



Islam (RE 215 001)

Skidmore College – Fall 2007
T/Th 9:40-11
TISCH 305

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Ladd Hall 212
Office Hours: T, R 11:15-1 & by appointment

COURSE DESCRIPTION

Three out of five of the countries in the world with the largest number of Muslims are in South Asia, making the region home to over a quarter of the world's Muslims. Rather than studying an abstract, monolithic "Islam" (which exists only in textbooks, rather than reality), we will focus on the history and the lived experience of Muslims living in this important area. This course is thus a thematic and historical introduction to the Islamic religious tradition as practiced in South Asia (Pakistan, Afghanistan, India, Bangladesh). In addition to providing an introduction to the basic history, doctrines, practices, and scriptures of Islam, we will pay particular attention to the following themes: (1) the dynamic relationship between individuals (ordinary and extraordinary) and God; (2) charisma and authority; and (3) the spread of Islam in South Asia; and (4) religion and (non-)violence.

REQUIRED READING

Devji, Faisal. *Landscapes of the Jihad: Militancy, Morality, Modernity*. Cornell University Press, 2005. ISBN 9780801444371

Elias, J., trans., *Death before Dying: The Sufi Poems of Sultan Bahu*. University of California Press, 1998. ISBN 0520212428

Ernst, Carl W. and Bruce B. Lawrence. *Sufi Martyrs of Love: The Chishti Order in South Asia and Beyond*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2002. ISBN 1403960275

Ernst, Carl W. *Following Muhammad: Rethinking Islam in the Contemporary World*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003. ISBN 0807855774

Sells, Michael. *Approaching the Qur'an: The Early Revelations*. White Cloud Press, 2007. ISBN 1883991692

Plus a number of articles and book chapters available electronically.

REQUIREMENTS

1. **Biweekly Quizzes (35%):** non-cumulative & covering the prior 2 week's readings, lectures, and discussions. Your lowest quiz score will be dropped. There will be no make-up quizzes; you will receive a zero. Quizzes will be a combination of short answer

and multiple choice and are designed to test your knowledge of basic facts, terms, and concepts.

2. **Midterm and Final (50%).** The midterm is a combination of essay and short answer; the final exam is a take-home essay exam.
3. **Attendance & Participation (15%).** I expect you to attend class daily save for legitimate, documented excuses (serious illness or death in the immediate family). More than five absences will result in automatic failure for the course. The scale for attendance is as follows: 5= came to all classes; 4= missed one or two classes; 3= missed three or four classes; 2= missed five classes. Frequent tardiness will result in the attendance grade being dropped further. Given my policy, I cannot accept emailed excuses for absences; the only remedy for a missed class is for you to make up the time by coming to see me during office hours in order to discuss the material that you missed. While in class, students are expected to participate in class discussions. At the end of each class, I make a note of which students participated and if any students were obviously inattentive (napping, reading the paper, etc.) or disruptive. The scale for participation is as follows: 5 = frequently contributed to discussion (spoke most days); 4 = contributed regularly (spoke about once a week); 3 = contributed occasionally (every few weeks); 2 = rarely, if ever contributed; 1 = slept in class or was obviously inattentive or disruptive. These grades will be adjusted upwards or downwards if the quality of your contributions are well above or below average. For the shy in class: in lieu of speaking in class, you may also come see me during office hours or send me emails with questions or comments.

General: It is the assumption of this course and the university as a whole that people will behave in a responsible and ethical manner. This includes behaving respectfully towards others - classmates, instructors, the authors we read, and the people whose religious beliefs we are studying. Discussion and writing should be characterized by honesty, enthusiasm, critical thought, and respect for the lifestyles, worldviews, and beliefs of others. Note that ‘critical thought’ does not mean being nasty to or about other people, but evaluating their ideas and practices intelligently and with a spirit of collegiality and good will.

Special Needs: Students with special needs (physical challenges, learning disabilities, etc.) are welcome in this class. Please notify the University’s ADA coordinator and your instructor in advance if you will need accommodations and/or auxiliary aids.

This class abides by Skidmore College’s Academic Integrity policy. Cheating, plagiarism, and other types of academic dishonesty will not be tolerated and can result in penalties ranging from failure on the assignment to expulsion from the University.

SCHEDULE OF CLASSES AND ASSIGNMENTS

(items marked with an asterisk are on electronic reserve via WebCT)

1.	9/6	Introductions, review of syllabus, etc.
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BACKGROUND, METHODOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL

These first few weeks will introduce you to the historical background of Islam and provide a forum for discussing such questions as: (1) what biases, stereotypes, and assumptions do people have about religion, religious studies, and Islam; (2) how do the authors of the assigned readings represent God, the individual, and the relationship between the two? For example, what does the Qur'an suggest about how human beings should act in this world? (3) How do scriptures function in Islam -- what role do they play in people's lives, how authoritative are they and why, etc. Finally, we will take a quick survey of the history and key features of Islam in South Asia as a means of orienting ourselves to the more detailed case studies that will follow.

