



Syllabus

Interpreting the Qur'ān (in Translation)¹

Winter 2021

RELSTUD 2310G/5310B

Instructor Information

Instructor: Lahouari Ramzi Taleb
E-mail: ltaleb@uwo.ca
Office Hours: Zoom appointment

Course Identification

Course Number: **RS 2310/5310B**
Course Name: Interpreting the Qur'an (in Translation)
Course Location: On Zoom until further notice

Class Times: Thursdays, 11:30 am – 2:00 pm (weekly)

Course delivery with respect to the COVID-19 pandemic

Although the intent is for this course to be delivered in-person, the changing COVID-19 landscape may necessitate some or all of the course to be delivered online, either synchronously (i.e., at the times indicated in the timetable) or asynchronously (e.g., posted on OWL for students to view at their convenience). The grading scheme will not change. Any assessments affected will be conducted online as determined by the course instructor.

Course Description:

This course explores passages in the Qur'an that have shaped classical and contemporary Islam, particularly regarding the tensions between text, context, and community. In addition to textual analysis, the course covers the history of reception and the influence these texts and their interpretations have on social relations and contemporary issues.

Readings consist primarily of English translations of the Qur'ān alongside a running

- To gain a substantial understanding of the centrality of the Qur'anic scripture in all spheres of Islamic faith (spiritual, ethical, and theological, so forth).
- To understand the text and context of the Qur'an, including its form, literary expression, and content.
- To be able to critically analyze a wide variety of Quranic material (chapters and verses), including medieval and modern Quranic interpretation (*tafsir*).

Evaluation:

Each student in this course is responsible for keeping up with the course materials, which includes **all** the assigned readings, as well as themes, notions and concepts discussed in in class. Students are expected to post questions/comments on the online Discussion Forum.

Course Materials:

The required Text for this course will be available at the Book store at Western. Other articles and chapters can be retrieved in pdf format through the OWL course website (**abbreviated in the Syllabus as CW**)

Required Text:

- *The Study Qur'an: A New Translation and Commentary*, ed. S. H. Nasr et al. (New York, NY: HarperOne, 2015)

Our assigned readings and assignments will be based on this translation. You may consider purchasing a small, handy translation of the Qur'ān such as Abd al-Haleem's (Oxford UP) to peruse through surahs for quick reference; OR, go online to Altafsir.com. I recommend the translation of Thomas Cleary: <https://www.amazon.com/Quran-New-Translation-Thomas-Cleary/dp/192969444X>

Useful Reference Works:

- *The Encyclopedia of the Qur'ān* (A basic source of information and up-to-date bibliography on most topics related to the Qur'an. It is available online through Western libraries website at <https://www.lib.uwo.ca/>.)
- *The Encyclopedia of Islam* (The go-to reference for all things Islamic Studies)

Course Evaluation and Due Dates

Requirements

The final grade for the course will be based on evaluations in three areas.

(1) **Attendance & Participation** (15%):

Each student is expected to carefully read the assigned readings and be prepared for class.

Your thoughtful and critical engagement with the readings, the instructor and peers will be crucial for earning a high participation mark. Your participation can be performed in two ways:

- a. For synchronous classroom, you may at any time raise a question, interject, or comment on the assigned readings or topics discussed in class.
- b. You may use the virtual 'Raise Hand' feature OR raise your hand on Zoom to participate.
- c. You may also ask a question and/or add a comment on the Group Chat feature on Zoom.

(2) **Moderated Discussion (20%) & Online Discussion Board**

This Discussion Board help students and their peers navigate through the challenging aspects of the reading material. You are expected **to post at least one thoughtful question or comment** on the assigned readings before our weekly Zoom session. Your **question/or comments** should be posted **on Tuesday of each week** (For our Jan 20th meeting, your question should be posted on Tuesday, Jan 18th).

