

Religion 270--Fall, 1998:

### **Introduction to Islamic Religion**

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Office Hours: Wednesday 9:30-12 (by advance *sign-up sheet* on office door), with additional office hours before assigned papers.

This course is intended to provide a broad introduction to the recurrent religious themes (in myth and ritual, belief and practice) and alternative paradigms of religious interpretation and authority that underlie the manifold expressions of Islam in the most diverse historical and cultural domains. This course concentrates on the common **foundations** of all subsequent historical understandings of Islam--i.e., the Qur'an and the life and teachings of Muhammad and his Family and Companions [hadith, Sira, etc.]--and then briefly surveys the ways those sources came to be elaborated in the learned Arabic "religious sciences" and corresponding classical social and political institutions. Some reference will also be made at the end of the course, for contextual purposes, to such key domains of the Islamic humanities as religious poetry, music, art and architecture, social life (*adab*), and related social institutions, but more extended treatment of those subjects is reserved for Religion 272 (offered each Spring semester) and other courses specifically focusing in those areas of Islamic religious life.

To begin with, it is essential to recognize that "Islam" and related terms ("Islamic", "Muslim", etc., with or without capitals) are commonly used today in English and other Western languages in four radically different and often quite unrelated senses:<sup>2</sup>

-- First, in its root sense, as the word first appears in the Qur'an, *islâm* describes the unique **spiritual state** of individual human souls totally devoted to God and unified with the divine Will. It is one key, central dimension of *Dîn* ("Religion"), the universal relationship of *all* creatures to their One Creator/Source. As such it subsumes all the universal spiritual virtues (and the related moral and intellectual virtues) which are the primary human aims of the Qur'anic and earlier prophetic teaching. "Islâm", in that specifically Qur'anic sense, can only be approached through the ongoing spiritual presence and influences of the prophets, saints and other divine intermediaries who actually exemplify that state. This one universal

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<sup>1</sup>Basic Rules of phone and e-mail etiquette, based on painful experience: (1) *Do NOT use e-mail for any course-related inquiries*; e-mail is not at all an adequate means for discussing any serious questions about this subject and readings, which always require personal contact and questioning. (2) The best time to raise course-related questions is immediately after a class session, or else during scheduled office hours. (3) Note that office hours are by advance signup; the sheet should be there a week in advance. (4) Do NOT contact the professor to explain why you are absent, or to get handouts that you missed. (5) Arrange with another class member from the beginning of the class (e.g., your study partner) to share any course handouts you may miss in time to complete the assignment when it is due.

<sup>2</sup>See al-Ghazali's classical Islamic formulation of some of these different meanings of "religion" at the beginning of your translated readings (on the Internet/Eres).

reality obviously stands in a very problematic relation to what most of us are culturally conditioned to think of as "religion(s)," whether "Islamic" or other.

-- Secondly, over long periods of time "islâm" and related linguistic forms have frequently come to be applied to whatever various **social groups** viewing *themselves* as "muslims" have taken to be *normative* social and cultural forms, such as particular practices, rituals, aesthetic or ethical values, doctrines and beliefs, legal or institutional structures, group identities, and so forth. *In this specifically historical and cultural sense there are hundreds or even thousands of "Islams", depending on which criteria one might wish to emphasize.* Since a strictly empirical and phenomenological approach to these multiple "islams" could only begin to cover a single small region or narrow historical period, this course will use a few representative samples (mainly through films)<sup>3</sup> from a wide range of "Islamic" cultures to illuminate the way those outwardly very different and constantly evolving historical and cultural forms can be viewed as creatively manifesting the principal Qur'anic and prophetic teachings.

-- Third, observers from *external* or non-"muslim" social groups, from soon after the time of Muhammad down to the present day, have frequently applied "Islam" and related terms to their own perceptions of an even greater range of cultural and historical forms--including literary and artistic traditions; implicit or explicit social, ethical and aesthetic norms; a vast range of social or political groups and institutions; etc.--that they have happened to associate with particular social groups they happened to identify as "muslims." (Hence both in popular and learned settings one often encounters such problematic expressions as "Islamic art", "Islamic history", "Islamic science", "Islamic institutions", "Islamic philosophy", "Islamic politics," etc.)<sup>4</sup> This course in *religion* cannot pretend to be an adequate introduction to such vast and diverse historical subjects, and students primarily interested in any of those particular fields probably should *not* expect this course somehow to provide the necessary foundations for pursuing such interests, any more than they would expect a course in Christian religion to "explain" cognate phenomena in "Western" civilizations.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup>Although it is no longer a required reading, we highly recommend E. Loeffler's Islam in Practice (available on Reserve) as perhaps the most useful and edifying (as well as cautionary) reading for someone wishing to begin to approach the study of Islamic religion from this inevitably highly particularist anthropological level. Loeffler's book should be a classic text for anyone undertaking the study of *any* "religion" at this local level.

<sup>4</sup>Marshall Hodgson's suggested neologism "Islamicate" is beginning to have some currency at least in more scholarly discourse, as a way of avoiding the otherwise monumental misunderstandings that are ordinarily conveyed or ratified by such unreflective popular usages.

<sup>5</sup>If your interest in things "Islamic" falls into one of these *non*-religious areas--above all, contemporary political and social developments or the history and culture of particular regions where people happen to be Muslim--Prof. Morris will be happy to suggest other Oberlin courses or teachers, useful readings, or suitable outside study and living opportunities more appropriate for exploring such particular interests.

