

Prof. Kecia Ali
NEJS 186a: Introduction to the Qur'an

Spring 2006

MWTh 11:10-12

Office hours W 12-1, Th 10-11

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TF: Joseph Ringel, office hours TBA

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This course will introduce students to the sacred book of one fifth of the world's population: the Qur'an, believed by Muslims to have been revealed by God through the angel Gabriel to the Prophet Muhammad in seventh century Arabia. The Qur'an has been declared "inimitable" by Muslim scholars, and its recitation can bring the faithful to tears; at the same time it is frequently deemed by non-Muslim readers to be disjointed, repetitive, and hardly inspiring of sublime religious sentiment. One important aim of this course will be to explore the reasons for these divergent reactions to the Qur'an. Beginning with Muslim accounts of the biography of Muhammad and the revelation of the Qur'an, we will proceed to look at the Qur'an in its textual, exegetical, and experiential dimensions.

By the time the semester is complete, students should have an understanding of: traditional Muslim accounts of the revelation and compilation of the Qur'an, as well as the challenges to this narrative by contemporary critical scholarship; the importance of recitation in the Muslim experience of scripture; the basic Qur'anic perspective on key themes such as God's "Oneness," creation, judgment, and the afterlife; the traditional Muslim view of prophecy and the relationship between Muhammad and the pre-Islamic biblical prophets; the basic outlines of the Qur'anic teachings on jihad and relations with non-Muslims, as well as the ways in which these teachings have been interpreted by classical exegetes; and historical and modern interpretations of crucial verses relating to women and the family, both conservative and feminist.

Readings:

It is vital that you come to class having read the assigned texts, as classroom lectures and discussions will build on this material, not repeat it.

The following books are required reading, and are available for purchase at the bookstore. Additionally, copies have been placed on two-hour reserve at the library. Other assigned readings will be available via WebCT or online, as indicated in this syllabus.

A.J. Arberry, translation of the Qur'an, any edition.

Carl Ernst, *Following Muhammad*

Hamid Algar, *Surat al-Fatiha*

Amina Wadud, *Qur'an and Woman: Rereading the Sacred Text from a Woman's Perspective*

Fazlur Rahman, *Major Themes of the Qur'an*

Michael Sells, *Approaching the Qur'an: The Early Revelations*

Note: ***Bring your Qur'an to each class session.*** Though knowledge of Arabic is in no way a prerequisite for this course, those students who read Arabic may want to acquire and bring to class a Qur'an in Arabic or with parallel Arabic text in addition to the required Arberry translation. For reading outside of class, <http://www.usc.edu/dept/MSA/quran/> is an excellent online resource, containing three different English translations of the Qur'an. It is searchable by keyword, and can provide an alternate version of difficult passages.

You will also find "listening" assignments for some weeks. Some are found on the CD included with Sells, *Approaching the Qur'an*, while others are accessible online as MP3 files and can be found through the links in this syllabus.

Assignments and grading:

There are four components to your grade: attendance/participation; weekly reflection papers; two short papers; and a final exam.

Attendance at all class sessions is necessary, because lectures will cover materials not in the class readings. *Participation* in discussions is also an important element in this course. Together, attendance and participation will account for 15% of your grade. Please note that *even if you miss a class session for a valid reason* you are expected to obtain notes from a classmate, as *you will still be responsible for any material covered or announcements given.*

This class is writing-intensive, with writing assignments of two types:

Weekly reflection papers: Over the thirteen weeks of the semester (not counting the first week), you must submit *ten* of these reflections. These papers (not less than two pages nor more than three) are an opportunity for you to comment on and analyze the week's readings, and will serve as a catalyst for our in-class discussions. Reflections will not be individually graded, only marked either acceptable (full credit) or unacceptable (no credit). They should not merely summarize the readings, but rather should address common themes, raise questions, present critiques, and/or highlight points that were helpful or confusing. Though they need not be formally structured or present an explicit argument, they should display proper grammar and spelling. Reflection papers should be *printed out and handed in* at the beginning of class on Thursdays; late papers will not be accepted for credit (except with a documented medical excuse) nor will papers be accepted in emailed form. In total, these reflection papers will be worth 15% of your grade.

Short papers: This course will have two 5 page papers (7-8 pages for graduate students), worth 20% of your grade each. The first will compare the biblical and Qur'anic treatments of the Prophet Joseph. The second will discuss feminist interpretation of the Qur'an. More specific guidelines for these papers will be distributed and posted on WebCT as noted below. These papers will include preliminary steps such as submission of a thesis statement and outline (Paper #1) or a rough draft (Paper #2). Due dates for stages are listed in the syllabus.

