Religious and Philosophical Traditions of the East

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Syllabus

1. Course Description
   a. Religion and Philosophical Traditions of the East
   b. Pre-requisites:
      A student should use knowledge and information from the materials previously
      have read. One should possess the ability to criticize, approve, agree or disagree with
      the shown material. In any case essay should have a critical design and reflect
      independent thinking. Any thesis or statement should be proved by historical or
      socio-cultural analysis. It's better to concentrate in several most important ideas
      than to try to write "in general". Good English is mostly welcomed. Time for writing
      the essay - no more than 120 min.
      Courses in Oriental History, at least 1 oriental language and history of philosophy
      are required.
   c. Course is compulsory
   d. Class Attendance & Discussion
      Regular class attendance is mandatory. Students are expected to attend class aswell
      as participate in lectures, discussions, and review sessions. Class participation will
      constitute 25% of the final grade. Each student is allowed a maximum of two and no
      more man two unexcused absences during the semester. For each unexcused
      absence thereafter, five points are deducted from your final grade. You are
      responsible for keeping the professor informed of any situation that prevents you
      from attending class. Students who have more than 4 unexcused absences will not
      pass the course.
   e. Abstract
      This introductory course focuses on the philosophical and religious phenomena in
      the Near East including the historical background and connections to the Western
      traditions. The Near Eastern religious tradition is dominated with the Abrahamic
legacy which is reflected in three main domains (classified chronologically): Jewish-Aramaic, Eastern Christian and Islamic. It includes also some descriptive parts about other Oriental traditions, mainly of Iranian origin.

This course is for those students who have at least some background in Oriental studies however it could be regarded as a qualifying for more detailed courses. This course will examine primarily the main principles of the Jewish religious revelation seen as a part of Ancient Near Eastern religious palette. Secondly all subsequent developments will be analyzed, first Oriental Christian and Early Islamic. This group of tradition could be described as Religion of the Scripture (kitāb). Secondly the course will concentrate on the interaction between Oriental Christianity and Islam in the Middle Age with the Ancient philosophical tradition. The course will focus primarily on the continuities and discontinuities in the religious message, concentrating on the basic phenomena as restriction, observation, isolation, mission, creationism, asceticism, mysticism, faith, sin and retribution, belief in resurrection and some other.

The following issues will be discussed: initial content of the religions message reflected in the Old Testament, the idea of the Single Deity, the idea of religious observation; the modernization of the traditional message in the Hellenistic Judaism and the origin of Christian message, the initial Christian message, the Gnostic development, apologetic ideas, Christian theology in the East, Greek philosophy and its impact on the Christian message, the ascetic turn, the mystical interpretation of Christian message, the initial Islam as Judeo-Christian message, Tawhid, Coranic theology, the influence of Greek philosophy (kalām and falsāfah), the mysticism (tasawwuf) etc.

Present day religious and philosophical landscape of the Near East presents traditional phenomena as well as modern trends (post- and anti-colonial, post-modern, western agnostic and esoteric). One of the major objectives of this course is to analyze these and to reach a coherent view of the Near Eastern spiritual tradition.

2. Learning Objectives
   To get a complex understanding of the Near Eastern religious and philosophical phenomena in their historical and social context. To understand modern trends in the Near Eastern religious and philosophical tradition as a system of synchronic and diachronic interconnection.

3. Learning Outcome
   Lectures, readings, excursions, assignments, and discussions are designed to help you develop the skills to:
• Think historically, read critically, and write and speak persuasively.
• Situate major religious trends in Oriental History in their proper philosophical, chronological, and social context;
• Connect and integrate historical religious and philosophical phenomena, and grasp their political, social, ethical and intellectual dimensions;
• Appreciate the greatness and complexity of the Near Eastern cultural and religious traditions;
• Seek for better understanding of the present religious situation of the Near East;
• Evaluate and critically assess the validity of historical evidence and interpretations;
• Use primary and secondary sources to construct sophisticated, persuasive, and logical interpretations of historical problems and events.

4. Course Outline

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<td>The Ancient Near Eastern Religious systems: ethnism, polytheism, state-religion</td>
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<td>The ancient Jewish monotheism as a system</td>
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<td>The Near Eastern religious mind in crisis: contacts and conflicts</td>
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<td>The early Oriental Christianity and its religious message</td>
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<td>Contacts and Influences (Greek philosophy and Christianity)</td>
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<td>The Christian theology in the Near East up to Modernity</td>
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<td>Islamic religion as reflected in the Qur’an and sunna</td>
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<td>The contact of the Islamic thought with the Greek philosophy</td>
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<td>The mystical trend in Islam (sūfī)</td>
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<td>Traditionalism and innovation in Islamic tradition</td>
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<td>12</td>
<td>Modern trends in the Near Eastern religion and philosophy</td>
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5. Reading List
   a. Required

b. Optional

6. Grading System
   Attendance and Class Participation - 25%
   Presentation - 25%
   Group Discussion and readings — 30%
   Final Examination (essay) - 20 %

7. Guidelines for Knowledge Assessment
   The attendance is strongly recommended. Reading is a basis for the successful accumulation of knowledge. One should make at least one presentation using PowerPoint or Keynote. It is required to clearly articulate objectives of the presentation, the main content and idea and
summary. One must choose main points and try presenting no more than three-five main points in a 10-15 minute presentation and develop a good conclusion. There is no need to put too many slides in the presentation (usually 4-5 for 15 min presentation). The presentation will be followed by a class discussion ab. 30 minutes w. questions.

8. Methods of Instruction
   1. Lectures
   2. Discussion seminars
   3. Presentation seminars

9. Special Equipment and Software Support (if required)
   Computer
   Projector