

COURSE SYLLABUS

RELS 6631
Seminar in Islamic Studies
W 3:30-6:15
Dr. John C. Reeves
Macy 204B
Office hours: WR 2:30-3:30; or by appointment
jcreeves@uncc.edu
[Home Page of John C. Reeves](#)

Course description: ‘Current and seminal issues related to the study of Islam.’ The topic for this spring’s seminar is **Situating Islam Within Late Antiquity**. Scholars have often used the appearance of Islam in the Mediterranean world of the seventh century as a marker of rupture signaling the violent demise of the classical societies of antiquity and the onset of what the West terms the ‘Dark Ages,’ an era when learning and ‘civilized life’ were supposedly supplanted by barbarism and fanaticism. We by contrast will study the emergence of Islam in the Near East in terms of its manifold ideological continuities with the monotheistic currents flowing through Roman, Iranian, Aksumite, and South Arabian religious communities in the sixth and seventh centuries of the Common Era. Early Islamic discourse and practice exemplifies the hegemony of what might be termed an ‘Abrahamic idiom’ of cultural expression; i.e., an articulation of one’s cultural identity in terms of an ethnic or religious association with the characters, locales, practices, and ideas found in and promoted by the various forms of Bible circulating within and beyond the Roman Empire during roughly the first half of the first millennium CE. Much of our work in this course will involve a close comparative exploration of the way Bible and Qur’ān render shared characters and narrative scenarios. We will juxtapose, isolate, and analyze their similarities and differences with a view toward unpacking their broader significance. Figures of prominent interest include but will not necessarily be limited to Adam, Satan/Iblis, Noah, Abraham, Joseph, Moses, Elijah, Jesus, and of course Muḥammad himself. Careful attention will also be given to the cultural issues surrounding the generation and promulgation of competing character profiles within kindred scriptures, as well as to the development of textuality as a marker of authority.

Required textbooks:

M. A. S. Abdel Haleem, *The Qur’an: A New Translation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).
Fred M. Donner, *Muhammad and the Believers: At the Origins of Islam* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2010).
Gabriel Said Reynolds, ed., *The Qur’ān in Its Historical Context* (London & New York: Routledge, 2008).

Supplementary readings and/or exercises will be assigned or distributed by the instructor as needed.

Course requirements:

a. *Diligent attendance and preparation.* Almost perfect attendance (see below) is an essential requirement for this course. Each class meeting builds upon the knowledge gained and queried during our previous meetings. Moreover, oral recitation and group study/discussion comprises practically the entirety of every class session. Preparation for class usually involves the completion of a series of required Hebrew and English language readings; brief written assignment(s) or lexical investigations are likely. Individual students may sometimes be asked to initiate and guide our collective examination and discussion of the weekly topics. Students are expected to contribute in an informed manner to the public analysis and discussion of any assigned topic. The instructor’s collective assessment of one’s attendance, weekly class preparation, brief written assignments, and oral presentations will constitute 60% of the final course grade.

b. *Research project.* One (1) formal research project will be presented in oral and written form (at least 20 double-spaced pages, exclusive of notes and list of sources) that focuses upon a particular topic relevant to the study of the late antique cultural and scriptural dimensions of Islam. After a close reading of primary and secondary sources and in consultation with the instructor, the student should select a topic of individual interest that permits such an extended exposition, analysis, and/or evaluation. The project will be presented orally (approximately 15-20 minutes) during the required final class meeting (Wednesday, May 11); the formal written version of the papers are due by 12:00 PM on Wednesday, May 4. The research project accounts for 40% of the course grade.

c. *Zakhor (Remember!):* Mastery of the assigned readings, the timely completion of all assignments, and diligent class attendance are necessary prerequisites for the successful completion of this course. Each student is responsible for all lectures, class discussions, hand-outs, assignments, and announcements, whether or not s/he is present when they occur.

Miscellaneous information:

a. The grading scale used in this course is as follows:

91-95+	A	=	demonstrable mastery of material—outstanding performance
81-90	B	=	satisfactory performance of assignments
71-80	C	=	inadequate and/or faulty understanding of material
0-70	U	=	unacceptable graduate-level work

b. One of the requirements of this course is to complete the work of the course on time. Sometimes there are legitimate reasons for late work—an illness or other emergency. ‘Emergency,’ however, does not include your social involvements, travel plans, job schedule, disk and/or printer failures, the state of your love life, your obligations to other courses, or general malaise over the state of the world. The world has been in a mess as long as anyone can remember, and most of the world’s work is done by people whose lives are a mass of futility and discontent. If you haven’t learned yet, you had better learn now to work under the conditions of the world as it is. Therefore:

1) All missing work is averaged as a 0 in the computation of the course grade.

