The Qur’an
CAS RN 340, GRS RN 640, STH TX 853
Prof. Kecia Ali
Spring 2013

MWF 10-11 RN 404, 145 Bay State Rd.
Office hours: M 1:30-3 and W 11-12:30 (145 Bay State Rd., #402)
phone: 617-353-4465; email: ka@bu.edu

Note: Email is the best way to reach me; I check it daily. For significant substantive queries, come to office hours or make an appointment by email to meet with me at another time.

This course will introduce students to the sacred book of one fifth of the world’s population. Muslim scholars deem the Qur’an inimitable and its recitation can bring the faithful to tears. At the same time some non-Muslim readers find it disjointed, repetitive, and hardly inspiring of sublime religious sentiment. This course will explore the textual, exegetical, and experiential dimensions of the Qur’an. By the end of the semester, students should understand:

- traditional Muslim accounts of the revelation and compilation of the Qur’an and challenges to this narrative by contemporary critical scholarship;
- the importance of recitation in the Muslim experience of scripture;
- Qur’anic perspectives on key themes: God’s “Oneness,” creation, judgment, and the afterlife;
- views on prophecy and the relationship between Muhammad and the biblical prophets;
- Qur’anic teachings on jihad and relations with non-Muslims, as interpreted by various exegetes, ancient, medieval, and modern;
- and the spectrum of interpretations of crucial verses relating to women and the family

Readings:

The following books are available for purchase at the bookstore and on reserve at the library:

Fazlur Rahman - Major Themes of Qur’an, 2nd 89 (Bib Islam), ISBN 978088290462
Amina Wadud – Qur’an and Woman, 99 (Oxf), ISBN 9780195128369
Michael Sells - Approaching the Qur’an-w/CD, 2nd 07 (Caveat Pr), ISBN 9781883991692
Hamid Algar - Surat Al-Fatiha, 98 (Islamic Mi), ISBN 9781889999005
The Qur’an, translated by MAS Abdul-Haleem. English (Oxford World’s Classic) or English-Arabic edition (recommended)

Occasional supplementary readings are posted on Blackboard and/or available as online library resources.

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.
Bring your Qur'an to each class session.

Though knowledge of Arabic is in no way a prerequisite for this course, those who can are encouraged to consult the parallel Arabic text. For supplementary reading outside of class, http://www.usc.edu/schools/college/crcc/engagement/resources/texts/muslim/quran/ contains three translations (Yusuf Ali, Pickthall, Shakir) for easy comparison. 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. Plenty of other recitations are accessible online and some exploration will repay handsomely.

Course Requirements and Grading:

Undergraduates: Class attendance and participation (15%), three book review papers (10% each), an in-class midterm (20%), and a final presentation (15%) and written report (20%) on a chapter of the Qur'an.

1) Class attendance and participation are vital. This will be a small course and much of our learning will take place in conversation. It is necessary that you attend each class session, having read the assigned text(s) and being prepared for discussion. Attendance and participation are worth 15% of your grade though if you miss an excessive number of classes, your grade is subject to further deduction.

2) Three book review papers of five double-spaced pages on the works by Algar (due 2/11), Rahman (due 3/4), and Wadud (due 4/8). These should not just be summaries of the reading. They should contain a brief (about one page) summary of the essential arguments of the reading but also raise key questions, comparative issues, and address your reflections on the text. You may consult secondary sources or refer to other course readings (using proper citations) but it is not required that you do so. Each paper is worth 10% of your grade, for a total of 30%.

3) An in-class midterm on 3/8. Worth 20% of your grade.

4) A ten minute oral presentation, with accompanying report, on a Qur'anic chapter (Surah) selected in consultation with me. Surahs are to be selected by 3/22. Fuller guidelines for this presentation appear at the end of this syllabus. Worth 35% of your grade: 15% for preparation and presentation; 20% for the written report.

Graduate students: In addition to attendance and participation (15%) and the midterm (20%), graduate students will write a critical review of a book on the course topic (20%), prepare a set of discussion questions for one class session (to be discussed individually – 5%), and write a final research paper (40%). Specific guidelines will be distributed in class and discussed individually.
Policy on Late Work, Missed Exams, and Incompletes:

Late work will be penalized by as much as one complete letter grade for each day overdue including weekends and holidays. Please note that electronic submission of papers is not allowed. 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 the instructor as far in advance of the due date as possible. The same holds for students who require accommodations for a religious observance: please notify me in writing as soon as possible so that we can make appropriate arrangements. A course grade of incomplete will only be granted for compelling reasons.