To help your classmates and the instructor identify the source of your question, **kindly indicate to the author and title (page and/or paragraph, if applicable) of the assigned reading *****

Some helpful guidelines on what your question/comment should include:

- a. Your question may be about a definition (what does this concept/idea mean?), a notion (what does this scriptural notion entail?), a theme (e.g., the nature and function of prophethood in the Qur'an) or a scriptural interpretation (what are the different ways in which one verse is interpreted by different exegetes and theologians?)

- c. You may also develop someone's else question (I think that the question that was asked by my peer is connected to another question that I have. Are they interconnected?)
- a. You may also have the same question as someone else: you can do so by pressing the 'like' button on the Forum or by sharing the question to your own thread.

The session will begin with a preliminary lecture (**30-40 mins**) on some of the key notions and themes that have come up in the reading assignments. I will also briefly take up some of the questions posted on the Discussion Board. We will then read together key passages from the assigned readings (**15-20 mins**). We will take a **10 mins** break, after which we will engage in a moderated group discussion (**40-45mins**):

Each week, the moderator of each group will gather **a thoughtful 1-page summary of the readings**; (2) The moderator will solicit three key ideas/concerns to get a sense of what areas should be explored in the discussion; (3) we will go back to classroom mode and ask the moderator of each group to bring up key concerns/ideas within each group (**20 mins**). Every week, a different moderator will be designated by his/her group. We will end each session with a **20minute** recap of the key ideas that were discussed in the group and assigned readings.

4 bi-weekly Reading Reports (20%):

You must complete at least 4 weekly assignments. Each assignment counts as 5% of your final grade and is designed to help you engage closely and analytically with the text of the Qur'an. If you are unsatisfied with an assignment grade, you may complete an extra assignment(s) and I will count your highest 4 marks toward the final grade.

(3) **Oral Presentation** (15%) (**March 3th**)

Each student will be required to give a 15 mins oral presentation (synchronously) on the topic you intend to explore for your final assignment. You are encouraged to email a handout of your presentation to the instructor and to the class before the presentation. The topic should be chosen in consultation with the instructor

(4) **Final Reading Report**: 30%: **Due April 7th, 2022.**

For your final assignment is a critical analysis of a short sura of the Qur'an or a topic

If you wish to submit a creative assignment on the art of Qur'anic calligraphy and illumination, Qur'anic recitation, or the impact of the Qur'anic teachings on Islamic Architecture and Music, please consult with me first before making your choice.

Submission Guidelines

Please submit your assignments in electronic format by the due dates/times through OWL site. If you do not receive a response from me acknowledging that I have received your assignment within 24 hours, then please resend to ltaleb@uwo.ca, since I may not have received it. Due dates/times for the discussion forum contributions will be posted on OWL site.

Huron provides free writing support to undergraduate students. Services are designed for both native and non-native speakers of English, and include non-credit courses, single-session workshops, individual writing consultations, and online resources. Students are encouraged to use these services as needed:
Huron's Writing Skills Centre: http://www.huronuc.on.ca/student_life/writing_services.

Schedule of Lectures and Readings

Jan. 13th (synchronous)

The Qur'ān: The Final Revelation and the Seal of the Prophets

- Introduction to the Course: What is a Sacred Scripture?
- The Qur'ān's Self-Referentiality: An Examination of *Kitāb* and *Tanzīl*
- ** Required Readings
- *The Study Quran*, Sura 1 "Al-Fātiḥa/The Opening", pp. 3-11; Sura 96 "Al-'Alaq/The Blood Clot," pp. 1535-1538 (read both the running commentary and the Qur'ānic text throughout course).
- Sells, *Approaching the Qur'an*, 1-31 (PDF on Course Website = [CW])
- Madigan, "Themes and Topics," in *Cambridge Companion to the Qur'ān*, pp. 79-95 (CW).
- Joseph Lumbard, "Muḥammad in the Qur'an" in *The Routledge Companion to the Qur'an*, pp. 105-114 (pdf on CW).

