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Islamic Mysticism

Religious Studies 246/AMES 236

We will meet in 337 Logan Hall each Thursday from 3:00-6:00

Course Description

Sufism (Islamic mysticism) is notoriously difficult to define. Husayn al-Hallaj, executed in a state of ecstasy in Baghdad (922 CE), the Spanish mystic Ibn 'Arabi (1240 CE), the sober legist Ibn Taymiyah (1328 CE), and the recent President of the Turkish Republic, all had Sufi affiliations. Scholars of both Islam and Judaism have assumed that mystics and religious legal authorities are in constant battle. Is there an "orthodox" esotericism? What distinguishes a Sufi Muslim from a non-Sufi Muslim? Why is Sufism perceived as a dangerous threat in certain countries today?

In this seminar we will read Islamic mystical texts dealing with the Sufi Path, the nature of God and the hidden meanings of the Qur'an, dreams and miraculous powers, and the spiritual reality of sexual union. We will also consider the differing social roles Sufism has played for over a millennium. We trace the development and spread of the Sufi initiatic orders and their distinctive rituals. We will examine what has happened when opposition to Sufism, especially in the early modern and contemporary periods, reaches peak moments and how Sufis have responded to their critics. For the contemporary period we will use film (documentaries and scripted movies), Western converts' narratives, and novels to see how a long tradition of mysticism continues to evolve in Islam today. Previous knowledge of Islam is not required. All source readings are in English translation. Open to undergraduate and graduate students. No exams.

Course Requirements

- **Participation:** You will be asked to choose one of the sessions, on a topic you might pursue in your paper, in which you will take a lead in the class discussion. I will lecture occasionally but the format of this class is that of a seminar. Your presence and active participation in the class will be the basis for one-half of your grade for the course. If you must miss a class, please contact me **before** the session by phone or e-mail.
- **Paper:** The other half of your grade for the course will be for your research paper, a minimum of 15 pages, due on the first day of final exams (December 15). By **November 10**, you are required to turn in a paragraph stating the question or problem you are addressing, with a short bibliography of at least five resources (books and/or articles) If you wish to submit a first draft of the paper, it must be turned in by **November 17**. You may re-write it for a higher grade, taking into consideration my comments and your own revisions. The final draft is due the **first day of final exams**. I will meet with each of you to discuss your topic and to offer research suggestions in the third week of class during my office hours or by appointment.

Textbooks

Penn Book Center, 3726 Walnut, 222-7600

- Michael Sells *Early Islamic Mysticism: Sufi, Qur'an, Mi'raj, Poetic and Theological Writings*
- Annemarie Schimmel *Mystical Dimensions of Islam*
- JS Trimingham *The Sufi Orders in Islam*
- Jalal al-Din Rumi *Signs of the Unseen* trans. Wm Thackston
- Martin Lings *A Sufi Saint of the Twentieth Century*
- Optional: WC Chittick *The Sufi Path of Knowledge* (Ibn 'Arabi)

Reserve Books

Rosengarten Reading Room

The textbooks listed above, as well as translations of the Qur'an and several more detailed studies on Sufism, are on reserve under my name.

Bulkpack

University Copy Service, 38th and Chestnut

The bulkpack will be available for purchase and a copy will be put on reserve in Rosengarten.

Course Outline

Tuesday Sept 15: DEFINITIONS, HISTORICAL PREVIEW, AND METHODOLOGY

- Handout James Morris "Situating Islamic 'Mysticism': Between Written Traditions and Popular Spirituality" from *Mystics of the Book*, ed. RA Herrera

Tuesday Sept 22: EARLY ISLAMIC MYSTICISM PART ONE: THE QUR'AN & MI'RAJ

- Sells "Introduction" and "Sources of Islamic Mysticism" 11-56; "Sahl at-Tustari" Sufi commentary on the Qur'an 89-96; "Bistami" 212-50
- Schimmel "Historical Outlines" 23-62

Tuesday Sept 29: EARLY ISLAMIC MYSTICISM PART TWO: ECSTASY & SOBRIETY

- Sells, "Hallaj" 266-80 and 302-3; "Junayd" 251-65; "Qushayri – Fana' and Baqa' etc." 119-126
- Schimmel "Al-Hallaj, Martyr of Mystical Love" 62-97; "Good and Evil: The Role of Satan" 193-99; "Love and Annihilation" 130-48

Tuesday Oct 6: THE SUFI ORDERS, ORGANIZATION AND RITUAL

- Trimingham "Foreword" to 1998 printing by J. Voll vii-xvii; "Formation of the Schools of Mysticism" 1-30; "Chief *Tariqa* Lines" choose and read section on **one** geographical area among "Mesopotamia," "Egypt and the Maghrib," or "Iranian, Turkish and Indian Spheres" 31-66; "Ritual and Ceremony" 194-217
- Schimmel "The Path" 148-78

