



SAINT LOUIS UNIVERSITY

*Madrid*

Course: THEO-273 Islam: Religion and Culture  
Semester: Fall 2014  
Time: MW 15.30-16.45  
Professor: Carlos A. Segovia  
Credits: 3  
Prerequisites: THEO-100

## 1. Course objectives

From the mid-7th to the early 8th century Islam gradually emerged as a new religion. Shortly afterwards it became a major world civilisation whose history has run parallel to, and intertwined with, that of the West. But how did Islam first begin and how were its foundations laid? How has it developed through the ages and what kind of social realities, artistic expressions and intellectual traditions are peculiar to it? Is there one Islam or are there several with their own idiosyncrasies? And why is it that in recent years it has become increasingly obvious to non-Muslim Westerners that Islam does matter? Finally, which categories are more suitable for the study of the Islamic phenomenon and its inherent complexity? It is only by answering these questions – which must be carefully reflected upon – that one may better understand the Muslim world and its present challenges.

Students who successfully complete the course will have achieved the following learning objectives:

- to understand the foundations of Islam
- to critically assess the merits and demerits of the traditional narrative of Islamic origins
- to survey the foundations of Islamic culture and religion
- to canvass the challenges that are peculiar to contemporary Muslim societies
- to eventually apply this knowledge to ordinary problems and situations
- to determine, by one's own lights, how to better deal with all the aforementioned issues

## 2. Course description

The course divides into seven major sections:

- I) ISLAM AND ISLAMISM: RETHINKING A COMPLEX TOPIC
- II) NEW SCHOLARLY PERSPECTIVES ON ISLAM'S ORIGINS: TOWARDS A PARADIGM

- SHIFT?
- III) MUHAMMAD AND THE QUR'AN: TRADITIONAL AND CONTEMPORARY APPROACHES
  - IV) AN UNSTABLE PICTURE? THE MUSLIM WORLD BETWEEN UNITY AND DIVERSITY
  - V) ORTHOPRAXIS: AN INTRODUCTORY APPROACH TO ISLAMIC LAW AND ITS MODERN CHALLENGES
  - VI) WOMEN AND FAMILY IN ISLAMIC CULTURE: CONSERVATIVE AND PROGRESSIVE VIEWPOINTS
  - VII) *JIHAD*: EXPLORING AFRESH A MISUNDERSTOOD CONCEPT

### 3. Text and other course materials

The text for the course is Malise Ruthven, *Islam: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2012). It is required and available on:

[http://www.amazon.co.uk/Islam-Very-Short-Introduction-Introductions/dp/0199642877/ref=sr\\_1\\_1?ie=UTF8&qid=1402582690&sr=8-1&keywords=malise-ruthven](http://www.amazon.co.uk/Islam-Very-Short-Introduction-Introductions/dp/0199642877/ref=sr_1_1?ie=UTF8&qid=1402582690&sr=8-1&keywords=malise-ruthven) (Paperback);

[http://www.amazon.com/Islam-Very-Short-Introduction-Introductions-ebook/dp/B0077R8RA4/ref=sr\\_1\\_cc\\_1?s=aps&ie=UTF8&qid=1402583011&sr=1-1-catcorr&keywords=malise-ruthven+kindle](http://www.amazon.com/Islam-Very-Short-Introduction-Introductions-ebook/dp/B0077R8RA4/ref=sr_1_cc_1?s=aps&ie=UTF8&qid=1402583011&sr=1-1-catcorr&keywords=malise-ruthven+kindle) (Kindle);

[http://www.amazon.co.uk/Islam-Very-Short-Introduction-Introductions/dp/9626343214/ref=sr\\_1\\_1?ie=UTF8&qid=1402582936&sr=8-1&keywords=malise-ruthven+cd](http://www.amazon.co.uk/Islam-Very-Short-Introduction-Introductions/dp/9626343214/ref=sr_1_1?ie=UTF8&qid=1402582936&sr=8-1&keywords=malise-ruthven+cd) (CD).

Additional course materials will be provided in due time.