Sura 27 “The Ant/Al-Naml,” pp. 927-944; Sura 55, “The Compassionate/Al-Rahmān,” pp. 1309-1318

- Mattson, “How to Read the Quran” in *Study Qur’an*, 1587-1606.

- Boullata, Issa J. “Literary Structures of the Qur’ān.” In *Encyclopaedia of the Qur’an*, edited by Jane Dammen McAuliffe, 192-205. Vol. 3. Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill Academic Publishers, 2003 (On CW).

** Extra Credit Opportunity: Watch *Koran by Heart* and submit a 2-page reflection by email at (ltaleb@uwo.ca) before next Tuesday 10/4 for an extra 1% to your final grade. More than 100 children from all over the world descend on Cairo to compete in an annual Koran-reciting contest). Directed by Greg Barker, 1h 30m. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ptHdmw57rzM>.

*** Assignment I: General Features of the Qur’ān (Submit electronically)***

Jan. 27th (synchronous)

** Required Readings

The Historical Context of the Qur’anic Revelation

– Pre-Islamic Arabia and the Broader Sectarian Milieu of Late Antiquity:

Jāhiliyya, the *Ḥanīf* Tradition, Jews, and Christians

– The Compilation of the ‘Uthmānī Codex: The Qur’ān and its Variant Readings (*qirā’āt*)

** Required Readings

- *The Study Quran, Suras 93-98*, pp. 1526-1544.

- Muhammad Mustafa al-Azami, “The Islamic View of the Qur’an,” in *The Study Quran*, 1607-1623.

Izutsu, Toshihiko. *Ethico-Religious Concepts in the Qur’ān* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2002), **Chap. V** (“Islamization of old Arab virtues” Ethico-religious concepts 74-104).

- **optional reading**: Donner, Fred, “The Historical Context,” in *The Cambridge Companion to the Qur’an*, pp. 23-40 (On CW).

Feb. 3rd (synchronous/or in-person)

The Meccan Revelations (ca. 615–622)

– The Meccan Revelations: One God, Many Signs, Judgment Day, Afterlife

***** Assignment II: “Ummī” in the Qur’ān***.**

Feb. 10th (synchronous)

The Medinan Revelations (ca. 622–632)

- The Medinan Revelations: Community and Family
- The Qur’ān on Three Pivotal Military Battles: *Badr*, *Uḥud*, and *al-Khandaq*

**** Required Readings**

- *The Study Quran*, **Sura 2** (The Cow/ Al-Baqara), **pp. 12-125.**

Feb. 17th (synchronous/or in-person)

Divine Legislation, Prophecy and Sainthood

- The Legal Verses: Commands, Prohibitions, and Abrogative Passages (*naskh*) in the Qur’ān
- The Qur’ān on Messengers (*Rusul*), Prophets (*anbiyā’*), and Saints (*awliyā’*)

**** Required Readings:**

The Study Quran, Sura 18, “The Cave/Al-Kahf” pp. 728-762

The Study Quran, Sura 21, “The Prophets”

The Study Quran, **Sura 24** (Light/ Al-Nūr), **pp. 864-888.**

Al-Ṭayyib, “The Quran as Source of Islamic Law,” in *The Study Quran*, **pp. 1695-1718.**

*****Assignment III: War and Peace in the Qur’an/or the Afterlife in the Qur’an*****
(submit electronically)

***** Spring Reading Week; No Class (Feb 19 -27) *****

Mar. 3th (synchronous/or in-person)

The Qur’ān on Christianity & Other Religions

*****Oral Presentation on Final Assignment *****

- Mary the Chaste: **An Analysis of Sura 19** Maryam
- Jesus the Spirit, Word, and Prophet of God

**** Required Readings:**

Read Suras (in the following order):

– Moses the Mouthpiece of God (*kalīm Allāh*), Legislator, and Student of al-Khidr

– The Qurʾān and the Sufi scriptural exegesis (tafsīr)

**** Required Readings**

- *Study Qurʾan*: Sura 18, Sura. 33, Sura. 53 (18:60-82, 33:33, 53:1-18 with commentary)

- Shaykh Ahmad al-ʿAlawi (d. 1934), “Commentary on the Basmala and al-Fatiha from the Swelling Sea: an Exegesis of the Qurʾan by Pure Light,” pp. 21-40.