2) All written work falls due on the dates scheduled in the syllabus, or on the date announced by the instructor in class (usually the next class meeting). ‘Late’ work will not be accepted from those who were privy to its oral evaluation and discussion (i.e., you were present while we ‘went over it’ but you neglected to do it beforehand). In the event of one’s absence, ‘late’ submissions bear the following penalties: one day late/one letter grade; two days late/two letter grades; three or more days late/U. Please note: these ‘days’ are calendar days, not class meeting days. For accounting purposes, letter grades bear the following values: A=95; A-=92; B+=88; B=85; B-=82; C+=78; C=75; C-=72; U=35. Seminar papers are assessed according to the following formulae: $\sqrt{+} = A$; $\sqrt{-} = B$; $\sqrt{-} = U$. An untyped paper or final project automatically receives the grade U, as do those typed submissions which violate the required parameters or which the instructor deems physically or grammatically substandard.

3) Since your diligent physical participation is critical for the success of this course, attendance at class meetings will be monitored by the instructor. One absence is regrettable; two absences are the limit of tolerability. Three (3) or more absences will result in an automatic U for the course. Please note that – with the exception of religious holidays – the instructor does not distinguish ‘excused’ from ‘unexcused’ absences. Unsanctioned late arrivals and early departures will be tallied as absences.

4) Policy regarding Audits: the instructor expects auditors (whether formally enrolled as such or not) to meet the same attendance, preparation, and oral participation standards as those students who are taking the course for credit. The instructor does not expect auditors to prepare and submit any written assignments.

d. Assistance and solicitation of criticism is your right as a member of the class. It is not a privilege to be granted or withheld. Do not hesitate to request it nor wait too late in the course for it to be of help.

e. A number of lexical and grammatical aids are available for student consultation in the [Cuneiform Studies Laboratory](#) (Macy 216). For assistance, please see the instructor.

SECONDARY TEXTS

Minimally, students are expected to acquire a comfortable familiarity with the contents of the following works regardless of whether or not they have been 'formally' assigned by the instructor:

- Khalil Athamina, "Abraham in Islamic Perspective: Reflections on the Development of Monotheism in Pre-Islamic Arabia," *Der Islam* 81 (2004): 184-205.
- Sheila S. Blair, "Transcribing God's Word: Qur'an Codices in Context," *Journal of Qur'anic Studies* 10 (2008): 71-97.
- G. W. Bowersock, "Polytheism and Monotheism in Arabia and the Three Palestines," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 51 (1997): 1-10.
- Heribert Busse, "The Sanctity of Jerusalem in Islam," *Judaism* 17 (1968): 441-68.
- Averil Cameron, "Blaming the Jews: The Seventh-Century Invasions of Palestine in Context," *Travaux et mémoires* 14 (2002): 57-78.
- _____, "The Jews in Seventh-Century Palestine," *Scripta Classica Israelica* 13 (1994): 74-93.
- Michael Cook, *Muhammad* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983).
- Patricia Crone, "The Religion of the Qur'anic Pagans: God and the Lesser Deities," *Arabica* 57 (2010): 151-200.
- _____, "What do we actually know about Mohammed?" www.openDemocracy.net, 31 August 2006.
- Patricia Crone and Michael A. Cook, *Hagarism: The Making of the Islamic World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977).
- Touraj Daryaee, "The Persian Gulf Trade in Late Antiquity," *Journal of World History* 14 (2003): 1-16.
- Fred M. Donner, "From Believers to Muslims: Confessional Self-Identity in the Early Islamic Community," *al-Abhāth* 50-51 (2003): 9-53.
- Clive Foss, "Syria in Transition, A.D. 550-750: An Archaeological Approach," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 51 (1997): 189-269.
- Abraham Geiger, *Judaism and Islam* (trans. F. M. Young; Madras, 1898; repr., New York: Ktav, 1970).
- S. D. Goitein, "Muhammad's Inspiration by Judaism," *Journal of Jewish Studies* 9 (1958): 149-62.
- Jeremy Johns, "Archaeology and the History of Early Islam: The First Seventy Years," *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 46 (2003): 411-36.
- G. R. D. King, "The Paintings of the Pre-Islamic Ka'ba," *Muqarnas* 21 (2004): 219-29.
- Michael Lecker, "Zayd b. Thābit, 'A Jew with Two Sidelocks': Judaism and Literacy in Pre-Islamic Medina (Yathrib)," *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 56 (1997): 259-73.
- Fergus Millar, "Empire, Community and Culture in the Roman Near East: Greeks, Syrians, Jews and Arabs," *Journal of Jewish Studies* 38 (1987): 143-64.
- Hossein Modarressi, "Early Debates on the Integrity of the Qur'an: A Brief Survey," *Studia Islamica* 77 (1993): 5-39.
- Michael G. Morony, "Economic Boundaries? Late Antiquity and Early Islam," *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 47 (2004): 166-94.
- Harald Motzki, "The Collection of the Qur'an: A Reconsideration of Western Views in Light of Recent Methodological Developments," *Der Islam* 78 (2001): 1-34.
- Angelika Neuwirth, "Qur'an and History – A Disputed Relationship: Some Reflections on Qur'anic History and History in the Qur'an," *Journal of Qur'anic Studies* 5 (2003): 1-18.
- Theodore Nöldeke, "The Koran," in idem, *Sketches from Eastern History* (trans. John Sutherland Black; London & Edinburgh: Adam and Charles Black, 1892), 21-59.
- F. E. Peters, "The Quest of the Historical Muhammad," *International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 23 (1991): 291-315.

