Quranic Studies: History, Hermeneutics and Modernity

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No. of contact Hours: 48 (=48 weeks)

Course description

This is an introduction to Quranic Studies (‘Ulum al Qur’an) focussing primarily on the principles and methodology of interpreting the Quranic text. The course is divided into 4 units which will cover the following topics: the history of the Quranic text, principles and approaches to interpretations (hermeneutics), the tafsir (exegesis) literature: classical and contemporary, and finally the Qur’an in contemporary Muslim’s life. The course will be delivered through a combination of lectures, group discussions and presentations.

Objectives:

The objectives of this course are:

- To expose learners, briefly, to the rich tradition of Quranic studies from the classical to the contemporary periods in a systematic and organised manner.
- To equip learners with the required tools and methodology that allow for critical investigation into the different interpretations of the Quranic text.

Learning Outcomes:

Learners are expected to:

- Demonstrate grasp of the basic concepts, principles and approaches covered in the 4 units mentioned above.
- Use the concepts and principles studied to analyse selected Quranic text and to evaluate the relevance of some pieces of exegetical (tafsir) literature and modern translations.
- Apply the concepts and principles studied on contemporary issues (women, jihad, tolerance, and environment) to assess the relevance of modern interpretations.

Reference Texts

Course Schedule

UNIT 1: HISTORY OF THE WRITTEN TEXT

Week 1: Introduction to the course; the context of revelation (Pre-Islamic Arabia); Approaches to the study of the Quran (traditionalists, orientalists and revisionists); Definition: the Qur'an and the Mushaf.

Readings: Bell & Watt (1-9); Mc Auliffe (7-12); Qadhi (24-29)

Week 2: What is ‘scripture’? ; the concept of wahy; the nature of the Quran: word, text and book; the structure and arrangement of the written text.

Readings: McAuliffe (1-4); A’zami (41-52); Bell & Watt (57-68); Von Denffer (67-84)

Week 3, 4, 5: The transmission of the oral text; the codices of the sahabas; the collection of the text by Abu Bakr; the compilation of ‘Uthman; pre-‘Uthmanic codices and the variant readings; evolution of Quranic scripts and orthography.

Readings: A’zami (56-76, 77-96); Bell & Watt (44-50); Von Denffer (46-51); A’zami (151-163, 129-150); Mc Auliffe (46-52)

Week 6, 7: Alternative viewpoints; (i) the Meccan critics of Wahy: poetry, magic and madness; (ii) the concept of I’jaz (inimitability) and the Qur’anic challenge; (ii) western scholarship: the views of Muir, Margoliouth, Bell and Watt on Wahy.

Readings: Qadhi (374-382, 257-287); Von Denffer (147-155); Ali M. (91-125)

Week 8: The ‘creation’ of the Qurán issue and the mihna; arguments of proponents and opponents of ‘creation’; the religious and political stakes (traditions vs. rationalism and state ideology); Al Ma’mun and the Muslim ‘inquisition’.


Week 9: The Quran and previous scriptures; the Qurán as ‘confirmation’ (Tasdî q) of previous revelations; the idea of distortion (Tahrî f); the Qur’an as ‘restorer’ of earlier teachings; Qurânic prophetology.

Readings: Bell & Watt (156-158); Selected passages from the Qur’an;

UNIT 2: EXEGESIS & TRANSLATIONS: METHODS AND APPROACHES

Week 10: Tafsîr: meaning and scope; Development of Tafsir; Early Tafsir literature; overview of the works of Muqatil, al Kalbi, al Thawri, al San’ani, Ibn Wahb and Ibn Sallam; Features of early Tafsir.

Readings: Qadhi (289-323); Shah (3-7, 16-19, 7-11)

Week 11, 12: Later Tafsir literature: Overview of the works of al Tabari, al Tha’alibi, al Mawardi, al Samarqandi, al Maturidi and Ibn Furak; Early hermeneutical categories; Approaches to tafsîr: the
Traditionist (*riwaya*), the Rationalist (*diraya*) and the Mystical (*ishara*); the Meccan, Madinan and Iraqi Schools; opposition to *tafsir*.