-- Fourth, "Islam" and related traditional religious terms are commonly used today in discussions (whether internal or external) of a wide range of recently invented **socio-political ideologies and social movements** in nascent, post-colonial nation-states. Those novel socio-political usages closely parallel such nominally "Christian" social phenomena in Europe and Latin America as "Christian Democratic" parties, Catholic "liberation theologies," certain fascist ideologies, utopian or revolutionary cults and the like, covering the same broad range of political possibilities and corresponding to the same peculiarly modern socio-historical conditions and transformations; they have their equivalent Jewish, Hindu and Buddhist nationalist socio-political forms as well. Such recent, historically ephemeral "Islamist" movements and ideologies have similarly tenuous and problematic relations to pre-existing and more widespread popular religious traditions and practices, and can only be understood in terms of their very specific historical and sociological settings. The role of Islamic *religion* (of any sort) in such circumstances is contingent and often relatively superficial, and again students primarily interested in such phenomena probably should instead work with the appropriate historical, sociological and "area-studies" disciplines and readings needed to properly understand such recent world-historical developments.

Now the most fundamental obstacle to any study of Islamic religion in our own surroundings is that the relative availability of our Western sources of images and "information"--whether from deeply rooted, usually unconscious cultural presuppositions; journalistic media; or more academic publications--is (and consistently has been for at least 1300 years) ***inversely proportional*** to the *religious* content and relevance of these four different dimensions of what our culture calls "Islamic." [Take your time to re-read this sentence and to reflect on its illustrations in your own experience.] *An initial and primary aim of this course, therefore, is to develop your ability to recognize and properly situate* both the realities and the discourse about things "Islamic" you will continue to encounter in the future.

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**Perhaps the only thing all four of these dimensions of what we call "Islam" have in common is a certain *language*--a shared *vocabulary* of inherited, historically accumulated symbols, myths, concepts and exemplary figures and an implicit, initially much more mysterious "*syntax*" of permissible meanings and interconnections--that for centuries has allowed the cultures and individuals employing this language to express the full range of potential human meanings and religious experience. This course is structured around that central metaphor of *language* (although it also happens to follow an approximately *chronological* order of development as well), beginning with the basic elements of that semantic universe (its "*grammar*" and "*vocabulary*", as it were), and then moving on to some of its classical creative representatives in the various Islamic religious sciences and humanities.**

The process of learning *any* new language by immersion initially involves a number of uncomfortable sensations (not least in "unlearning" old habits and assumptions), and it normally demands a great deal of hard work. However, learning a language (or culture, religion, music)

*from within* has two indispensable advantages. First, one discovers almost immediately that the implicit organization and perception of this new world at any level--whether affective, cognitive, symbolic, spiritual or imaginal--really is something new, communicating dimensions of experience that cannot be adequately "translated" into one's original, familiar language. Secondly, and usually somewhat later, one begins to appreciate that a language (and even more so a religion) is not a "thing" that can be described or delimited, but a living, creative *instrument of communication* whose possibilities and meanings are always open to change and creative expansion. This course is designed so that you will learn for yourself how absolutely central this process of *active interpretation* is in both the creation and the understanding of any of the thousands of historical forms of "Islam".

**The common language shared by virtually every form of Islamic religion includes the following essential elements:**

1. The *Qur'an* is not simply the source of much of the basic symbolic vocabulary for every subsequent form of Islam. Far more importantly, it outlines the vast field of archetypal potentialities, restrictions, and permissible connections within which all later interpretations and actualizations of "Islam" have had to operate. As you will quickly discover as you read through the Qur'an, it is primarily a metaphysical, symbolic "**grammar of spiritual possibilities**" constantly requiring concrete interpretations (in thought and action) in the light of *each* reader's own unfolding experience and situation.
2. The *archetypal interpretation* of the Qur'an and the primary religious model for most later Muslims has been the life and teachings of Muhammad (broadly called *Sunna* or "Tradition") as that example was orally transmitted (and transmuted) and eventually recorded in a vast range of literature including *Sîra* (biographies), *hadîth*, and more popular homiletic and devotional materials. Together with the Qur'an itself, these complex images of Muhammad (and his Companions, then their spiritual successors) have provided the common symbolic "vocabulary" for virtually all later forms and interpretations of Islamic religion, in both Sunni and Shiite traditions.
3. The Qur'an repeatedly refers to the common teachings and spiritual models of **earlier named and nameless religious exemplars**, from Adam down to Muhammad, in ways that have allowed Muslims from various cultural and religious contexts--beginning with the Arab, Jewish, Christian and Zoroastrian traditions of the earliest Muslim communities--to continue to assimilate many elements of each major world religious tradition.<sup>6</sup> That creative process continues throughout the world today, above all in the many geographical areas

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<sup>6</sup>The earliest products of that still ongoing process--recorded in the literatures of Qur'anic commentary (*tafsîr*) and popular "tales of the prophets" (*qisas al-anbiyâ'*), and eventually reflected in the practices and presuppositions of learned traditions of theology (*kalâm*) and law (*fiqh*)--likewise added another immense corpus of cultural "vocabulary" that has been subject to constant reinterpretation ever since its initial Arabic literary formulations during the second and third centuries after Muhammad.

(such as the U.S. and Americas, W. Europe and E. Asia) where Islam is only beginning to become an “indigenous” religious tradition.

4. Virtually all the spiritual (and more worldly) potentialities suggested within the Qur'an were manifested in the diverse personalities of Muhammad's *Family* (figures like Aisha, Khadija, Fatima, Ali, and the Prophet's two grandsons Hasan and Husayn) and his close *Companions*. Every subsequent interpretation of Islam has found its religious (and often its more mundane) ideals mirrored in its images of those *spiritual exemplars* and refracted in its particular understanding of the *archetypal events and struggles* involving those figures and their descendants in the decades following Muhammad's death.

5. Finally, and again following profuse Qur'anic indications, Muslims everywhere have turned to the living presence of a multiplicity of “*saints*” (*awliyâ'*) and *spiritual guides*, in both worlds, for ongoing direction and insight in interpreting and applying the broad directives of the Qur'an. Through time--as in every world religion--their examples and teachings likewise have become an integral part of the shared vocabulary of religious expression and perception in many regions of the Muslim world.

