

SYLLABUS: Unitarianism and Ottoman Islam / Spring 2008

Rev. Dr. Susan Ritchie, Instructor

COURSE DESCRIPTION:

This course depicts religious toleration not as a Western abstraction but as the lived result of mutual attractions, persecutions, and historic interactions between Ottoman Muslims and Unitarians in 13th-18th century Europe. We begin by acquainting ourselves with the basic theology, religious and cultural traditions of Ottoman Islam, focusing on the affinities between Unitarianism and the progressive theology of Ibn-al-‘Arabī (whose thought characterized Ottoman literature and was taught within the sufi order of the poet Rumi). We then move on to the actual relationships that existed between Unitarians and Ottoman Muslims in 16th century Transylvania, Renaissance England, and Enlightenment Europe.

REQUIRED FOR PURCHASE:

Galip, Şeyh *Beauty and Love*, Victoria Holbrook translator (NY: Modern Language Association, 2005). (available at GTU bookstore, phone 510.649.2470; also at Amazon.com)

REQUIRED TO ACQUIRE IN SOME FASHION:

Islam: Empire of Faith. 2003 PBS DVD--widely available used and in some libraries

SCHEDULE OF READINGS AND TOPICS:

UNIT ONE: Introduction: Re/Contextualizing the Ottoman.

We begin by placing the Ottoman within the context of the larger history of Islam, learning the basics of Ottoman history and culture, and noting what historian Caroline Finkel has noted as “the black hole of Ottoman history” as a still-present cause for the “iron curtain of misunderstanding” between Islam and the west. We take a quick look at the case of Rumi as an example of how the repression of the Ottoman. The cosmopolitan liberal version of Islam expressed by Rumi thrived in the Ottoman Empire, but is persecuted in modern Turkey, both by Islamists and secularists. Americans, in the meantime, have made Rumi their most popular poet, but only after stripping his work of cultural and religious specificity.

Watch: *Islam: Empire of Faith*. 2003 PBS DVD--widely available used.

Read (will be posted on class site): William Dalrymple, “What Goes around Comes

Around: The Popularity of Rumi in the United States,” *Journal of the Arabesques Press*, 2005.

Read (will be posted on class site) selected comparative translations of Rumi

UNIT TWO: The History of Orientalism: “Islam” as the Projection of Western Fears and Fantasies. An introduction to the pervasive Western constructions of Islam as Other, beginning with the Ottoman Empire, which was long understood as the ultimate threat to European values.

Read (to be posted on the class site): Selections from Karen Armstrong, *Muhammad* (NY: Harper Collins, 1992), and Edward Said, *Covering Islam* (NY: Random House, 1997).

UNIT THREE: Basic Introduction to Ottoman History, Culture, and Religious Institutions and Ideas.

Read (to be posted on the class site): Selections from Norman Itzkowitz, *Ottoman Empire: Islamic Tradition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980).

UNIT FOUR: Ottoman-Islamic Theology: Ibn-al-‘Arabī and the vahdet-i-vücut (“unity of being”). The liberal, cosmopolitan theology that thrives in the Ottoman Empire was a result of Ibn-al-‘Arabī’s highly reasoned and tolerant theological explication of the central Islamic teaching regarding the unity of God or Being. His approach was adopted by and spread through the Mevlevi dervish order of Rumi.

Read (purchase book) Victoria Holbrook, “Introduction,” in Şeyh Galip *Beauty and Love*, Victoria Holbrook translator (NY: Modern Language Association, 2005).

Read (to be posted on class site): William C. Chittick, “Oneness of Being,” from *Imaginal Worlds: Ibn-al-‘Arabī and the Problem of Religious Diversity* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994).

UNIT FIVE: Beauty and Love: Understanding Ottoman-Islamic Spiritual Journey. Şeyh Galip’s romance-poem “Beauty and Love”, considered the greatest work of Ottoman literature, allegorizes the spiritual journey. Şeyh Galip was head of the Istanbul center of Mevlevi dervish in the 18th century.

Read (purchase book) Şeyh Galip *Beauty and Love*, Victoria Holbrook translator (NY: Modern Language Association, 2005).

UNIT SIX: Religious Toleration, Ottoman-Islamic Style.

Understanding the theological basis for the Ottoman-Islamic support of religious diversity and toleration.

