by the CRJM, one on “Monotheism and Tolerance”, the second on “the Jews of Morocco in the 19th century: continuity and discontinuities” and the most recent on “Moroccan migrations, Judeo-Moroccan migrations.”

Thanks to the enormous amount of scientific activity which has developed since its founding, the CRMJ has already made a name for itself in university centers involved with the Jews of North Africa. In France, where the CRJM has its headquarters, the CRJM regularly organizes seminars and conferences open to the public. More than forty PhD, masters and DEA [diplômes d'études approfondies] scholarships have been awarded between 1995 and 1998 to post graduate students pursuing their studies in France, Morocco and in Israel.

In Israel, a chair of the history of Morocco and the Jews of Morocco was created by the CRJM at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. The CRJM also has a joint project with the Israel Academy of the Hebrew Language to encourage research on Judeo-Moroccan manuscripts.

In Morocco, the CRJM has formed close ties with the Universities of Rabat, Kenitra, Fes and Oujda. The Rabat Center has become a meeting place for all the Moroccan doctoral students involved in the history and culture of the Moroccan Jews.

In France, since the start of the 1998 academic year, the CRJM has initiated a program on the Jews of Morocco at the EHESS, under the direction of Lucette Valensi and Annie Dayan-Rosenman.

The CRJM would like to develop similar ties with French and American universities and, in another area completely, contribute to the translation and publication of basic works on the Jews of Morocco.

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