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Once these foundational elements common to all forms of Islam have been introduced (hopefully by Week 11), we will then very briefly survey the complex process by which the historical-cultural complex of “Islam” gradually began to emerge historically as a distinct *world* religion within a growing number of very different cultural and linguistic settings. This final part of the course will very briefly survey a few representative elements of the formative stages of that ongoing process:

(1) The way those early scriptural and traditional sources were integrated into the development of the learned Arabic-language “religious sciences” (Qur'an interpretation, hadith criticism, theology, “law”, etc.) in the second and third centuries after Muhammad;

(2) The worldwide elaboration and popularization of those sources, in new cultural settings, through the “Islamic humanities” in learned and vernacular forms (Attar; sessions on *dhikr* and religious music, art and poetry);

(3) In each of those cases, the peculiar impact of specific historical circumstances on the *institutionalization* and propagation of these increasingly diverse forms of “Islam” (focusing especially on those *distinctive* factors in that experience which were *radically different* from the historical development of both formative Christianity and rabbinical Judaism reflected in our popular Western notions of “religion”).

(4) A few classical and still highly influential **paradigms of authority and interpretation** constituting different alternative approaches to integrating (or rejecting) these increasingly diverse historical forms of Islam (Ghazâlî, Ibn Taymîya, al-Fârâbî).

Each of the above elements of the course will be approached against the backdrop of the more immediate and concrete illustrations of Islam in "local contexts" provided by selected readings, films and examples from current events and students' own wider readings and experiences which will be brought out in students' questions and class discussion.

### **COURSE FORMAT:**

This is NOT really a "lecture" course in any familiar sense, in which you could expect to passively acquire a certain quantity of "knowledge" in notebooks or tapes, after which you would be tested on your memory retention and note-taking skills.

Since seriously learning about an unfamiliar religious tradition in fact *does* involve learning a new symbolic language, you should clearly understand that--like most serious science or language courses--**this is essentially a "laboratory," group-based process in which you must do the most essential work outside the classroom setting.** The "lectures," like lessons in a new grammar, can only introduce the most basic symbols and concepts, *which you must then individually and repeatedly explore and "practice" in order to discover their actual workings and referents.* The lectures will only make sense if you have ALREADY completed the assigned readings. And **the question periods at the end of each session are the most important element**, since they are your main chance to verify and refine your own insights and uncertainties about proper "usage" and meaning.

*The key to this course is your active, ongoing preparation of all the assigned readings and regular attendance at all class sessions.*<sup>7</sup> It is not possible to learn any spoken language--much less the far more complex language of a world religious tradition--by listening to lectures on grammar and memorizing lists of vocabulary. In the process of investigating a particular problem that interests you in the Qur'an and hadith you will have the opportunity actually to re-experience the process and parameters (intellectual, imaginative, political, spiritual, artistic, etc.) of *creative interpretation* by which all the historical forms of Islamic religion have come into being.

The lectures, discussion sessions, study sheets and writing assignments are all designed to help you to decipher and begin to penetrate the unfamiliar world of the Qur'an and hadith and the traditions and ways of life that have continued to grow out of their inspiration. The lectures are intended to provide essential background and helpful guidelines for pursuing the assigned readings, and they presuppose that you have actually read those preceding reading assignments. The last 10-15 minutes of each class will usually be left open for your questions and/or related discussion of the assigned readings.

*Above all, there are no "bad", "ignorant", "simple" or "irrelevant" questions about Islam. In reality, almost any question or problem that occurs to you either in your reading or in*

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<sup>7</sup>As indicated above, the progression of subjects we will cover is as **rigorously cumulative** as in learning any language. Especially given the vast range of material we have to cover, *if you miss a lecture or class discussion or fail to prepare an assigned reading you will naturally find a number of things puzzling and confusing in later readings and lectures.*

*relating those readings to current events and popular conceptions is likely to be shared by a large number of your classmates. Your questions are not an “interruption” of the lectures: they are the most valuable thing you can contribute to the rest of the class.*

### **COURSE REQUIREMENTS:**

This course is intended to be as demanding and difficult, in its own domain, as any of Oberlin’s science and intensive language courses, and it is ordinarily offered every Fall semester. Please read over these requirements and the syllabus carefully (including the attached midterm and final examination questions) and do not take the course now if you know that your schedule will not permit you to devote the time and energy the course will require.

Course grades will follow the standard “curve” of the Religion Department guidelines, with a maximum of approximately 15-20% (= 6-8 students in class of 40) for the entire ‘A’ (and ‘C’) range.

Course requirements are divided into two groups: (a) Those that *positively* determine your grade (i.e., the Qur'an and hadith papers, take-home midterm, and final paper or exam); and (b) basic requirements that will *reduce* your grade if they are *not* completed (i.e., daily attendance and weekly reaction papers and comments).

1. *Daily class attendance:* Past experience has shown that attendance and success in the course are directly correlated, and that students who have missed classes thereby miss essential building-blocks of later discussions (while depriving their classmates of their own contributions and insights). Students taking this course will *sign in on the daily attendance sheet at each class* (after the first few weeks). Each absence<sup>8</sup> will reduce your final grade by one level (i.e., from A- to B+; B to B-; etc.). In particular, a missing reaction paper will be taken as evidence of absence on the date it was due.

2. *Weekly 1-page Reaction Paper.* The detailed reading assignments and related study questions for the following week will be handed out at the end of class each Thursday.<sup>9</sup> A one-page (*maximum!*) response to one of the assigned study questions will be due at the *beginning* of the following Tuesday's session. These weekly reaction papers will not receive a separate letter grade, but each failure to complete one on time will also *lower* your final grade by one level (just as with failure to come to class.) At the midterm and again at the end of the course, I will review all of your reaction papers, and those completing consistently superb papers (top 15-20%) will receive extra credit.