Read (will be posted on class site): William C. Chittick, “Diversity of Belief,” from *Imaginal Worlds: Ibn-al-‘Arabī and the Problem of Religious Diversity* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994).

UNIT SEVEN: Religious Toleration, European Style. In this unit we refine and expand our vocabulary regarding religious toleration and explore the history of religious toleration from the point of view of the West.

Read (will be posted on class site): John Christian Laursen, “Orientation: Clarifying the Conceptual Issues” from *Religious Toleration* (New York, St. Martin’s 1999): 1-13; John Christian Laursen and Cary J. Nederman, “General Introduction: Political and Historical Myths in Toleration Literature” from Laursen and Nederman, *Religious Toleration before the Enlightenment* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1998), 25-52; John Locke, “Letter on Toleration”; Voltaire, “Toleration.”

UNIT EIGHT: Religious Toleration, Unitarian Style. The theological and historical basis for Unitarian support of religious diversity and toleration.

Read: “What Unitarians Mean by Tolerance: at <http://www.theopenmind.org.uk/about/leaflets/tolerance.html>

Read: (will be posted on class site) Selections on tolerance from Earl Morse Wilbur, *A History of Unitarianism* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1945).

UNIT NINE: *Religious Toleration and Real World Interactions between 16th Century Transylvanian Unitarians and Ottomans.*

Read (will be posted on the class site): Susan Ritchie, “The Pasha of Buda and the Edict of Torda: Transylvanian Unitarian/ Islamic Ottoman Cultural Enmeshment and the Development of Religious Tolerance,” *Journal of Unitarian Universalist History* (XXX) 2005: 36-54.

UNIT ELEVEN: *Religious Toleration and Real World Interactions between European Unitarians and Ottoman Muslims in 17th Century England.*

Read (will be posted on the class site): Nabil Matar, “The Toleration of Muslims in Renaissance England: Practice and Theory,” in Laursen, op cit., *Religious Toleration*.

UNIT TWELVE: *Fear of Islam and Anti-Socinianism: the Ottoman Years.* In 17th and 18th century Europe, much of the persecution of Unitarians had to do with their actual and imagined relationships to Ottoman Muslims.

Read (will be posted on the class site): Selections from J.A.I. Champion, *The Pillars of Priestcraft Shaken: The Church of England and its Enemies* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992); and Ahmad Gunny, *Images of Islam in Eighteenth Century Writings* (London: Grey Seal: 1996).

UNIT THIRTEEN: *The Limits of Tolerance: Gender, Sexuality, and Empire.* How a shared patriarchal homosociality informed even the most liberal of Ottoman-European cultural collaborations.

Read (will be posted on the class site): Selections from Walter Andrews and Mehmet Kapakl, *Age of Beloveds: The Loved and Beloved in Early Modern Ottoman and European Culture and Society* (Duke University Press, 2005).

UNIT FOURTEEN : *Rethinking the Purposes of Tolerance and Intolerance*

Read: (selections will be posted on the class site) David Nirenberg, *Communities of Violence: Minorities in the Middle Ages* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996).

STUDENT EXPECTATIONS:

► Students are expected to complete the readings and post a brief reflection on those readings (250 words) to the class site weekly. The instructor will post several questions each week to serve as prompts for the reflections.

► Students will have two small essays (600 words) to complete. One, due the fourth week of class, will ask students to locate post and briefly discuss some instance of anti-Islamic discourse that seems to have roots in the European fear of the Ottoman. The second, due the eighth week of class will ask the students to analyze a Rumi poem as translated by Coleman Barks with the

same Rumi poem translated by an academic translator (examples will be posted on line). Are their specificities of Rumi's religious or cultural context that, from what we have learned about Ottoman culture, seem stripped of context or actual misrepresented?

► Students will have a project due the final week of class. This project asks that students develop some aspect of the course content into a form expressive of their ministries. Examples might include a religious education course on Rumi or Sufism; a sermon reflective of the Islamic influence on the principle of religious toleration; a workshop of the staff of a social service agency on how to identify and counter anti-Islamic biases; a spiritual exercise that uses as its basis the Ottoman understanding of the shape of the spiritual journey. There will be an opportunity to refine and discuss possible projects on-line.

► Students are expected to demonstrate good church(wo)manship at all times; engaging each other and the material as appropriate and in a manner which shows attention to the quality of our shared experience.