### 4. Required reading

Unless otherwise indicated, reading assignments will be from:

- Abdel Haleem, Muhammad A. S. *The Qur'an: A New Translation*. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2004.
- Berkey, Jonathan P. *The Formation of Islam: Religion and Society in the Near East, 600–1800*. Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003.
- Guillaume, Alfred. *The Life of Muhammad: A Translation of Ibn Ishāq's Sīrat rasūl Allāh with Introduction and Notes*. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1989.
- Hawting, Gerald R. *The Idea of Idolatry and the Emergence of Islam: From Polemic to History*. Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999.
- Hughes, Aaron W. *Theorizing Islam: Disciplinary Deconstruction and Reconstruction*. Sheffield, UK and Bristol, CT: Equinox, 2012.
- Ramadan, Tariq. *Western Muslims and the Future of Islam*. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2004.
- Ruthven, Malise. *Islam: A Very Short Introduction* (see Section 3 above).
- Saeed, Abdullah. *The Qur'an: An Introduction*. London and New York: Routledge, 2008.

## 5. Grading and attendance

In this course final grades are calculated as a weighted average of four scores: two exams, a paper, and participation. The scores are weighted as follows:

Midterm exam:	25%
Paper:	25%
Final exam:	25%
Participation:	25%

Exams and paper: The exams must be taken and the paper turned in on the dates assigned (see Section 6 below). Violations of this policy will result in the loss of a grade point (from B to C, for example) in all but the most exceptional cases.

Participation: This component of your final grade will be based on oral exercises and commitment to the class discussions, attendance, effort, and punctuality. Seven or more absences FOR ANY REASON constitute an unrecoverable loss of course content and will result in an F for the course. Mobile phones are to be switched OFF in class. Computers and tablets are to be used SOLELY for taking class notes. Students are expected not to interrupt class by leaving the room and returning during the class period.

Please note that, as a student in this course, you are required to adhere to the university's Academic Honesty Policy. Cheating, falsification, and plagiarism are strictly forbidden. Plagiarism is the intentional representation of someone else's thoughts or words as if they were one's own. Any violation of this policy will result in an F for the pertinent academic exercise. A detailed statement of the policy may be found at [http://spain.slu.edu/academics/academic\\_advising/docs/Academic\\_integrity.pdf](http://spain.slu.edu/academics/academic_advising/docs/Academic_integrity.pdf).

## 6. Course calendar

Sept. 3 (Introduction)

### *Sept. 3 – Session 1: Introducing our Topic*

- What do we think we know about Islam and how do we think we know it?
- To what extent can the distinction between Islamic religion and culture be considered valid – and how can this help us deal with the information on Islam displayed in the media?
- How should the study of Islam's origins be approached today – and how can this contribute to the mutual understanding between Muslims and non-Muslims?
- Provisional conclusion: standing half way between Muslim apologetics and Islamophobic discourse

Sept. 8–10 (Section i)

I) ISLAM AND ISLAMISM: RETHINKING A COMPLEX TOPIC

**Sept. 8** – Session 2: *Islam, Muslims, and Islamism*

- Representing and misrepresenting Islam: a violent religion?
- Islam and the West: coexistence or conflict?
- The Muslim identity, between religion and politics.
- Who speaks for Islam, anyway?
- A religious awakening or a spiritual vacuum?

► Reading assignment: - Malise Ruthven, *Islam: A Very Short Introduction*, Ch. 1.

**Sept. 10** – Session 3: *Distinguishing between Islamic Traditionalism, Pre-Modern Islamic Revivalism, Modern Islamic Reform Movements, and Islamic Fundamentalism*

- ‘Abd al-Wahhab and his contribution to pre-modern Islamic revivalism.
- Jamal al-Din al-Afghani, Muhammad ‘Abduh and the modern Islamic reform movement.
- From Islamic reform to Islamic fundamentalism: Rashid Rida, Hasan al-Banna and Mawlana Mawdudi.
- Islamic culture between traditionalism, reform and secularism.
- Provisional conclusion: an open future.

► Reading assignment: - Tarik Ramadan, *Western Muslims and the Future of Islam*, excerpts.

Sept. 15–24 (Section ii)

II) NEW SCHOLARLY PERSPECTIVES ON ISLAM’S ORIGINS: TOWARDS A PARADIGM SHIFT?