Students who have already completed Religion 272 or 274 should make sure that they have a study partner who has *not* been in either of those courses, and students from a Muslim

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<sup>8</sup>Beyond the first two, which are allowed for medical and family emergencies, etc. There is no need to approach the instructor with excuses.

<sup>9</sup>If you miss a Thursday class, you are still responsible for acquiring those study questions and related reading assignments *from a study partner or another classmate (not the course instructor)* and returning them completed the following Tuesday.

cultural background should make sure that their study partner is not Muslim: in both cases, this will allow *new* students with less background and experience to benefit directly from your own prior learning and cultural perspectives.

3. Two *short Interpretive Papers* (each 5 pages maximum) due **October 8** and **November 12**: This assignment--which is the core of the course--is meant to give you a "hands-on" experience of the recurrent problems of *interpretation* that are involved in the elaboration of any form of Islamic practice or thought. Each paper will constitute *at least 30%* of your final positive course grade.

During the first part of the course you will be expected to write a short analytical paper (no more than 5 pages) exploring a specific topic that interests you in (1) *the Qur'an* (due in class Thursday, October 8); and (2) in either the *hadith* (using any of the translations of major collections on Reserve), the *Sîra* or *life of Muhammad* (and his Companions, etc.), or "*tales of the prophets*" literature (due in class Thursday, November 12). You should be thinking about a topic that interests you as you read through the Qur'an for the first time and do your initial reaction papers. Then you can narrow down your subject and make sure you are using all the verses relevant to your subject by working with the English Qur'anic Concordance (by H. Kassis) on Reserve in Mudd Library. The second paper (on a topic that interests you in the hadith, *Sîra* or tales of the prophets) *will require working with one of the many translations of these sources on Reserve* in order to select your topic.

4. *Longer final paper* (6 pages **maximum**) or *final take-home essay exam*: the *due date* for either is *the last day of classes, Thursday, December 10*. Students are encouraged to pursue their individual interests in some particular aspect of Islam by preparing a thoughtful analytic paper (of no more than 6 pages) based on wider reading in an area of personal interest.<sup>10</sup> Alternatively, you may complete a *take-home final essay exam* (also **due Dec. 10**) consisting of your choice from a number of broad, synthetic questions designed to pull together everything you have studied in the course. (= At least 35% of final positive grade for either option.)

4. Your *class notebook* (including all your reaction papers) will be handed in at the end of the course (Thursday, Dec. 11), and will receive a single grade of A (= "+"-sign), B (no mark), or C ("-"-sign) for its overall quality and completeness. (= 5-15 % of final positive grade).

### **TENTATIVE READING/MAJOR ASSIGNMENT OUTLINE:**

Almost all materials used in this course are translations of primary sources. Apart from Arberry's translation of the Qur'an (to be used by everyone) and M. Lings' biography of the Prophet, most of the other required readings are to be copied from the Internet. [*INSERT URL location(s) for translations on Internet.*]

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<sup>10</sup>Since the availability and quality of sources varies radically for different fields, the topic and readings should be worked out in advance in consultation with Prof. Morris, definitely before the Thanksgiving break.



As indicated above, detailed reading assignments, study questions and topics for the short reaction papers will be handed out each week. Readings will follow the general *order* indicated below, but the actual time spent on each topic will vary depending on how quickly it can be adequately covered. Usually we end up spending more time on the Qur'an and hadith than originally scheduled.

Week 1: First Day: Introduction to Course Format and Requirements (no reading):

For following week: study syllabus closely and begin 1st long reaction paper assignment (due following Tuesday):

*Readings* to prepare for following week: Translations from Internet/Eres including: hadith on *imân*, *islâm* and *ihsân*; Ghazâlî on the different meanings of "religion" (*madhhab*); skim selected shorter hadith and selected verses in "Qur'anic Anthropology" section of packet. You can also begin exploratory skimming of the Qur'an (Arberry tr.), ***from back to front***.

Week 2: Begin Qur'an study (assignments above):

Readings to prepare *for Week 3*: (From Internet site) reading on "The Spiritual Virtues in the Qur'an," translation of Sura of Joseph. Review above readings from Internet (Qur'an and hadith).

Week 3: Continue Qur'an study--the central spiritual virtues:

Readings to prepare *for Week 4*: "Qur'anic Anthropology" selections (from Internet site); after completing initial reading of Qur'an, return to areas of interest and continue study for paper topic.

Week 4: Continue and complete Qur'an study; lectures on central unifying themes:

*For Week 5* (while preparing your Qur'an paper): skim background study sheet (from Internet site) for first film, In the Name of Allâh.

Week 5: Complete Qur'an study:

Tuesday, 9/29: Islamic Religious Ritual and Daily Life: film In the Name of Allâh (Fez, Morocco).

Readings to prepare *for Week 6*: assigned chapters from Muhammad (M. Lings); short background handout (from Internet readings) for next week's film, The Message.

Week 6: **1<sup>st</sup> 5-page Qur'an papers due Thursday, October 8.**

The Life of Muhammad and his Family and Companions; film Tuesday, 10/6 (The Message--NB: *this video runs to roughly 5:15 p.m*; try to arrange to stay through if you possibly can):

Readings to prepare *for Week 7*: From course readings *packet* (*not* on Internet): all hadith selections (including *tables of contents*). Begin background/selection

work on your own hadith/Sîra/tales of prophets study (using translated collections on Reserve)

Week 7: Muhammad as Teacher and Guide:

Readings to prepare for Week 8: continue/review hadith translations (from Internet site).