Final exam: Worth 30% of your grade, it will be held according to the University schedule.

Policy on Late Work and Incompletes:

Late work will be penalized by one complete letter grade for each day overdue (including weekends and holidays), except reflection papers, which will not be accepted late for credit. Extensions will be granted only in exceptional circumstances, and in no case after the original deadline for completion has passed. Students who anticipate difficulty in meeting deadlines should contact me as far in advance of the due date as possible. A course grade of incomplete will only be granted for compelling reasons.

University Statement on Academic Integrity:

"Academic integrity is central to the mission of educational excellence at Brandeis University. Each student is expected to turn in work completed independently, except when assignments specifically authorize collaborative effort. It is not acceptable to use the words or ideas of another person—be it a world-class philosopher or your lab partner—without proper acknowledgement of that source. This means that you must use footnotes and quotation marks to indicate the source of any phrases, sentences, paragraphs or ideas found in published volumes, on the internet, or created by another student. Violations of University policies on academic integrity, described in Section Three of Rights and Responsibilities, may result in failure in the course or on the assignment, or in suspension or dismissal from the University. If you are in doubt about the instructions for any assignment in this course, it is your responsibility to ask for clarification."

Because this class is writing-intensive, we will spend time discussing plagiarism and improper use of source materials. Helpful resources and more substantial information about proper use of sources can be found at Prof. Teuber's USEM 27B page: <http://people.brandeis.edu/~teuber/usemacadpol.html>. Especially useful sites include the Harvard University guide to "Writing with Sources" (<http://www.fas.harvard.edu/%7Eexpos/sources/>) and the Purdue University Online Writing Lab (OWL) guide to "Quoting, Paraphrasing, and Summarizing" (http://owl.english.purdue.edu/handouts/research/r_quotprsum.html).

Disabilities:

A student who requires accommodation for a documented disability of any type should see me immediately to discuss modifications to course requirements.

*Class sessions:***January 18, 19****Introduction: Before revelation: Muhammad and the pre-Islamic Arabs**

Readings: Begin reading Carl Ernst, *Following Muhammad*

January 23, 25, 26**"Recite!" The first revelation and aural dimensions of the Book**

Readings: Finish Ernst, *Following Muhammad*; Qur'an, 96:1-5; Michael Sells, *Approaching the*

Qur'an, 1-28, 145-50; Ahmad von Denffer, *'Ulum al-Qur'an*, Ch. 1, pp. 8-29, (http://www.youngmuslims.ca/online%5Flibrary/books/ulum%5Fal%5Fquran/chapter_1.htm).

Listen to: Sells CD, Tracks 5, 10, 13, 18, 26, 29.

January 30, February 1, 2

The Meccan verses: Divine unity, divine signs, divine judgement

Readings: Sells, *Approaching*, pp. 44-141; Qur'an, S. 53:1-18, S. 81-114; Fazlur Rahman, *Major Themes of the Qur'an*, 1-79

Listen to: Sells, Tracks 3, 4, 6-9, 11, 12, and 14-17.

February 6, 8, 9

Al-Fatiha (the opening chapter) and its interpretation

Readings: *Qur'an*, S. 1; Iqra, Surat al-Fatihah, pp. 5-9 (WebCT); Sells, *Approaching*, pp. 42-3, 156-7; Mahmoud Ayoub, *The Qur'an and its Interpreters*, pp. 16-53 (WebCT); Hamid Algar, *Surat al-Fatiha: Foundation of the Qur'an*, 1-43.

Listen to: Sells CD, Tracks 2, 23, 33.

Guidelines for paper #1 handed out on 2/9.

February 13, 15, 16

Surat Yusuf

Readings: Qur'an, S. 12; Genesis 37, 39-47 (<http://www.bibleontheweb.com/Bible.asp> or another edition); Stowasser, "The Chapter of Zulaykha," pp. 50-6 (WebCT); Maududi's introduction to S. 12, <http://www.usc.edu/dept/MSA/quran/maududi/mau12.html>, Mustansir Mir, "Irony in the Qur'an: A Study of the Story of Joseph" (from Issa J. Boullata, ed., *Literary Structures of Religious Meaning in the Qur'an*, Surrey: Curzon, 2000) pp. 173-87; (WebCT); Mir, "The Qur'anic Story of Joseph: Plot, Themes, and Characters," http://www.islamic-awareness.org/Quran/Q_Studies/Mirjoseph.html

Additional graduate student readings: Sufia Uddin, "A Mystical Journey or a Misogynist Assault?" (WebCT), Fedwa Malti-Douglas, selections from *Woman's Body, Woman's Word* (WebCT)

February 27, March 1, 2

Prophets in history

Readings: *Qur'an*, S. 3, 10, 11, 13-21; Rahman, *Major Themes of the Qur'an*, 80-131.