Academic integrity, plagiarism, and independent work:

Every student is expected to be familiar with and comply with the BU policy on academic conduct, posted at: http://www.bu.edu/academics/. If you have any questions about how the policy applies to work for this course, please ask. Please note that sharing your papers or work with other students without the instructor’s permission is as significant an offense as borrowing and making use of another student’s work.

The conduct code discusses plagiarism and source usage on pp. 12-17. Other helpful resources about proper use of sources can be found many places online and should be consulted before you begin work on your papers. Dartmouth College’s page on source usage is a good place to begin: http://www.dartmouth.edu/~writing/sources/sources-citation.html or in PDF at http://www.dartmouth.edu/~writing/docs/FINAL%20Sources%202011%2012.pdf. You might also find useful Purdue University Online Writing Lab’s guide to “Quoting, Paraphrasing, and Summarizing” (http://owl.english.purdue.edu/handouts/research/r_quotprsum.html).

Chicago-style citation is preferred, but notes may follow any common style so long as it is used consistently.


Disabilities:

In accordance with University policy, if you require accommodation for a documented disability of any type, please see me immediately to discuss appropriate modifications to course requirements; see details at http://www.bu.edu/disability/policies/index.html.

Note: If you wish to use a laptop to take notes during class, please see me to discuss it. You will be required to email me lecture notes at the end of each class session if you choose to use your laptop.
### Course Schedule

Note that some weeks have readings listed for the entire week while others list specific readings for each day.

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<th>Date</th>
<th>Reading / Activity</th>
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<tr>
<td>W 1/16</td>
<td>Recite!&quot; (In class: Q. 96: 1-5) – Muslim theories of revelation</td>
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<tr>
<td>F 1/18</td>
<td>The Qur'an's historical context and compilation</td>
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Read: Esack, pp. 1-55; Graduate/ supplementary reading: Chapters 1-3 in McAuliffe, ed., *Cambridge Companion to the Qur'an* (Online at BU Libraries)

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<th>Date</th>
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<tr>
<td>M 1/21</td>
<td>NO CLASS</td>
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<tr>
<td>W 1/23</td>
<td>Rhythm and rhyme in Meccan suras (Listen in class: 5, 10, 13, 18, 26, and/or 29)</td>
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<tr>
<td>F 1/25</td>
<td>Divine signs in the &quot;early revelations&quot;</td>
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Read: Esack 56-77, Sells 1-28, 44-141 (includes translations), 145-50; Listen to: Sells CD, Tracks 3, 4, 6-9, 11, 12, and 14-17.

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<th>Date</th>
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<tr>
<td>M 1/28</td>
<td>Divine judgment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>W 1/30</td>
<td>Divine unity</td>
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<tr>
<td>F 2/1</td>
<td>Qur'anic theology</td>
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Read: Rahman, *Major Themes of the Qur'an*, 1-79

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<tr>
<td>M 2/4</td>
<td>Al-Fatiha – The Opening</td>
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<tr>
<td>W 2/6</td>
<td>The commentary tradition 1</td>
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<td>F 2/8</td>
<td>The commentary tradition 2</td>
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<tr>
<td>M 2/11</td>
<td>Prophets and messengers</td>
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<td><em>Algar review paper due at beginning of class</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>W 2/13</td>
<td>Adam – creation and slipping</td>
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<tr>
<td>F 2/15</td>
<td>Mary and Jesus</td>
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<td>M 2/18</td>
<td>No class</td>
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<tr>
<td>W 2/20</td>
<td>(BU Monday) Joseph – the story</td>
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<tr>
<td>F 2/22</td>
<td>Biblical intertexts (compare Genesis 37, 39-47)</td>
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Categories of non-Muslims – salvation, community, and punishment

Relations with non-Muslims – Christians and their beliefs

The dhimmi

The dhimmi

Prima text handout (excerpt from Q. 5)

Rahman review due at beginning of class
Graduate student book review due at beginning of class

Review for midterm

Midterm

No new readings; guidelines for Surah projects handed out

SPRING BREAK

Jihad and abrogation

Jihad and legal interpretation

Primary text handout ("Slay them wherever you find them" and commentaries)
Select Surah for presentation

Read: S. 9, S. 47-48; re-read Q. 2:190-194; find at least one online commentary on these latter passages and print out for class on Friday

Community and family life: inheritance

Community and family life: marriage

Community and family life: divorce

Read: Q. 2, Q. 4:1-104

Creation, egalitarianism

"Difficult passages"

Modern interpretation and scholarly qualifications


Modesty in Women’s Dress

Wadud review paper due at beginning of class

Muhammad’s wives

The veil in commentary

M 4/15 No class
W 4/17 Contemporary Qur’an education
Th 4/18 BU MONDAY – Women and Recitation
F 4/19 Recitation and Muslim ritual life


M 4/22 Reciter class visit
W 4/24 MFA Qur’an exhibit visit (Note: date tentative)
F 4/26 Student research presentations

Readings: TBD

M 4/29 Student research presentations
W 5/1 Student research presentations

Written reports and graduate student papers due Friday 5/3 at 5 pm in Prof. Ali’s Religion Department mailbox, 2nd floor.
Critical book review guidelines

The ability to read critically is perhaps the most important skill for a student and scholar, not to mention an educated citizen. The aim of this assignment is to sharpen your analytical reading skills and provide you with the tools necessary for assessing sources for perspective, thoroughness, use of evidence, and coherence of argument.