**Sept. 15** – Session 4: *Old Ideas vs. New Historical and Archaeological Evidence*

- The old scholarly paradigm from Theodor Nöldeke to the present
- Revisiting the historical, cultural and ethnic background of emergent Islam
- A new look at the Arabian Peninsula on the eve of Islam: Abraha’s religious inscriptions from Muraghyan and Ma’rib

► Reading assignments: - Jonathan Berkey, *The Formation of Islam*, excerpts;  
- Gerald Hawting, *The Idea of Idolatry and the Emergence of Islam*, excerpts.

– **Last Day to Drop a Class Without a Grade of W and/or Add a Class**

– **Last Day to Choose Audit (AU) or Pass/No Pass (P/NP) Options**

**Sept. 17** – Session 5: *Theses on the Method Required for the Renewed Study of Islam’s Origins*

- Liminality and religious identity making: the new scholarly consensus
- Critical discourse analysis and the nature of the early Muslim sources

- The Qur'an as a late-antique document
- New insights on Muhammad and the Arab 'conquest' of the Fertile Crescent
- Relocating the beginnings of Islam: 'Abd al-Malik b. Marwan, the Dome of the Rock and the Meccan shrine

► Reading assignment: - Alfred Guillaume, *The Life of Muhammad*, excerpts.

**Sept. 22** – Session 6: *Re-imagining the Dawn of Islam beyond the Traditional Account of Its Beginnings (1)*

→ Video: Tom Holland, *Islam: The Untold Story*.

**Sept. 24** – Session 7: *Re-imagining the Dawn of Islam beyond the Traditional Account of Its Beginnings (2)*

→ Discussion over Holland's video, *Islam: The Untold Story*.

- Provisional conclusion: a paradigm shift?

Sept. 29–Oct. 6 (Section iii)

III) MUHAMMAD AND THE QUR'AN: TRADITIONAL AND CONTEMPORARY APPROACHES

**Sept. 29** – Session 8: *The Qur'an: Style, Contents, and Collection*

- Structure
- Style
- Major themes
- Text-types
- Chronology
- Collection
- Variant recensions and readings

► Reading assignments: - Malise Ruthven, *Islam: A Very Short Introduction*, Ch. 2;  
- Abdullah Saeed, *The Qur'an*, excerpts.

**Oct. 1** – Session 9: *Reading the Qur'an between the Lines*

- Muhammad and the Qur'an / Muhammad in the Qur'an?
- The Quranic *rasm* and its inherent ambiguities.
- Arabic alone?
- Texts and subtexts.
- Multiple authorship?
- A long redactional and editorial process?
- Provisional conclusion: the Qur'an before the Qur'an – an intriguing puzzle?

**Oct. 6** – Session 10: *The Early Representation(s) of Muhammad*

- The Quranic prophet and the Islamic prophet.
- Muhammad as the 'Seal' of prophecy.
- Muhammad as statesman.

- Muhammad's religious rivals and political opponents.
- Beyond the consensus: Muhammad as a new messiah?
- Provisional conclusion: Muhammad between myth and reality.

► Reading assignment: - Malise Ruthven, *Islam: A Very Short Introduction*, Ch. 2;

**Oct. 8** – Session 11: Warm-up Session

**Oct. 13** – **Midterm exam**

Oct. 15 (Looking back and forth in time)

**Oct. 15** – Session 12: *Muslims, non-Muslims, and the Making of the Early Islamic Community*

→ Video and discussion: Fred Donner, *How Ecumenical was Early Islam?*

– **Last Day to Submit Transfer Application for Spring Semester**

**Oct. 17–19** (Optional trip to Cordova)

Oct. 20–27 (Section iv)

IV) AN UNSTABLE PICTURE? THE MUSLIM WORLD BETWEEN UNITY AND DIVERSITY

**Oct. 20** – Session 13: *Unity and Diversity in Early Islam and Beyond*

- The struggle for Muslim identity in the 7th century and over the ages.
- Major sectarian divisions of old: Sunnites, Shiites, and Kharijites.
- The theological debate over rationalism: Mutazilites, Asharites, and Hanbalites.
- Winners and losers: what if everything had turned out differently?
- Integrating diversity: the social role of Muslim rituals and sciences.
- A note on Islam's regional variants.

► Reading assignment: - Malise Ruthven, *Islam: A Very Short Introduction*, Ch. 3.