### MIDTERM BREAK

Week 8: Concluding discussions of Muhammad and hadith:

Readings to prepare *for Week 9*: Materials on early civil wars (hadith of *fitan*), Shiism and early Shiite Imams (from packet);

Week 9: Historical background on "Formative Islam": the Arab conquests, sectarian "civil wars," and early development of the religion called Islam; early Shiite movements.

Reading for following week: background on Hajj and Shiite pilgrimage films (in packet).

Week 10: Shiism and the early Imams; (Tuesday, 11/10: films on Hajj and Shiite pilgrimage and "passion-plays" of Kerbala, *ta'ziyeh*):

2nd five-page paper due (final draft): **Thursday, Nov. 12.**

Readings to prepare for Week 11: Attar, The Conference of the Birds (short assigned sections); from packet: background material on Attar and his work; Rumi, Quatrains (from packet).

Week 11: The "Islamic humanities" and the development of Islam as a *world* religion: Discussion of Attar and Rumi; sign up for topic for *final paper* (optional).

Readings to prepare *for Week 13*: From packet: short selections from al-Shâfi'î, Islamic Jurisprudence... and Imam Malik, al-Muwatta; sections of Ibn Taimiya's Struggle Against Popular Religion.

Week 12 (Thanksgiving): [We will probably not have a Tuesday class, due to the AAR/MESA conferences; no class Thursday]:

Week 13: The development of *fiqh* ("Islamic law), *kalâm* and related Arabic "religious sciences" and institutions

Readings to prepare *for Week 14*: from packet: short selections from late Shaykhi author and Hafez translations. Receive (and begin to complete) final take-home exam questions—most of these are already included with this syllabus!

Week 14: The key structures of Islamic art and aesthetics: "Visible and Invisible Islam"

Last class: Thursday, Dec. 10: submission of final analytical paper or completed take-home essay exam.

## **BOOKS TO PURCHASE:**

(Most of the translations can be copied for free from the Internet [*INSERT Website/URL location*]; a small packet of photocopies must be purchased from the Religion Dept., Rice 320 [open M-F 8:30-4:30, except for lunchhour; checks payable to "Oberlin College"]. All readings are available as well on Reserve, as well as the translations of hadith and other sources needed for your second class papers:

If your book budget is a concern, the most essential of these required readings--which you will need to have with you in class throughout the course--are the *packet of translations* (from both the Internet and the items to be purchased from the Religion Dept.), and the *Arberry translation of the Qur'an* (to be used by everyone for this class, even if you already have another translation). I have requested that a number of copies of each of the required readings be placed on Reserve, along with the Qur'an Concordance and hadith translations you will need for preparing your first two papers.

Attar, Farid ud-Din (tr. A. Darbandi and D. Davis). The Conference of the Birds.

Qur'an (tr. A.J. Arberry), The Koran Interpreted.

Lings, M. Muhammad: His Life Based on the Earliest Sources. (We will only be working with selected chapters.)

-- Packet of translations on sale in the Religion Department office (Rice 320; 9-4:30). *This packet is essential throughout the course.*

-- Additional translations available by copying from Internet site...[INSERT]

**REFERENCE/SOURCE BOOKS ON RESERVE** (\* = hadith and related materials useful for preparing the *second* interpretive paper; multiple copies of each reference have been requested):

When you are ready to work on the first and second papers, go back and look at the actual translated materials on the Reserve Room stacks: Given the difficulty of handling Arabic transliterations on the computer, frequently the Reserve catalogue/reference sheets do not end up listing all these collections. ***NB: AVOID relying on footnotes and commentaries in all of the hadith "translations," which constantly import irrelevant and grossly misleading interpretations.*** The only even remotely reliable and scientific hadith translations now available are those by Graham (for the *hadith qudsi*), Robson (Mishkat al-Masabih), and (with some caution) the recent (new) translation of Malik's Muwatta'. There are now several good reference CD-Rom disks for the Qur'an—including full recitations by the most famous reciters, plus 3 or 4 English translations and a transliteration that can all be viewed at the same time—available at the Reserve counter. (Unfortunately, they only run for now on **ONE** of the Windows machines to the North of the Reserve room; you may need to ask for assistance to load them and get them running on that machine.)

\* Abû Dawûd. Sunan Abû Dawûd (3 vol.).

\* Ali ibn al-Husayn, Zayn al-'Abidin (tr. W. Chittick). The Psalms of Islam (al-Sahîfa al-Sajjâdiyya). NY, Oxford Univ. Press, 1989.

\* Bukhârî (tr. M.M. Khan). Sahîh Bukhârî (9 volumes).

- \* Graham, William. Divine Word and Prophetic Word in Early Islam. (Translations and commentaries on the *hadīth qudsī*).
- \* Ibn Ishaq (tr. Guillaume). The Life of the Prophet Muhammad (Oxford U. Press). (The primary source for most later Sunni *Sīra* accounts, including M. Lings' recent summary.)
- Kassis, Hanna E. A Concordance of the Qur'an. (Keyed to Arberry's translation of the Qur'an.)  
In most cases, you will find that ***this reference work is absolutely essential for preparing your Qur'an paper.***
- \* al-Kisâ'î (tr. W. Thackston). The Tales of the Prophets of al-Kisâ'î.
- Loeffler, Reinhold. Islam in Practice: Religious Beliefs in a Persian Village. (This is simply background reading, to give an idea of the actual diversity of "Islam" in any traditional setting and to suggest questions for further discussion; many copies are available on Reserve.)
- \* Malik ibn Anas (tr. Aisha Abdurrahman). Muwatta' Imâm Malik.
- \* Muhammad Ali (ed. & tr.). A Manual of Hadith (to be used with caution and supplemented by other collections, keeping in mind author's specific aims).
- \* Muslim b. al-Hajjâj al-Nîsabûrî (tr. A. H. Siddiqi). Sahîh Muslim (3 vols.).
- \* an-Nawawi (tr. S.M. Madni Abbasi). Riyadh as-Saliheen (2 vols.).
- \* Robson, James (tr.). Mishkât al-Masâbîh (2 vol.).
- \* Wensinck (ed.). A Handbook of Early Muhammadan Tradition. (A partial topical index in English to many of the hadith collections now available in above translations.)