2.	9/11	Ernst, <i>Following</i> , preface and Ch. 1; bring to class an example of a biased website (HINT: see http://www.unc.edu/~cernst/islam.htm for Ernst's own collection of links)
	9/13	Ernst, <i>Following</i> , Ch. 2; *Lopez, "Belief" (think about how Lopez's remarks apply to Islam; you aren't responsible for the info on Buddhism!); quiz #1
3.	9/18	Ernst, <i>Following</i> , Ch. 3; *Peters, "Jewish and Christian Tampering" p. 441-45 (pp. 15-17 of .pdf file)
	9/20	Sells, <i>Approaching</i> , 1-40
4.	9/25	Sells, <i>Approaching</i> , 42-141 even pages only (only the suras are required; the commentary is recommended)
	9/27	*Schimmel, "Religion" from <i>The Empire of the Great Mughals</i> and Hardy, "Islam in South Asia" from <i>Ency. of Religion</i> ; quiz #2

FASTING AND PILGRIMAGE

These two weeks consider important elements of Islamic religious practice: the fast of Ramadan, the pilgrimage to Mecca, plus a variety of 'popular' practices characteristic of South Asian Islam. As you do the reading for this section of the course, think about the following questions: (1) What expectations exist in South Asian Islam about how a 'good Muslim' should behave, and what do these suggest about the ideal relationship between the individual and God, on the one hand, and the individual and the wider community, on the other? (2) How does the performance of religious rituals create, mark, or efface status difference in South Asian Muslim communities?

5	10/2	Ernst, <i>Following</i> , 108-19, 127-31, 142-51
	10/4	*Donnan, "Symbol and Status"; *Wolfe, "Her Highness Sikander"
6	10/9	*Murphy, "Muslim Feasts" and *Werbner, "Langar"
	10/11	*Schimmel, "Islam in India"; quiz #3

REGIONAL ISLAM: CASE STUDIES ON THE SPREAD OF ISLAM

This section of the course takes an in-depth look at the spread of Islam in two regions of India: Bengal (week 7) and Tamilnadu (week 8). As you do the reading for this part of the course, consider the following questions: (1) What are the standard explanations for why Islam spread, and to what extent do Eaton and Bayly agree or disagree with these explanations when it comes to Bengal and Tamilnadu? (2) Thought Experiment: what would the USA be like, if explorers and early settlers had been Sufis rather than Christians? Note too, in preparation for the concluding weeks of the course, what these readings suggest about (3) violence, martyrdom, and warfare in the history of pre-colonial Islam in the region.

7	10/16	Ernst, <i>Following</i> , 164-82; *Eaton, <i>Rise of Islam</i> , xxi-xxv, 113-34
	10/18	*Eaton, <i>Rise of Islam</i> , 174-83, 207-19, 268-303
8	10/23	*Bayly, <i>Saints, Goddesses</i> , 104-23, 132-50
	10/25	*Bayly, <i>Saints, Goddesses</i> , 187-215; quiz #4

		optional: See http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yWScK8uusww for a trailer of the film (<i>Marudha Naayagam</i>) about Yusuf Khan's life
9	10/30	Midterm
SUFISM This mystical branch of Islam has been mentioned repeatedly in the preceding weeks; this month we take a closer look at South Asian Sufism. As you do the reading for the next few weeks, think about (1) how the Chishtis (while reading Ernst) and Sultan Bahu (while reading <i>Death Before Dying</i>) characterize the human-divine relationship; (2) to what extent the Sufism described by the readings is typically Islamic, and to what extent typically South Asian; and (3) how Sufism compares and contrasts with non-Sufi Islam when it comes to issues of authority.		
	11/1	Ernst & Lawrence, <i>Sufi Martyrs</i> , 1-13 (stop b/f "The alternative"), 14-("The Dialectic" on)36 (stop b/f "There are two") , 44-51 (stop b/f "CHISHTIS AND SUHRAWARDIS"); watch http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8-qdFUxurtg
10	11/6	Ernst & Lawrence, <i>Sufi Martyrs</i> 65-78 (stop b/f "A PREMODERN"), 85-104;
	11/8	*Ernst, "Lives of Sufi Saints" and "Conversations"; *Mir, "Teachings," all in Lopez, ed., <i>Religions of India</i> ; quiz #5
11	11/13	Elias, trans., <i>Death Before Dying</i>
	11/15	*Weber on charisma and *Lindholm, "Prophets and Pirs" from <i>Embodying Charisma</i>
MARTYRDOM, JIHAD, AND ACTS OF (NON-)VIOLENCE Violence may be symbolic (eg, as depicted in literature or art) or real (eg, real blood is shed). Some types of violence are exclusively religious (eg, animal sacrifice, martyrdom, self-flagellation), and others (eg, riots, wars, suicide bombings) are not religious <i>per se</i> , but can relate to religion in a variety of ways. As you do the reading for this section of the course, think about (1) the relationship between symbolic violence and real violence (does one cause or prevent the other, and if so, when and why) and (2) the extent to which the violent acts described in each reading are <i>caused by</i> religion, <i>prevented by</i> religion, or merely <i>dressed up</i> with religious images or rhetoric.		
12	11/20	*Pinault, <i>Horse of Karbala</i> , Ch. 1-2; recommended: *Hegland, "Flagellation"
13	11/27	*Esposito, <i>Unholy War</i> , Ch. 2; *Johansen, "Radical Islam" quiz #6
	11/29	*Ahmad, "Islamic Fundamentalism," from <i>Fundamentalisms Observed</i> , 457-510 (pp. 510ff, on the Tablighi Jama'at., is recommended)
14	12/4	Devji, <i>Landscapes</i> , preface, Ch. 1-2
	12/6	Devji, <i>Landscapes</i> , Ch. 4-6 (Ch. 3 is recommended)
15	12/11	Concluding discussion, quiz #7 and evaluations