



Spring 2024 Graduate Seminars

 MIDDLE EASTERN STUDIES



The University of Texas at Austin

ARA 384C – Reading Islamic Sources: Qu’ran and Interpretation

Dr. Hina Azam

From its initial proclamation by Muhammad until today, the Qur’an has served as a source of spiritual teachings, ethico-legal guidance, sacred narratives, and theological doctrines for Muslims of diverse times, places, and sects. Muslims have held their scripture to contain insights into history, the natural world, and human psychology. Believed to contain the direct words of God and therefore to be an infallible indicator of the divine mind, the Qur’an has remained the ultimate point of reference in Islamic thought and Muslim piety, and the scripture’s interpreters have hung complex doctrines on its precise wording and turns of phrase over the course of centuries. The repository of this centuries-long interpretive effort is the Qur’an’s interpretive tradition, known as tafsīr (exegesis). This Arabic-language course introduces students to the world of the Qur’an and tafsīr, both modern and premodern.

The course will progress along three parallel trajectories: (1) English-language secondary readings in the field of Qur’anic studies, which will orient students to the field as a whole and will provide background for the Arabic-language course materials; (2) Arabic-language readings from the Qur’an itself on selected topics (theological, ethical, and narrative), which will familiarize students with the base texts upon which tafsīrs are constructed; and (3) Arabic-language primary readings from a range of exegetical works on those same topics. Discussions will primarily be in Arabic and strong working knowledge of Arabic and/or completion of the 3-year Arabic sequence are prerequisite.

Course requirements, beyond attendance, reading, and participation in class discussion, will include a research paper (to be written in English using Arabic sources) and an accompanying oral presentation.

HEB 380C – Bible in Hebrew – Genesis-Deuteronomy

Dr. Bruce Wells

This seminar involves the reading and analysis of Genesis–Deuteronomy in Hebrew. The Masoretic Text as reproduced in Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia will serve as the main text. The Septuagint will be consulted on occasion. Much of the course will be devoted to examining the grammar and syntax of the Tiberian Hebrew in the text and attempting to understand any anomalies that are encountered. Students will also practice pointing unpointed texts from the Pentateuch. In addition, the course will consider the matter of source criticism and the state of current scholarship on that topic, as well as certain literary considerations that are important for reading these texts.

MEL 380C – Akkadian IV

Dr. Bruce Wells

Students continue their study of Akkadian by reading cuneiform texts from a variety of genres and time periods.

MEL 383C – Current Issues in the Hebrew Bible

Dr. Jonathan Kaplan

Purpose of the Course

This course will examine the issues that are current in scholarship about Achaemenid Period Yehud (Judah).

Course Objectives

- To learn the major areas of critical scholarly discussion about Achaemenid Period Yehud (Judah).
- To collect bibliography about the critical issues in the study of Achaemenid Period Yehud.
- To evaluate the state of the current scholarly work on Achaemenid Period Yehud.
- To identify new areas for research in this sub-field of scholarship.

MES 385 – Modern Iranian History & Historiography

Dr. Mikiya Koyagi

This course will provide students with a comprehensive understanding of the historical developments in Modern Iran. Students will learn how Iranian society, culture, and politics have evolved throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. This course will also introduce students to many of the key debates in the field of Modern Iranian history. Students will read, analyze, and discuss selected titles from a list of the most influential scholarly books on Modern Iranian History. Readings in primary historical documents will also be required. Whenever possible, these will be in the original Persian language. However, for students who do not have sufficient Persian language skills, translations will be used. One of the goals of the course is to give students the necessary research and writing skills, along with the requisite knowledge of the field, to conduct meaningful research in the area of Modern Iranian History.

MES 398T – Supervised Teaching in Middle Eastern Studies

Dr. Levi Thompson

Teaching at the university level can be exhilarating and daunting in equal measure. Whether we are seasoned teachers or just starting out, we are often faced with a number of difficult and sometimes pressing questions. How do we pick a route through our material that will be pedagogically effective and intellectually meaningful? How do we craft strong lectures, lead stimulating discussions, and ensure thoughtful evaluation of our students and ourselves? And at a deeper level, how do we develop a teaching philosophy that reflects our own analytical, creative, and ethical selves?

In a manner both practical and theoretical, we will explore these questions at a challenging time for US higher education. Overall, this course will prepare you to enter the academic job market with stronger teaching portfolios, research statements, academic job cover letters, and some experience with how an academic job interview works.

Course Goals:

By the end of this course, you should be prepared to teach your own courses and compile materials needed to apply for academic teaching positions.

Cross-listed courses

MEL 383 – Critical Issues in Judaism in Late Antiquity

Dr. Jonathan Schofer

This graduate seminar examines the literature and history of Judaism in the time period from the destruction of the Second Jewish Temple in 70 C.E. to the early Middle Ages. A primary focus will be for students to learn the extensive literary sources of classical Rabbinic Judaism, including Mishnah, Talmud, and Midrash. At the same time, study of literature, practices, and groups beyond the canon will include mysticism, synagogue poetry, and beyond. Topics will include the dynamics of scriptural interpretation (Midrash), gender and sexuality, purity and ethics, worship and mysticism, and law. We will consider approaches to history and the social context of the extensive body of written sources we have for understanding Judaism in this time. Assignments will include presentation in class, short written pieces during the semester, and a medium-sized research paper.

MES 386 – Islamic Ornament

Dr. Stephennie Mulder

Contact faculty for description.

MES 386 – Shii Islam: History & Resistance

Dr. Syed Hyder

Contact faculty for description.