Religion 270: Introduction to Islamic Religion  
**General Study and Exam Questions For Course**

I. The following question will be required for the final take-home essay (4 pages max.): Please answer the following question *entirely on the basis of the Qur'an* (i.e., your English translation), as much as possible without any reference to other readings, traditions, teachings, beliefs, practices, assumptions, etc. you may have encountered concerning "Islam". (There is no need to cite chapter and verse, but you should be ready to do so if you wish to justify your answers.)

You have encountered a mysterious stranger entirely ignorant of human history and religious traditions (including that of Muhammad) who is anxious to know about the teachings contained in the Qur'ân. You are that person's sole source of information for the following questions about the Qur'ân:

1. Who are human beings (*insân*): where have they come from; what is their intrinsic *purpose* or aim, as human beings, here on earth?
2. What are the *most essential teachings* of the Qur'an, and *how are those teachings related to or necessary for* adequately fulfilling that uniquely human purpose?
3. According to the Qur'an, what are the *most essential types of action and virtues* (attitudes, qualities) required for understanding the teachings in #2 and then actually realizing that distinctive human purpose?
4. Given the physical absence of Muhammad or another widely acknowledged divine messenger, *where (to what or whom) does the Qur'ân itself suggest human beings should look for the practical spiritual guidance and direction* needed to apply #2 and #3 in order to actualize that distinctive human purpose in their own particular lives and historical circumstances?

Please be concise ("essential"), and note that the most difficult part of this question is not in summarizing the Qur'anic teachings themselves, but in *explaining the successive connections or linkages between #'s 2-4 and #1*.

## II.

Other questions relating to the Qur'an that may appear on final take-home exam:

1. What types of "laws" do you find in the Qur'an? Do they constitute a legal "system", and do they presuppose (or prescribe) a particular form of society? **Who** does the Qur'an describe as the "judge" or enforcer of those prescriptions?
2. What specific religious "rites" or rituals do you actually find prescribed in the Qur'an? (NB: not just "alluded" to or "suggested".) Be specific. What does the Qur'an itself indicate about the *purpose* or aim of the particular practices you have mentioned?

3. What does the Qur'an actually say, in terms of *positive descriptions*--not criticisms of other individuals' purported views or interpretations--about the nature and reality of Jesus and of Mary?

4. What does the Qur'an actually say about the essential nature and role of Muhammad as a prophet? (Be as comprehensive as possible; don't leave out key passages.)

5. What does the Qur'an suggest about any human attempts to understand or pursue life and right action in this material world (*dunyâ*) without direct awareness of the "next", spiritual world (*al-âkhira*)?

6. What is the Qur'anic conception of "sin" or "transgression", and what links (if any) can you see between that subject and the Qur'anic accounts of human beings' purpose and of God's all-encompassing Love or Compassion (*rahma*)?

7. In secondary literature (by both Muslims and non-Muslims) you will often encounter references to the "utterly transcendent Deity of Islam"--which might suggest a fundamental duality, or even threefold ultimate reality (God-World-Humanity). What specific features of the Qur'anic teaching (whether about the divine Names, prophets, angels, human being, Nature, creation, or the Qur'an itself) that you have encountered might call such recurrent stereotypes into question?

8. What (or who?) are the divine "Books", "Words", "Pen(s)", "Speech" and "Tablet" constantly referred to in the Qur'an?

9. What would you see as the relation between the modern sciences and mathematics and the overall picture of divine and human nature and the cosmos set forth in the Qur'an?

10. What does the Qur'anic anthropology and cosmology suggest about the metaphysical grounds and proper aims of poetry, music and other visual arts?

11. What does the Qur'an actually say about the meaning and spiritual functions of the prophets and messengers *after* their historical, bodily appearance(s) on this planet?

12. From the point of view of the Qur'an, what is truly Real, and what is illusion ("veil")? *Who is responsible for that distinction, and why should it exist at all?*

13. What does the Qur'an actually say about the being of creatures "below" human beings? How do you understand the meaning of those allusions?

14. What is the Qur'anic conception of earthly "history"? Does it have any meaning or direction ("progress" or "decline") in itself, at a level other than the story of individual souls? What is the relation of the succession of divine prophets and messengers to the historical world?

15. What does the Qur'an tell us about the *human* significance of angels and angelic messengers and guides? On the basis of the Qur'an alone, what essential differences are there (if any) between angelic messengers and human ones (saints, spiritual masters, etc.)? How could you

tell the difference, if you weren't a prophet yourself? (cf. Gabriel in the hadîth on *islâm*, *îmân* and *ihsân*.)

16. Some later Islamic legal scholars and politicians (e.g., Ibn Taymiya) have considered the "cult of saints" (and associated religious practices, such as pilgrimage)--not to mention the focus on the Imams in Shiism--to be a heretical "innovation" in their version of Islam. What Qur'anic passages or teachings do you find that might be relevant (pro or con) to such a dispute?

17. From the Qur'anic perspective, can ethical or political "virtues" within any culture actually be understood apart from their spiritual ends? Do you think the Qur'an assumes or alludes to a universal sphere of morality or ethical principles that transcends different historical religions?

18. The Qur'an seems to affirm with equal insistence the ultimate freedom and responsibility of human actors and God's determination of their religious faith or lack thereof. What aspects of the Qur'anic teaching might point to a genuine reconciliation of those two apparently incompatible teachings?