Listen to: Surah 19, "Maryam" at <http://www.shapulus.com/free-quran-software/quran-mp3-software/QuranReciter/quran-mp3-4.htm>

Thesis statement and outline for Paper #1 due at beginning of class on Monday, 2/27 and

handed back with comments in class on Thursday 3/2. Refer to guidelines for more specifics.

March 6, 8, 9

Revelation and prophecy considered

No new readings; we will tie up any loose ends from previous weeks and discuss key themes.

Paper #1 due at beginning of class on Thursday, 3/9. Refer to guidelines for more specifics.

March 13, 15, 16

Madinan revelation: community life and family life

Readings Qur'an: S. 2; S. 4:1-105; S. 9; S. 47-48; selections from Taha, *The Second Message of Islam* (WebCT); selections from al-Tabari's commentary (WebCT).

March 20, 22, 23

Relations with non-Muslims

Readings: Qur'an, S. 4:105-176, S. 5; selections (TBA) from *Tafsir Ibn Kathir* at www.tafsir.com Helmut Gatje, *The Qur'an and its Exegesis*, pp. 133-45, 212-4 (WebCT), Rahman, *Major Themes*, Appendix I and II, pp. 150-170; Jane Dammen McAuliffe, *Qur'anic Christians: An Analysis of Classical and Modern Exegesis*, 1-9, 129-79 (WebCT)

Guidelines for Paper #2 handed out on 3/23.

March 27, 29, 30

Text and context: Classical discussions of the "veil"

Readings: First read Qur'an, S. 24:30-31; 33:53; and 33:59, then go back and read S. 24 and S. 33 in their entirety. "Women's Modesty in Qur'anic Commentaries: The Founding Discourse," by Soraya Hajjaji-Jarrah (pp. 181-213) (WebCT) and Linda Clarke, "The Hijab According to the Hadith," (WebCT).

April 3, 5, 6

Feminist approaches to the Qur'an

Readings: Amina Wadud, *Qur'an and Woman*, entire book; Asma Barlas, "Amina Wadud's Hermeneutics of the Qur'an," pp. 97-123 (WebCT); and Barlas, selections from *Believing Women in Islam: Unreading Patriarchal Interpretations of the Text* (WebCT).

Additional graduate student readings: Other selections from Barlas, *Believing Women* (WebCT).

April 10, 12

The compilation of the text and current critical scholarship

Readings: Read first three sections at <http://www.uga.edu/islam/quran.html>; von Denffer, *Ulum*

al-Qur'an, Chapter 2, pp. 31-66 (available at <http://www.islamworld.net/UUQ/2.txt>); Cook, *The Koran*, pp. 119-140 (WebCT); Lester, "What is the Koran?" pp. 107-25 (WebCT); Burton, "The Collection of the Qur'an," pp. 59-117 (WebCT); Brockett, "The Value of the Hafs and Warsh Transmissions," pp. 33-45 (WebCT)

Note: since there is no class Thursday 4/13, reflection papers are due Wednesday 4/12.

April 24, 26, 27

The Qur'an as living text

Readings: William Graham, *Beyond the Written Word: Oral Aspects of Scripture in the History of Religion*, pp. 79-115 (WebCT); Denny, "Qur'an Recitation in Indonesia," pp. 288-306 (WebCT).

Listen to: S. 36, Ya-Sin, at <http://www.shapulus.com/free-quran-software/quran-mp3-software/QuranReciter/quran-mp3-3.htm>.

Rough draft of Paper #2 due via email by 9 am on Monday 4/24, to be returned by Thursday 4/27. Refer to guidelines for more specifics.

May 1, 3

No new readings; we will tie up any loose ends from the last six weeks and discuss key themes.

Final version of Paper #2 due Monday, 5/1 at the beginning of class. Refer to guidelines for more specifics.

Final exam to be scheduled in accordance with University policy.