Sufism
RELS 445 (and NELC 485, RELS 645, NELC 687)

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Course Description: This course is an intensive survey of the large complex of Islamic intellectual and social perspectives subsumed under the term Sufism. Sufi philosophies, liturgical practices, and social organizations have been a major part of the Islamic tradition in all historical periods, and Sufism has also served as a primary muse behind Islamic aesthetic expression in poetry, music, and the visual arts. In this course, we will attempt to understand the various significations of Sufism by addressing both the world of ideas and socio-cultural practices. The course is divided into three broad sections: central themes and concepts going back to the earliest individuals who identified themselves as Sufis; Sufi metaphysics and epistemology as exemplified in the work of Ibn al-‘Arabi and his school, and literary expressions as exemplified in the epic poem Layla and Majnun by Nizami, The Conference of the Birds by Attar, and in the life and poetry of Mawlana Jalaluddin Rumi. In studying this material, we will be concerned equally with establishing common patterns and seeing how being a Sufi has meant different things to various people over the course of history.

Requirements: Regular seminar attendance and participation. Weekly one paragraph responses to the reading pasted on Blackboard; two short papers; term paper.

Readings are to be done before class. All written assignments are to be completed on time (extensions will only be granted with prior discretionary approval of the instructor).

Additional Requirements for RELS 645: The graduate version of this course will meet for an additional hour each week during which we will read primary sources from books such as Knowledge of God in Classical Sufism in the original languages (knowledge of Arabic or Persian required). Students registered for this section will be required to write a longer research paper, and will be required to select and present material in the seminar.

Required Readings:

The following books are at the Penn Book Center):

Ahmet Karamustafa, Sufism: The formative period
Michael Sells, Early Islamic Mysticism
Nizami, The Story of Layla and Majnun
Attar, The Conference of the Birds

The remaining readings will be available on Blackboard. They will be drawn from works such as:

S. Bashir, Bodies of God’s Friends: Sufis in Persianate Islamic Societies
W. Chittick, Sufi Path of Knowledge
F.S. Colby, *Narrating Muhammad’s Night Journey: Tracing the Development of Ibn ‘Abbas’ Ascension Discourse*

J.J. Elias, *The Throne Carrier of God: The Life and Thought of ‘Ala’ al-dawla as-Sinnani*

C. Ernst, *Eternal Garden: Mysticism, History, and Politics at a South Asian Sufi Center*

V.R. Holbrook, *The Unreadable Shores of Love: Turkish Modernity and Mystic Romance*

F Kesşavarz, *Reading Mystical Lyric: The Case of Jalal al-Din Rumi*

D. Le Gall, *The Culture of Sufism: Naqshbandis in the Ottoman World, 1450-1700*


A.Y. Ocak, *Sufism and Sufis in Ottoman Society*


Radkte and Dejong, *Islamic Mysticism Contested: Thirteen Centuries of Controversies and Polemics*

M. Tourage, *Rumi and the hermeneutics of eroticism*

M. Winter, *Society and Religion in Early Ottoman Egypt: Studies in the Writings of ‘Abd al-Wahhab al-Sharani*

**Readings and Seminar Topics:**

**January 11th:** *The Essence of Islamic Mysticism: topical overview*

**Required:** Sells, *Early Islamic Mysticism*, pp. 11-150 (start reading for next time)

**January 18th:** *Early Sufism: The Birth of a Tradition*


**January 25th:** *Early Sufism: Classical Sufi Figures*

**Required:** Sells, *Early Islamic Mysticism*, pp. 151-280; .

**February 1st:** *Sufi Philosophy: Ibn al-‘Arabi*

**Required:** The Bezels of Wisdom, Chittick, Sufi Path of Knowledge; Chittick; *The Self-Disclosure of God*; Bashier, *Ibn al-‘Arabi’s Barzakh* [all on Bb].

**February 8th:** *Sufi Philosophy: Ibn al-‘Arabi*

**Required:** The Bezels of Wisdom, Chittick, Sufi Path of Knowledge; Chittick; *The Self-Disclosure of God*; Bashier, *Ibn al-‘Arabi’s Barzakh* [all on Bb].

* **Assignment:** Short paper assigned February 15th; due February 24th by 5pm.

**February 15th:** *Sufi Philosophy: Traveling the Sufi Path*

**Required:** Elias, *The Throne Carrier of God* [Bb].

**February 22nd:** *Orders and Fraternities*

**Required:** Ohlander, *Sufism in an Age of Transition* [Bb]; Karamustafa, *God’s Unruly Friends* [Bb]; Bashir, *Sufi Bodies* [Bb].
February 29th: **Sufism and Modern Society**  
**Required**: Ewing, *Arguing Sainthood*, pp. 93-267; Ocak, *Sufism and Sufis in Ottoman Society* [Bb].

March 14th: **Mystical Lyric and Allegory**  
**Required**: Attar, *Conference of the Birds* [entire]; de Bruijn, *Persian Sufi Poetry* [Bb].

* **Assignment**: Short paper assigned March 21st; due March 30th by 5pm.

March 21st: **Allegorical Literature**  
**Required**: Nizami, *Layla and Majnun* [entire].

* **Assignment**: Final Topic due April 6th by 7pm (electronic).

March 28th: **Jalal al-din Rumi and Sufi Poetry**  

April 4th: **Jalal al-din Rumi and Sufi Poetry**  

April 11th: **Mystical Prayer and Musical Performance**  
**Required**: Qureshi, *Sufi Music in India and Pakistan* [Bb]; audiovisual assignments of Qawwali and Mevlevi Sema performances [Bb].

April 18th: **Presentations**

* **Assignment**: Term Paper due on Monday April 30th by 5 pm.