Seventh Annual Victor Danner Memorial Lecture in Islamic Studies

March 25th, 2009 at 7:30 pm
University Club
Indiana Memorial Union

“Circumscribing the Sacred: The Limits of the Law in Eighteenth Century Islamic Traditions of Reform”

Presented by:
Professor Ahmad Dallal
Georgetown University

Opening Remarks by:
Professor Nazif Shahrani

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Thank you!
Ahmad Dallal is an Associate Professor of Arabic and Islamic Studies and Chair of the Arabic and Islamic Studies Department at Georgetown University. His teaching, research and writing cover the history of learning in Muslim societies, the history of science, early modern and modern Islamic thought and movements, Islamic revivalist thought, and Islamic law. He received his Doctoral degree from Columbia University in 1990, and has taught at Smith College (1990-1994), Yale University (1994-2000), and Stanford University (2000-2003). In 2007-2008, Professor Dallal was named Carnegie Scholar and in February 2008 he delivered the Dwight Terry Lectures at Yale University. He is currently finishing a book manuscript entitled *Islam, Science and the Challenge of History*, as well as a book-length comparative study of eighteenth-century Islamic reform entitled *Islam Without Europe, Traditions of Reform in Eighteenth Century Islamic Thought*. 
Professor Victor Danner was born on October 22, 1926, in Irapuato, Guanajuato, Mexico to Arthur James and Maria Lopez Danner. As a young man, he served his country during WWII. After the war he attended Georgetown University where he received his B.A. *magna cum laude* in 1957. Later that year he traveled to Morocco to become an instructor and eventually Director of the American Language Center, sponsored by the US Information Service. While there he took advantage of the opportunity not only to get acquainted with the country but also to perfect his knowledge of classical Arabic texts.

In 1964, Professor Danner returned to the US for his doctoral studies and graduated from Harvard in 1970. He came to IU in 1967 and was a professor of Arabic and Religious Studies at Indiana University until his death in 1990. He served as Chairman of the Near Eastern Languages and Cultures Department for five years, and was an enthusiastic supporter of the Middle Eastern Studies Program.

He was an internationally renowned scholar in the fields of Islamic mysticism, comparative religion, and classical Arabic literature. In 1976, he was invited to speak at the international World Festival of Islam in London. Professor Danner was also active in a number of professional organizations, including the Washington D.C.-based Foundation for Traditional Studies, for which he served as Secretary-Treasurer. He wrote *Ibn ‘Ata ‘Allah’s Sufi Aphorisms* (1973); *Ibn ‘Ata ‘Allah: The Book of Wisdom*, (1978); and *The Islamic Tradition: An Introduction* (1988), in addition to over twenty-five articles and reviews.

One of his students, Lauri King Irani, captured his essence: “As a teacher, Victor Danner had few equals. He taught Arabic, classical Arabic literature, Islam, Sufism, the Qur’an, comparative religion, comparative mysticism, and Eastern religions. His dignified bearing, elegant gestures, and verbal eloquence transformed his lectures into performances which had the power to captivate and inspire his students, whether he was discussing Arabic grammar or Islamic theology. His concern for and encouragement of his students, coupled with his understated sense of humor, earned him a well-deserved reputation as a caring and committed educator who taught not only when behind the classroom lectern, but also by example.”

*He who is illumined at the beginning is illumined at the end.*
-from the *Sufi Aphorisms* by Ibn ‘Ata ‘Allah (d.1309)
Translated by Victor Danner