Reading: Shah (19-24, 24-31); Von Denfer (121-132)


Readings: Shah (37-41);

**Week 14**: Tafsir genres: the *nasikh wal mansukh*; the *asbab al nuzul*; the *al wujuh wal naza’ir* (polysemy); the *i’jaz* genre; the *majazat* and the *mutashabihat*; the *ahkam al Qur’an*; the *mufradat al Qur’an*, the *I’rab al Qur’an* and the books of *tafsir* in hadith literature.

Reading: Shah (48-51)

**Week 15**: Classical Tafsir methodology: An example: A Study of Surah 109: 1-6 from Ibn al Jawzi’s *Zad al Masir fi ’ilm al tafsir*.

Reading: McAuliffe: 184-189


Readings: McAuliffe (191-200); Qadhi (22-23)

**Week 18**: Translation of the Qur’an: Can scripture be translated? History of Quranic translations; Benefits and limits of translations; Survey of English translations; thematic *tafsir* approach.

Readings: Von Denfer (141-45); Qadhi (349-373); McAuliffe (154-157); http://quranica.com/divergence-in-translations/

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**UNIT 3: INTERPRETING THE TEXT: APPROACHES AND PRINCIPLES**

**Week 19**: Principles pertaining to context of revelation (*sabab al nuzul*)

**Week 20**: Principles of *tafsir* methodology: intertextuality (*Qur’an*); Para textuality (sunna & Aathar al sahaba); Rational approach to *tafsir*

**Week 21**: Linguistic principles pertaining to: the context; tenses; sentence construction; cases and declensions; superlatives; transitive and verbal nouns

**Week 22**: Principles pertaining to literary styles: shifts and transitions (*iltifat*) in expressions

**Week 23-24**: Principles pertaining to rhetoric and common exegetical tools

**Week 25**: Principles pertaining to pronouns, foreign names and conjunctions

**Week 26**: Principles pertaining to conjunctions and adjectives
Week 27: Principles pertaining to emphasis and synonyms

Week 28: Principles pertaining to commands, prohibitions and negation

Week 29: Principles pertaining to the general/specific, the absolute/particular,

Week 30: Principles pertaining to the explicit/implicit and interrogation.

Week 31: Principles pertaining to inconsistencies, punctuations and repetitions

Week 32: Principles pertaining to anonyms, abrogation, propriety and miscellaneous rules.

Week 33-34: The literary approach to the Qur’an: A study of Muntasir Mir’s essay ‘The Qur’an as Literature’; Islahi’s concept of Qur’anic coherence

Readings for weeks 19-33:
Maudarbx M.B., *Quranic Hermeneutics: the Art of Interpreting the Qur’an*, 2016, m.s.

Mir M. 1986, *Coherence in the Qur’an*, Indianapolis, American Trust Publications


UNIT 4: THE QUR’AN AND MODERNITY

Week 35-37: Women in the Qur’an and in Islamic history; Re-reading the Qur’an: An overview feminists’ readings of the Qur’anic teachings: superiority (daraja), subservience (giwama), disobedience (nushuz), divorce, polygyny, witness and inheritance; analysis & implications of these readings in the light of tafsir principles.


Week 38-40: The Qur’an and Violence: An overview of verses pertaining to violence; the doctrine of Jihad in Islam; Contrast with Qur’anic verses on peace; the literalist and fundamentalist approach to the Qur’an; survey of some websites on ‘Islamic violence’ (jihadwatch.org; answering-islam.org; danielpipes.org; memritv.org)


Week 41-46: Islam and Other faiths: Overview of verses pertaining to (i) Jews and Christians (ii) Unbelievers (kuffars) (iii) pagans (musrikun); Religious pluralism and Islam: the doctrine of salvation; the Qur’an and interfaith dialogue; the Qur’an and western scholarship.

Week 47-48: The Qur’an and the environment: Quranic verses on nature and its protection

Readings: Lecture notes; The Qur’an (with Translation)