- Michael E. Pregill, "The Hebrew Bible and the Quran: The Problem of the Jewish 'Influence' on Islam," *Religion Compass* 1 (2007): 10.1111/j.1749-8171.2007.00044.x.
- John C. Reeves, "Problematizing the Bible ... Then and Now," *Jewish Quarterly Review* 100 (2010): 139-52.
- Andrew Rippin, ed., *The Blackwell Companion to the Qur'ān* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2006).
- Chase F. Robinson, "The Ideological Uses of Early Islam," *Past & Present* 203 (2009): 205-28.
- Uri Rubin, "*Ḥanīfiyya* and Ka'ba: An Inquiry into the Arabian Pre-Islamic Background of *dīn Ibrāhīm*," *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 13 (1990): 85-112.
- Thomas Sizgorich, "Do Prophets Come with a Sword? Conquest, Empire, and Historical Narrative in the Early Islamic World," *American Historical Review* 112 (2007): 993-1015.
- _____, "Narrative and Community in Islamic Late Antiquity," *Past & Present* 185 (2004): 9-42.
- Guy G. Stroumsa, "False Prophet, False Messiah and the Religious Scene in Seventh-Century Jerusalem," in *Redemption and Resistance: The Messianic Hopes of Jews and Christians in Antiquity* (ed. Markus Bockmuehl and James Carleton Paget; London & New York: T & T Clark, 2007), 285-96.
- _____, "Religious Contacts in Byzantine Palestine," *Numen* 36 (1989): 16-42.
- Estelle Whelan, "Forgotten Witness: Evidence for the Early Codification of the Qur'ān," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 118 (1998): 1-14.

SUPPLEMENTAL BIBLIOGRAPHY FOR RELS 6631

In response to student requests for recommendations regarding useful and enlightening discussions of certain topics, themes, and personalities that are presented in class and/or readings, I offer the following suggestions for further study at the student's leisure. I confine myself to materials which I myself have used with profit and which are currently available at Atkins Library.

It is often helpful for the student to begin with appropriate articles in the standard Bible dictionaries. The most up to date are *The New Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible* (5 vols.; ed. Katherine Doob Sakenfeld; Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2006-09) and *The Anchor Bible Dictionary* (6 vols.; New York: Doubleday, 1992). Dated but still reliable are *The Interpreters' Dictionary of the Bible* (4 vols.) and its *Supplementary Volume* (ed. George A. Buttrick; Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1962 & 1976), and the *Harper's Bible Dictionary* (ed. Paul J. Achtemeier; San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1985). Highly recommended are the relevant articles in the new *Encyclopaedia Judaica* (22 vols.; Detroit: Macmillan Reference USA/Thomson Gale, 2007), the *Encyclopaedia of Islam* (2d ed.; 11 vols.; Leiden: Brill, 1954-2002), the *Encyclopaedia of the Qur'ān* (6 vols.; ed. Jane Dammen McAuliffe; Leiden: Brill, 2001-06), and *The Qur'ān: An Encyclopedia* (ed. Oliver Leaman; London and New York: Routledge, 2006).