- Chittick, “The Quran and Sufism,” in *The Study Quran*, pp. 1737-1749.

**** *Assignment IV: Jesus as Prophet in the Qurʾan/or Qurʾān’s Appraisal of the “People of the Book” *****

Mar. 18th (synchronous/or in-person)

The Medieval Interpreters

Tuesday 3/5 – Major Trends in Qurʾanic Exegetical Literature

**** Required Readings:**

The Study Quran, Sura 13 (The Thunder/*al-Raʿd*), pp. 615-628; Sura 23 (The Believers/*Al-Muʾminūn*), pp. 850-864.

Saleh, Walid, “Quranic Commentaries,” in *The Study Quran*, pp. 1645-1658.

Mar. 25th (synchronous/or in-person)

**The Quran and the Islamic Intellectual Tradition
Literary Features of the Qurʾān**

**** Required Readings:**

Study Qurʾan, *Suras* 13-17 (15 and 17 with commentary), 24 (24:35 with commentary)
Damad, “The Quran and Schools of Islamic Theology and Philosophy” in *SQ*, 1719-1735.

- Mayer, “Traditions of Esoteric and Sapiential Quranic Commentary” in *SQ*, 1659-1678.

Jean-Louis Michon, “The Qurʾan and Islamic Art” in *SQ*, 1751-1764.

April 1st (synchronous/or in-person)

Dagli, Conquest and Conversion, War and Peace in the Quran” in *Study Quran, 1805-1817*.

April 7th (synchronous/or in-person)

Women, Ethics and Society in the Qur’ān

– Modern & Feminist Readings of the Qur’ān

** Required Readings:

Maria M. Dakake. “Quranic Ethics, Human Rights and Society.” SQ, pp. 1785-1804.

Sura 4, (Women/*al-Nisā*) pp. 188-269.

Brown, Jonathan, *Misquoting Muhammad: The Challenge and Choices of Interpreting the Prophet's Legacy*, **chapter 7**, "When Scripture Can't be True" (Simon and Schuster, 2014). (On CW)

Academic Integrity

Plagiarism is an academic offense and will be treated as such. Students who are in doubt as to the nature of this offence should consult their instructor, Department Chair, or Dean’s Office, as well as the Huron University College Statement on Plagiarism, “specifically, the definition of what constitutes a Scholastic Offence, at the following Web site: <http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/handbook/appeals/scholoff.pdf>.”

see: <http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/handbook/exam/crsout.pdf>

Students Requiring Accommodations a

If you require accommodations due to a disability or a health reason, please inform the course instructor and get in touch with the Accessibility Services Office as soon as possible. **"Students seeking academic accommodation on medical grounds for any missed tests, exams, participation components and/or assignments worth 10% or more of their final grade must apply to the Academic Counseling office of their home Faculty and provide documentation. Academic accommodation cannot be granted by the instructor or department. For UWO Policy on Accommodation for Medical Illness see:**

<http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/handbook/appeals/medical.pdf>.”

Verification of Illness URL:

Please see the University’s Policy on Accommodation for Medical Illness at:

<https://studentservices.uwo.ca/secure/index.cfm>

Writing Support

Students who are in emotional/mental distress should refer to Mental Health@Western <http://www.uwo.ca/uwocom/mentalhealth/> for a complete list of options about how to obtain help. Immediate help in the event of a crisis can be had by phoning 519-661-3030 (during class hours) or 519-433-2023 after class hours and on weekends.