Tenth Annual Victor Danner Memorial Lecture in Islamic Studies

April 4, 2012 at 7:00pm
University Club - President’s Room
Indiana Memorial Union

The Islamic State and Moral Philosophy: Engaging Post-Modernity

Presented by:
Professor Wael Hallaq
Columbia University

Opening Remarks by:
Professor Asma Afsaruddin
Chair of NELC

Generously Funded by
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Wael B. Hallaq is a scholar of Islamic law and Islamic intellectual history. His teaching and research deal with the problematic epistemic ruptures generated by the onset of modernity and the socio-politico-historical forces subsumed by it; with the intellectual history of Orientalism and the repercussions of Orientalist paradigms in later scholarship and in Islamic legal studies as a whole; and with the synchronic and diachronic development of Islamic traditions of logic, legal theory, and substantive law and the interdependent systems within these traditions.

Hallaq’s writings have explored the structural dynamics of legal change in pre-modern law, and have recently been examining the centrality of moral theory to understanding the history of Islamic law. His books include Ibn Taymiyya Against the Greek Logicians (1993); A History of Islamic Legal Theories: An Introduction to Sunni Usul al-fiqh (1997); Authority, Continuity and Change in Islamic Law (2001); and An Introduction to Islamic Law (2009). His latest work, Shari’a: Theory, Practice, Transformations (2009) examines the doctrines and practices of Islamic law within the context of its history, from its beginnings in seventh-century Arabia, through its development and transformation under the Ottomans, and across lands as diverse as India, Africa and South-East Asia, to the present. Hallaq’s work has been widely read, and translated into Arabic, Persian, Turkish, Japanese, Indonesian and Hebrew.

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
We would like to offer our sincere thanks to the generous people who have already contributed to the Victor Danner Memorial fund.

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Thank you!

Asma Afsaruddin
NELC Chair & Professor