Your book review should be 6-8 pages long, is worth 20% of your grade, and is due at the beginning of class on Monday 3/4. Book titles must be submitted for approval by Friday 2/15. By the time you have submitted a title, you should have already have the book in hand or determined that you will be able to obtain it rapidly. Should you need to change titles for some reason, let me know immediately.

Your review should contain the following:

- **Complete bibliographical information on the book**: author(s), title, publisher, and place and date of publication.

- **Where available, a brief summary of the author's background and qualifications for writing the book.** It may be helpful to do a library database search to see if the author has written other related books, or an internet search for information such as institutional affiliation. This should usually be a few sentences at most.

- **A summary of the contents of the book.** A review should not be primarily a summary; the summary’s purpose is to preview the contents sufficiently that someone who has not read the book will be able to understand your analysis and critique.

- **Discussion of the theoretical framework, if any, used by the author to explain the phenomena s/he discusses.** What biases does the author have (e.g., assumptions about Islam/Muslims/Islamic law/the authorship of the Qur'an and prophethood of Muhammad/women's "roles") that color her/his analysis of the topic at hand? What effect do these presumptions have on the work?

- **A description of the intended audience for the book.** Is it aimed at academics, students, the general public, Muslims living in the West, etc.? How does this affect the style, tone, and other aspects of the work?

- **An assessment of the evidence used by the author.** Does s/he rely on other secondary sources or do original research? With published data or manuscript or other archival evidence? What methods does s/he use - participant observation, textual analysis, etc.? What language skills have been used in the course of the research? Would the study have been different if the author were more qualified to read materials in Arabic, for example?
• An assessment of the author's arguments. What points is s/he trying to make? Are they made convincingly? Does the evidence support the arguments or suggest other conclusions? Does the author use the evidence to its best advantage? What did you accept on the basis of this book? What were you unwilling to accept and why?

• Where appropriate, a comparison of this book with other works on the subject. Does it agree with other things you've read on the topic of the Qur’an and its interpretive tradition or history in Islamic thought and Muslim history? Does it disagree? How?

Notes:

1) These guidelines are drafted with the review of secondary sources in mind. If you intend to review a primary text for this assignment, which may be helpful for your research paper, please see me to discuss your approach. For instance, more detailed author information may be relevant in such a case.

2) You need not keep these elements in the same order I have them here.

3) Any quotations from the reviewed book must be put in quotation marks. Instead of footnoting, the relevant page numbers may simply be included in parentheses - e.g., (35). Take care to also include page numbers after references to particular arguments or points made by the author, even if you do not actually quote the text. If you refer to other works in the body of your paper, be sure to give complete citations, either in footnotes or in parenthetical citation, with a list of cited works at the end.

4) Reviews of other books, such as those published in academic journals, should be consulted to get a sense of how scholars generally approach the review process. Do not, however, read other reviews of the work you have chosen for your essay.

5) Keep in mind the syllabus statements governing late work and academic integrity.

Rev. 12.31.12
Each of you will give a **seven to eight minute oral presentation** and **submit a written report** (up to ten pages) on a surah selected by **Friday 3/29** in consultation with me. No more than one student may present on any given surah and assignment will be first-come, first served. **This project is worth 35% of your grade: 15% for preparation and presentation; 20% for the written report.**

Presentations will be held during class time on M 4/22, W 4/24, F 4/26, and M 4/29. **Students must attend all presentations.**

Written reports are due Friday 5/3 at 5 pm in Prof. Ali’s Religion Dep’t. mailbox, 2nd floor.

Each presentation must provide

- **A short summary of the contents of the surah.** If you select a very short surah, this will be relatively straightforward. If you select a long surah, you will have to be satisfied with a brief (*no more than 1-2 minutes*) discussion of key themes, important topics (judgment; prophecy; the story of Noah; inheritance regulations or the rules surrounding proving and punishing illicit sex; the description of paradise and its inhabitants and pleasures; the relationship of 'believers' to those who don't believe). If the surah is not quite short (e.g., the ones given in Sells), **do not** attempt to be exhaustive. You cannot summarize the whole surah verse by verse or even topic by topic.