Important scholarly journals wherein critical articles devoted to the study of Qur'ān and its interpretation can be found include *Arabica*, *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, *Journal of Near Eastern Studies*, *Journal of Qur'anic Studies*, *Journal of Semitic Studies*, *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, *Muslim World*, and *Studia Islamica*.

Modern Critical Introductions to Qur'ān and Qur'ānic Studies

- Richard Bell, *Introduction to the Qur'ān* (Edinburgh: University Press, 1958).
- Michael Cook, *The Koran: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).
- G. R. Hawting and Abdul-Kader A. Shareef, eds., *Approaches to the Qur'ān* (London & New York: Routledge, 1993).
- Jane Dammen McAuliffe, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to the Qur'ān* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

- Andrew Rippin, ed., *Approaches to the History of the Interpretation of the Qur'ān* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988).
- _____, ed., *The Qur'ān: Formative Interpretation* (Brookland, Vt.: Ashgate, 1999).
- John Wansbrough, *Quranic Studies: Sources and Methods of Scriptural Interpretation* (Oxford, 1977; repr., Amherst, N.Y.: Prometheus Books, 2004).
- _____, *The Sectarian Milieu: Content and Composition of Islamic Salvation History* (Oxford, 1978; repr., Amherst, N.Y.: Prometheus Books, 2006).
- W. Montgomery Watt (ed.), *Bell's Introduction to the Qur'ān* (rev. ed.; Edinburgh: University Press, 1970).

Orientation to Historical Issues Surrounding the Rise of Islam

- Tor Andrae, *Mohammed: The Man and his Faith* (trans. Theophil Menzel; New York, 1936; repr., New York: Harper & Row, 1960).
- Jonathan P. Berkey, *The Formation of Islam: Religion and Society in the Near East, 600-1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003). See esp. pp. 3-101.
- G. W. Bowersock, Peter Brown, and Oleg Grabar, eds., *Late Antiquity: A Guide to the Postclassical World* (Cambridge, Mass. & London: Harvard University Press, 1999).
- Peter Brown, "Christianity in Asia and the Rise of Islam," in his *The Rise of Western Christendom: Triumph and Adversity, A.D. 200-1000* (2d ed.; Oxford: Blackwell, 2003), 267-94.
- _____, "The Changing of the Kingdoms: Christians under Islam," in his *The Rise of Western Christendom*², 295-320.
- _____, *The World of Late Antiquity: AD 150-750* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1971).
- Lawrence I. Conrad, "The Arabs," in *The Cambridge Ancient History, Volume XIV: Late Antiquity: Empire and Successors, A.D. 425-600* (ed. Averil Cameron, Bryan Ward-Perkins, and Michael Whitby; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 678-700.
- G. R. Hawting, *The Idea of Idolatry and the Emergence of Islam: From Polemic to History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).
- D. S. Margoliouth, *Mohammed and the Rise of Islam* (3d ed.; New York & London: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1905).
- David S. Powers, *Muhammad is Not the Father of Any of Your Men: The Making of the Last Prophet* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009).
- Chase F. Robinson, "Early Islamic History: Parallels and Problems," *Proceedings of the British Academy* 143 (2007): 91-106.

Jewish, Christian, and Islamic Traditions Pertaining to Biblical Figures and Events

- Camilla Adang, *Muslim Writers on Judaism and the Hebrew Bible: From Ibn Rabban to Ibn Hazm* (Leiden: Brill, 1996).
- Philip S. Alexander, "Jewish Tradition in Early Islam: The Case of Enoch/Idrīs," in *Studies in Islamic and Middle Eastern Texts and Traditions in Memory of Norman Calder* (ed. G. R. Hawting, et al.; JSSSup 12; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 11-29.
- Carol Bakhos, *Ishmael on the Border: Rabbinic Portrayals of the First Arab* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2006).
- Shosh Ben-Ari, "The Stories about Abraham in Islam: A Geographical Approach," *Arabica* 54 (2007): 526-53.
- Marc S. Bernstein, *Stories of Joseph: Narrative Migrations Between Judaism and Islam* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2006).
- Leigh N. B. Chipman, "Mythic Aspects of the Process of Adam's Creation in Judaism and Islam," *Studia Islamica* 93 (2001): 5-25.
- Reuven Firestone, "Comparative Studies in Bible and Qur'ān: A Fresh Look at Genesis 22 in Light of Sura 37," in *Judaism and Islam: Boundaries, Communication and Interaction: Studies in Honor of William M. Brinner* (ed. Benjamin H. Hary, et al.; Leiden: Brill, 2000), 169-84.
- _____, *Journeys in Holy Lands: The Evolution of the Abraham-Ishmael Story in Islamic Exegesis* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1990).