Tuesday Oct 13: "THERE IS NO CELIBACY IN THIS RELIGION" PROPHET MUHAMMAD

Film "Sufism in the Sudan"

- Trimingham "Role of the Orders in the Life of Islamic Society" 218-244
- Schimmel "Sufi Orders and Fraternities" 228-58
- Bulckpack V. Hoffman "Mysticism and Sexuality in Sufi Thought and Life," Selection from Suhrawardi *A Sufi Rule for Novices*, K. Kreiser "The Dervish Living," R. Lifchez "The Lodges of Istanbul"
- Tayeb Salih *Wedding of Zein* (short novel, on reserve and on order at Penn Book Center)

Tuesday Oct 20 (Fall break – no class)

Tuesday Oct 27: IBN 'ARABI'S ONTOLOGY 'WAHDAT AL-WUJUD'

- Trimingham "The Mysticism and Theosophy of the Orders" 133-65
- Schimmel "Theosophical Sufism" 259-86
- Bulckpack WC Chittick "Oneness of Being"
- Chittick *Sufi Path of Knowledge* (optional text, on reserve, recommended)

Tuesday Nov 3: RUMI AND THE MEVLEVI TRADITION

Film "Turning" ('Whirling Dervishes')

- Jalal al-Din Rumi *Signs of the Unseen* (entire)
- Schimmel "Maulana Jalaluddin Rumi" 309-28; "Sama'" 178-86

Tuesday Nov 10*: DREAMS AND MIRACLES, PROPHET AND SAINT IN THE MIDDLE WORLD

**Paragraph on your research topic with five item bibliography due in class*

- Schimmel "Saints and Miracles" 199-213; "Veneration of the Prophet" 213-227
- Trimingham "Mysticism and Theosophy of the Orders" 133-65 (second look)
- Bulckpack GE von Grunebaum *The Dream and Human Societies* (selection), L. Kinberg "Literal Dreams and Prophetic Hadiths in Classical Islam," E. Waugh "Following the Beloved: Muhammad as Model in the Sufi Tradition," M. Chodkiewicz *Seal of the Saints* (selection)

Tuesday Nov 17*: SUFI WOMEN

**First draft of research paper due in class if you choose the re-write option*

Evening banquet and film "A Door to the Sky"

- Schimmel ""The Feminine Element in Sufism" 426-35
- Bulkpack R. Roded "Mystic Women," J. Elias "Female and Feminine in Islamic Mysticism," BR von Schlegell "Sufism and Social Innovation under Women Masters in Damascus"

Tuesday Nov 24: OPPOSITION TO SUFISM/RULERS AND THEIR SUFIS

Film "*Dhikr* Rituals in Modern Egypt"

- Bulkpack M. Zilfi "The Kadizadelis: Discordant Revivalism in Seventeenth-Century Istanbul," Th E Homerin "Thieves and Asses: Sufis and Their Detractors in the Mamluk Empire," *idem* "Ibn 'Arabi in the People's Assembly: Religion, Press and Politics in Sadat's Egypt"

Web From the course homepage <http://ccat.sas.upenn.edu/~brvs/web.html> read over the opposing sides in the controversy over Sufism. Apart from the writers' stated motivations in writing in favor of or against Sufism in Islam, can you offer alternative interpretations of their arguments? How do these debates relate (or not relate) to the medieval and early modern conflicts described in this week's readings? **This assignment is for everyone.**

Tuesday Dec 1: NORTH AFRICAN CASE STUDY THE SHADHILIYAH/'ALAWIYAH

Video "Shaykh Muhammad al-'Alawi in South Africa"

- Lings *A Sufi Saint of the Twentieth Century* (entire)
- Trimingham "Traditionalist Revival" 110-14
- Bulkpack Shaykh al-Darqawi *Letters of a Sufi Master* (selection)

Tuesday Dec 8: AMERICAN SUFIS

- Bulkpack M. Hermansen "In the Garden of American Sufi Movements: Hybrids and Perennials," S. Barboza *American Jihad* (selections), G. Webb "Tradition and Innovation in Contemporary American Islamic Spirituality: The Bawa Muhaiyadden Fellowship"

Web Visit at least two of the modern Sufi groups linked to the course homepage (worldwide) <http://ccat.sas.upenn.edu/~brvs/web.html> What are the goals of this group? What is their stance vis-à-vis non-Sufi Muslims? Contact the webmaster of the site and ask questions by e-mail about their organization. Report what you have found to us in class. **This assignment is for everyone.**

Visit to the Philadelphia Bawa Fellowship for *dhikr*