- **Some discussion of the crucial elements of the surah and their relationship to other ideas/topics/figures in 1) the surah or 2) the Qur'an as a whole.** For instance, if you chose Surah 19, Mary, you would discuss how a somewhat different account of Mary's story appears in Surah 3. You might also discuss the figure of Jesus and his importance, or Mary in relation to other figures who appear in Surah 19, both male and female, with regard to character, function, communication with the divine, etc. For instance, what do Mary and Zakariyya have in common and how do they differ? What if anything does this tell us about or males or females or parenthood or God's relationship to humanity?

Presentations should also address one or more of the following

- **The literary qualities of the surah in question.** These might be poetic (meter, rhyme), linguistic (to the extent that such subtleties come through in English), or structural (e.g., the frame story in Surah 12; the series of opposites in several early Meccan surahs).

- **The social or ritual function or use of the surah** – in prayer, performance, particular life-cycle moments (e.g., Surah 19, Mary, is often recited for pregnant women), in later literature (like the recurring story of Joseph and Zulaykha) or in Islamic law (rules for divorce).
Commentary on the surah. As you write about the topics, ideas, themes, and/or structure of the surah, the commentaries – classical or contemporary – and their interpretations are likely to be helpful, and several have been written or more typically translated into English. Of course, you are welcome to use Arabic or other foreign language sources as appropriate. If you are looking at legal verses, I can recommend legal works in translation as well as other sources.

Sources

On topics related to Islam in general and the Qur'an in particular, it can be difficult to assess the reliability of sources. Especially with online sources, it is vital to know something about who is saying what, and why. I very strongly recommend coming to see me during office hours or by appointment to discuss books or articles you'd like to use. If you would like to use online materials, please send a URL by email so that I can help you determine whether the site is reliable.

Citations

In your written report, provide citations both when you quote a passage and when you simply discuss it.

Cite Qur'anic passages with parenthetical surah:verse citation.

To cite surah 12, verse 5 simply put (Q. 12:5) after discussion or quotation of the passage.

For sequential verses use a hyphen to separate verse numbers (Q. 12:5-8).

For verses or verse clusters within the same surah but separated by intervening verses use commas (Q. 12:5-8, 13, 15-17).

If you are referring to verses in multiple surahs separate the entries with commas (Q. 2:228, 4:34).

If you have both multiple verses in one surah and verses from multiple surahs, use commas to separate verses from the same surah and a semi-colon to separate all references to surahs (Q. 12:5-8, 13; 4:1; 5:6).

Cite other works with a) parenthetical author, date, page references (Rahman 1980, 37) or b) footnotes in any widely accepted style (MLA, Chicago, etc.). If you are using multiple online sources (recall the caveats above), footnotes are likely to be the better bet. When citing online sources provide an access date.
Discussing sources in your presentation

When you adopt an interpretation from a secondary source you will give the appropriate credit in your written presentation, but you must also do so when making your oral presentation so that your classmates don't mistake the analysis for your own. Say, for example, you want to argue that Surah 12, Joseph, has as its main idea that God's plans always carry the day. You might want to use Fazlur Rahman's discussion of God's guiding force. You could introduce your use of his work by saying, "As Fazlur Rahman suggests …". You don't have to give all publication information orally. It is not necessary to say "On page 84 of *Major Themes of the Qur’an*, published in Chicago in 1980 by Biblioteca Islamica, Fazlur Rahman writes that …". Do indicate, though, if you are directly quoting his words.

On oral presentations

In order to accommodate presentations within allotted class time, each presentation must be kept to eight minutes maximum. *This is harder than it sounds.* Please respect your classmates by sticking to your allotted time. If, with time limits in mind, you wish to use electronic resources, Power Point, or a CD or MP3 file, please let me know in advance.

You may choose whether to speak from notes or read your presentation from a written text. Your written report will be too long to read; *four* double-spaced pages (Times New Roman, 12 pt. font, 1" margins) should fill your time allowance, although you will want to do a run-through beforehand to test your pacing and get comfortable with the material. Expect to have to revise a written presentation in some places; what works in print may be hard to follow or awkward when spoken. If you choose to speak from notes, you should also practice beforehand. During your presentation, you will need to carefully monitor your use of time, so that you do not spend disproportionate time on the early sections of your presentation and have to rush through the later portions.

Final notes

In preparing for your presentation and in writing your paper, please consult the syllabus guidelines about effective use of sources and independent work. The resources provided there also give information on citing sources. Come see me if you have any questions about how these regulations apply to work for this course.

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