19. The Qur'an repeatedly draws analogies between the prophetic situations of Moses and instances in the life of Muhammad. Suppose someone were to assert that Muhammad was simply another prophet/sage in the line of prophets recorded in the Hebrew Bible and Jewish tradition. What teachings in the Qur'an itself might depart from or supplement such an assertion?

20. Why does the Qur'an constantly mention so many different divine Names? Is there any connection between those Names and the particular contexts in which they occur? What does the Qur'an indicate is the relevance of those Names to faith and the practice and understanding of a truly human being (*insân*)?

21. What is the real meaning of the "polytheism" or "associationism" (*shirk*), "hypocrisy", and "unbelief" or "ingratitude" (*kufr*) which the Qur'an constantly contrasts with true faith (*îmân*)? (Look at the contexts.) Is it understandable at the level of contrasts between historical human "religions"? If so, then did those recurrent passages become irrelevant when most everyone joined a "monotheistic" religious community?

22. Does it seem to you that all passages of the Qur'an are equally understandable, or that different ones may have been intended for different audiences or levels of understanding? Does the Qur'an itself allude to some of those types or levels of understanding? What implications would those indications have for subsequent Islamic interpretations of the Qur'anic teaching?

23. Muhammad's Meccan enemies at first accused him of being just another "poet"--an accusation that is refuted in several places, including the assertion that the poets "say what they do not *do*." How is the Qur'an itself like poetry, and how is it different?

24. Many of the more specific social instructions in the Qur'an--e.g., concerning the treatment and/or behavior of slaves, women, divorce, inheritance, kinship relations, tribal feuds (talion and retaliation), etc.--clearly were intended as "reforms" (in some cases quite radical ones) of central Arabian society in Muhammad's time. Some modernist interpreters take those specific social references to establish a "model" valid for all time (although they rarely propagandize, e.g.,

for slavery!), while other contemporary Muslims insist just as strongly on instituting the *principles* underlying those injunctions (which could again lead to various social and political changes). What connection (if any) do you think either of those contrasting social options have with the broader theological and anthropological themes of the Qur'an?

25. What does the Qur'an indicate is the *purpose* of human *suffering and temptation*? Would that purpose appear just to you if God is understood as standing outside and beyond the process of testing, like some quality-control inspector on an assembly-line? In what particular verses does the Qur'an allude to the true Actor in that "divine comedy"?

### III.

Questions on Hadith or Life of Muhammad that may also appear on final take-home exam:

1. What are the 3 or 4 religiously most significant events in the traditional accounts of Muhammad's life? Why?
2. In the past, non-Muslims have often referred to historical forms of Islam as "Mohammedanism": in what ways do you think that name (as a description) would be appropriate and inappropriate?
3. Some modernist Muslims (especially in polemic contexts) strongly insist that Muhammad was "only a man". What aspects of the traditional life of Muhammad and hadith you have encountered, as well as the Qur'an, would tend to qualify or question such a statement?
4. From what you have studied so far (Qur'an, hadith, and traditional biography), what would you say were Muhammad's "miracles", and why?
5. Suppose someone claims that Muhammad (or Moses) was just a remarkably astute politician and statesman? What features of the his biography, hadith and the Qur'an would you point to in suggesting additional key aspects of his character, influence and teaching?
6. What are the most essential and unavoidable problems you see for a Muslim wishing to interpret and apply the traditions (hadith) concerning Muhammad's teaching outside the Qur'an?
7. How can you tell from a hadith report whether or not the teaching recounted there is intended for all Muslims, or for a more particular group (or individual) or specific situation?
8. How would you go about resolving apparent contradictions between the Qur'an and practices or teachings recorded in the hadith collections? (Use specific examples if possible.)
9. What are the main kinds of issues or teachings you've found in the hadith you've read so far? (Give specific examples of each.)
10. What assumptions do you have to make if you want to separate the *principles* underlying particular hadith from their original social and historical contexts?



11. What *practical* and theoretical assumptions do you have to make if you want to derive a *legal system* from the hadith and traditions you've read so far? What is the relation between those assumptions and the Qur'an?
12. Modernist Muslim ideologists often insist that "Islam makes no distinction between sacred and profane", or "Church and State". Based on your readings of hadith and the particular areas covered by traditional Islamic "law" (*fiqh*), how do you think such statements might be accurate and/or misleading?
13. What (in summary) are some of the areas of legislation, administration and governance in any modern nation-state that are apparently NOT covered in, e.g., the subject-headings of a traditional treatise of Islamic "law" (*fiqh*) like Malik's Muwatta' (in your translations packet)?
14. What are the similarities and differences between Muhammad's community in Medina and the early Christian "church"? How might those differences be reflected in contemporary (and past) political and social discourse in Islamic polities (as compared with polities formed by Christian social traditions)?

## Religion 270: Assignments/Study Questions

## #1: For Week 2

**READING ASSIGNMENTS** (NB: Copy or download translations from internet, and buy course translations packet from Religion Department if you haven't already):

Readings for next Tuesday (besides *carefully studying syllabus*):

The following brief selected translations outline basic questions and perspectives that will apply to virtually all the subsequent readings in this course. Next week's lecture(s) and discussion will focus on them.

- Hadîth on the three levels of Religion and on the Questioning at the Resurrection (#1 in packet).
- Ghazâlî's Mîzan al-'Amal, final chapter (on the three meanings of "religion").
- If you have time, glance over the "selected shorter hadîth" in the packet as well.

Readings for next Thursday (and for the rest of September):

- Carefully read all the selected hadith (which often encapsulate many widely scattered Qur'anic verses and themes you will be encountering this month).
- *Before* beginning to read the **Meccan** Suras in Arberry's Qur'an translation (as described below), start by studying more carefully the "Qur'anic Anthropology" selections and the translation of the Sura of Joseph—both included in the readings on the Internet.
- Begin first rapid overview reading of the **Meccan** (earliest) Suras in Arberry, The Koran Interpreted, starting from "end" and reading back to "beginning" of Qur'an.  

