Thirteenth Annual Victor Danner Memorial Lecture in Islamic Studies

April 15, 2015 at 7:15 pm
University Club - President’s Room
Indiana Memorial Union

Mamluks, Qalandars, Rafidis, and the ‘Other’ Ibn Taymiyya

Presented by:
Professor Yahya Michot
Hartford Seminary

Opening Remarks by:
Professor Asma Afsaruddin
Chair of NELC

Co-Sponsored by the School of Global and International Studies, the College Arts & Humanities Institute, & the Medieval Studies Institute
Yahya M. Michot (Belgium, 1952) joined Hartford Seminary in 2008 as Professor of Islamic Studies and Christian-Muslim Relations. He is also the current editor of the journal *The Muslim World* edited by the Seminary.


He is internationally recognized as a specialist of both the Iranian philosopher Avicenna (d. 1037) and the Syrian theologian-mufti Ibn Taymiyya (d. 1328). He has also explored the influence of Avicenna on later Sunnism and English thought, that of Ibn Taymiyya on pre-Wahhâbi Ottoman puritanism and modern Islamism.

**Abstract**

The Syrian theologian and mufti Ibn Taymiyya (d. 728/1328) is often accused of opposition to reason and mysticism as well as of subscribing to “fundamentalism” and radicalism. He even gets a mention in “The 9/11 Commission Report” as the source of “a long tradition of extreme intolerance.” His own writings however confirm that the Damascene scholar never ceased to be a great spiritual master of the middle way of traditional Islam. Concerning the Mamluk rulers of his time and their innovations, he is not only a loyal subject but promotes an open-minded and merciful salafism. Rather than condemning the Qalandars and their anti-religious excesses, he calls upon us to understand their circumstances and blames the ulemas for not doing their job properly. As for the “Rafidis,” he clearly makes a difference between their theoretical, general pronouncements and their adoption of ill-considered, practical measures against individuals. This complex and flexible “other” Ibn Taymiyya fully deserves to be reexplored.
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, especially Dr. Mary Ann Fadae Danner.

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Thank you!

Asma Afsaruddin
NELC Chair & Professor