- Louis Ginzberg, *The Legends of the Jews* (7 vols.; Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 1909-38). A very useful resource for investigating the postbiblical development of biblical characters and events.
- Shalom Goldman, *The Wiles of Women/The Wiles of Men: Joseph and Potiphar's Wife in Ancient Near Eastern, Jewish, and Islamic Folklore* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995).
- David J. Halperin, "The Hidden Made Manifest: Muslim Traditions and the 'Latent Content' of Biblical and Rabbinic Stories," in *Pomegranates and Golden Bells: Studies in Biblical, Jewish, and Near Eastern Ritual, Law, and Literature in Honor of Jacob Milgrom* (ed. David P. Wright, et al.; Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1995), 581-94.
- James L. Kugel, *Traditions of the Bible: A Guide to the Bible As It Was at the Start of the Common Era* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1998).
- Jacob Lassner, "The Covenant of the Prophets: Muslim Texts, Jewish Subtexts," *AJS Review* 15 (1990): 207-38.
- Hava Lazarus-Yafeh, *Intertwined Worlds: Medieval Islam and Bible Criticism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992).
- Shari L. Lowin, *The Making of a Forefather: Abraham in Islamic and Jewish Exegetical Narratives* (Leiden: Brill, 2006).
- Jane Dammen McAuliffe, Barry D. Walfish, and Joseph W. Goering, eds., *With Reverence for the Word: Medieval Scriptural Exegesis in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).
- Tilman Nagel, "Ḳiṣāṣ al-anbiyā'," *EF* 5:180-81.
- Gordon D. Newby, *The Making of the Last Prophet: A Reconstruction of the Earliest Biography of Muhammad* (Columbia, S.C.: University of South Carolina Press, 1989). A plausible attempt to reconstruct the lost initial portion of the *Sīra* or 'Life of Muhammad'; it reportedly collected and recounted traditions about the careers of Muhammad's predecessors.
- Scott B. Noegel and Brannon M. Wheeler, *Historical Dictionary of Prophets in Islam and Judaism* (Lanham, Md.: Scarecrow Press, 2002).
- Moshe Perlmann, *The History of al-Tabarī, Volume IV: The Ancient Kingdoms* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1987). Pages 112-25 deal with Jesus.
- John C. Reeves, ed., *Bible and Qur'ān: Essays in Scriptural Intertextuality* (Atlanta/Leiden: Society of Biblical Literature/Brill, 2003).
- Gabriel Said Reynolds, *The Qur'ān and Its Biblical Subtext* (London & New York: Routledge, 2010). Must be used with caution.
- Andrew Rippen, "Interpreting the Bible through the Qur'ān," in *Approaches to the Qur'ān* (ed. G. R. Hawting and Abdul-Kader A. Shareef; London & New York: Routledge, 1993), 249-59.
- Franz Rosenthal, *The History of al-Tabarī, Volume I: General Introduction and From the Creation to the Flood* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989). Stops with the introduction of Noah; Atkins unfortunately does not own *Volume II* or *Volume III* (translated by William M. Brinner) which contain the intervening biblical characters.
- Uri Rubin, "Traditions in Transformation: The Ark of the Covenant and the Golden Calf in Biblical and Islamic Historiography," *Oriens* 36 (2001): 196-214.
- Aviva Schussman, "The Prophet Ezekiel in Islamic Literature: Jewish Traces and Islamic Adaptations," in *Biblical Figures Outside the Bible* (ed. Michael E. Stone and Theodore A. Bergren; Harrisburg, Pa.: Trinity Press International, 1998), 316-39.
- Haim Schwarzbaum, "Prolegomenon," in Moses Gaster, *The Chronicles of Jerahmeel* (New York: Ktav Publishing House, 1971), 1-124. A rich bibliographical resource.
- Georges Vajda, "Isrā'īliyyāt," *EF* 4:211.
- Marilyn R. Waldman, "New Approaches to 'Biblical' Materials in the Qur'ān," *Muslim World* 75 (1985): 1-16.
- Brannon M. Wheeler, *Mecca and Eden: Ritual, Relics, and Territory in Islam* (Chicago & London: University of Chicago Press, 2006).
- _____, *Moses in the Quran and Islamic Exegesis* (London & New York: RoutledgeCurzon, 2002).
- _____, *Prophets in the Quran* (London & New York: Continuum, 2002).
- Eli Yassif, *The Hebrew Folktale: History, Genre, Meaning* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1999).