**Be extremely careful NOT to read any of the later, "Medinan" Suras:** the Suras you should **NOT** read at this time include (in reverse order): **110/CX, 98/XCVIII, 72-86/LVII-LXVI, 47-49/XLVII-XLIX, 33/XXXIII, 24/XXIV, 22/XXII, 7-9/VII-IX, and 2-5/II-V.** As we will explain in more detail in the introductory lectures, the Medinan Suras in many places reflect and assume very different historical and social circumstances which we will not begin exploring until roughly week 6 of this course.
- Above all, keep looking for (1) *the wider unifying themes and intentions*; (2) a particular *topic or problem* [primarily from the **Meccan** Suras] which particularly interests you, that you would like to explore in your first short paper (due in class on Thursday, Oct. 8).

**Reaction Paper Topic and Study Question** (*For next Tuesday, Sept. 8; no more than 2 pages—**for your own use***):

The purpose of this assignment is to become more aware of the implicit, mostly unconscious models or paradigms of "religion" and "religions"—and stereotypes of things

“Islamic”, “Muslim”, etc.—with which you are approaching the study of Islam. There are no “right” or “wrong” answers to this assignment: the important thing is to be as honest and comprehensive as possible in your inventory, to get down in writing what you already *expect* “Islam” to be or to mean as you begin the course. Since *this initial inquiry is for your own use* (not to share with your study partners), you can keep your notes as short and cryptic as you like.

### Part I: “Religion(s)”

Begin by thinking of the ways in which you and those around you ordinarily use terms relating to religions and religious life, as such references come up in all the levels of everyday life, from descriptions of your own spiritual experience to popular political discourse (i.e., *not* in the specialized definitions of another anthropology, religion or history course). Think about what are the *underlying assumptions and categories* that define religions or “religious” matters in such non-technical discourse, such as in the mass media or in your conversations with family members and friends. For example, does that discourse assume that there is a multiplicity of religions, or that “Religion” is one reality or dimension of existence? What relations are assumed in that discourse between “religious” matters and, for example, science, the world of nature, the creative arts, literature, politics, social institutions, education, and so forth?

After you have thought about our usual language and assumptions about those questions, summarize as briefly as possible: (a) what particular sorts of things (e.g., beliefs, doctrines, rituals, institutions, etc.) those assumptions would lead you to look for in defining or describing “Islam”; and (b) *where* or *from whom* you would expect to find reliable answers to each of those resulting questions about “Islam”?

### Part II: “Islam(ic)”/”muslim”

The introduction to the course syllabus outlines four very different spheres in which contemporary American culture (at least potentially) alludes to things “Islamic” or “muslim”. **In each of those 4 spheres, take your own personal inventory of** (a) *what you “know” about Islam*, and (b) *where* you received or found that “knowledge”. (In most cases the local mass media will probably be the most obvious source, but the process is even more valuable if you happen to be a Muslim or come from a region or culture with greater proximity to a particular Islamic society.) Focus especially on what you actually “know” about the first two, primarily *religious* senses of “Islam”, and on the geographic and cultural stereotypes included in your “knowledge” at all four levels. Notice especially the gaps and questions that begin to emerge as you write down the results of your inventory.

Once you have completed your written inventory, **try a simple test of reciprocity**. (You can do the rest of this exercise in your head; there’s no need to write it down.) Take the limited phenomena (or media imagery) that you came up with in each of the 4 spheres above and then look in each case for corresponding familiar phenomena from the world of your own everyday experience. Then imagine for a moment that an outside observer was systematically describing *all* those familiar phenomena in your world (e.g., cultural norms, sciences, arts, political institutions, pop music, social and gender roles and expectations, etc.) as “Christian” or “Jewish”. Continue this mental experiment in reciprocity until you have a clear sense of (a) the utter confusion and misunderstanding that would result; and (b) the profound moral, spiritual and intellectual repugnance you would feel—no matter what particular form of Christianity or Judaism you might

personally take as normative—at the application of those univocal labels to such an incongruous range of historical and social phenomena.

Religion 270: Qur'ân Recitation: the final verses (285-286) of Sura II<sup>11</sup>


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1st NARRATOR	(Divine) "WE"	PEOPLE/"ACTORS"
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[1:285] Faith has the Messenger in what was sent  
 down upon him from his RABB,  
 and those-with-faith:

Each one has faith in God, and His angels, and His  
 Books, and His Messengers--

[divine or human "We"?:]

Nor do We separate between any of His  
 Messengers.

And they said:

"We have heard, and we humbly obey. (Grant)  
 Your Forgiveness, our RABB.  
 And to YOU (is) the Return."

[1:286] Nor does GOD require of any soul other  
 than her capacity:  
 For her whatever (good) she has earned,  
 And against her whatever (wrong) she has  
 acquired.

Our RABB, do not blame us if we have forgotten or  
 we have missed-the-mark!

Our RABB, and do not give us to bear a burden like  
 You gave to bear to those before us!

Our RABB, and do not make us bear that for which  
 we lack the strength!

And pardon us,  
 And forgive us,  
 And have Loving-mercy on us!

YOU are our Friend-Protector,  
 So help us against the group of those-who-reject.

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<sup>11</sup> Recitation by M. Emin Ay (contemporary Turkish *qâri'*). Qur'an Recitation & translation CD's (for Windows machines, with excellent recitation and multiple English translations, plus a phonetic transliteration) available at RESERVE Desk in Mudd basement: BP109 1993 "The Holy Quran"; and BP20.I7533 1966 "The Islamic Scholar" (which also includes a number of other translations and chronological aids relating to hadith, Sira, lives of Prophets, etc.). (These CD-ROMs will only work with one of the Windows machines at that level; you may need to ask for some help to get them going.)