**Oct. 22** – Session 14: *A Call for Unity against the Sunnite/Shiite Divide*

→ Video and discussion: Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Sunnism and Shi'ism: Yesterday, Today, and Tomorrow*.

**Oct. 27** – Session 15: *Witnessing to God's Transcendence / Seeking God's Presence: Introducing Islamic Art and Spirituality*

- What is Sufism?
- God, man, and the world.
- The esoteric and the exoteric.
- Theosophical speculations.

- Reading assignment: - Malise Ruthven, *Islam: A Very Short Introduction*, Ch. 3.
- Group presentations: ‘Which is the major ruling principle of Islamic art?’

Oct. 29–Nov. 5 (Section v)

V) ORTHOPRAXY: AN INTRODUCTORY APPROACH TO ISLAMIC LAW AND ITS  
MODERN CHALLENGES

**Oct. 29** – Session 16: *Why the Shari‘a?*

- Islam: orthodoxy and/or orthopraxy?
- The roots of Islamic law.
- Schools of jurisprudence.
- The *shari‘a*: an all-encompassing ideal.

- Reading assignment: - Malise Ruthven, *Islam: A Very Short Introduction*, Ch. 4.

**Oct. 30** – Last Day to Drop a Class and Receive a Grade of W

**Nov. 1** – Application Deadline for Fall Semester Degree Candidates

**Nov. 3** – Session 17: *Applying the Shari‘a: A Modern Social Challenge?*

→ Video and discussion: Isobel Coleman, *Women, Shari‘a Law, and Reform in the Middle East*.

**Nov. 5** – Session 18: *Debating over Shari‘a and Secular Law*

- Group presentations: ‘Which role must be assigned to the *shari‘a* in our modern world?’

**Nov. 6** – Registration for Spring Semester begins

Nov. 10 – *Nuestra Señora de la Almodena* Holiday (University Closed)

Nov. 12–24 (Section vi)

VI) WOMEN AND FAMILY IN ISLAMIC CULTURE: CONSERVATIVE AND PROGRESSIVE  
VIEWPOINTS

**Nov. 12** – Session 19: *What Does the Qur‘an Say about Women?*

- Problematising pro-gender-equality arguments and texts in the Qur‘an.
- The basic issue: thematising/constructing the female body.
- Textual and normative expansions: the Qur‘an and the Muslim tradition on women.
- A miscellaneous survey of a few particular Quranic norms.

**Nov. 17** – Session 20: *The Role of Women in Traditional Islam*

- Islam and patriarchal symbolism.
- Women and the *shari'a*.
- Polygamy, marriage, and divorce.
- Women in social and religious life.
- A note on Islam and feminism.

► Reading assignment: - Malise Ruthven, *Islam: A Very Short Introduction*, Ch. 5.

**Nov. 19** – Session 21: *Islamic Feminism: A New, Thought-Provoking Concept*

→ Video and discussion: Amina Wadud, *Islam, Feminism, and Human Rights*.

**Nov. 24** – Session 22: *Becoming a Muslim Woman: Motivations and Implications of a Growing Phenomenon*

→ Video and discussion: BBC documentary, *Make Me a Muslim*.

Nov. 26–Dec. 3 (Section vii)

VII) *JIHAD*: EXPLORING AFRESH A MISUNDERSTOOD CONCEPT

**Nov. 26** – Session 23: *The Semantics and Uses of a Fuzzy Concept*

- *j.h.d.* and *q.t.l.* in the Qur'an.
- The greater and the lesser *jihad*.
- *Jihad* and resistance.
- *Jihad* and contemporary jihadism.

**Dec. 1** – **Paper due**

– Session 24: *Coping with Religious Violence: Islam as a Threat to the West?*

→ Video and discussion: David Cook, *Islam and the West*.

**Dec. 3** – Session 25: *Overcoming Jihad: Problem-Solving Resources and Methods*

► Group presentations: 'What would you do to stop violent *jihad*?'

Dec. 8 – *Inmaculada Concepción* Holiday (University Closed)

**Dec. 10** – Session 26: Warm-up Session

**Dec. 19** – **Final exam**

**7. Guidelines for writing your paper, preparing the group presentations and taking your two exams**

You will have to write a short essay (c. 2500 words) on a topic of your own choice. Given the overall introductory character of the course, writing this short paper should give you a chance to explore in some depth some of its contents and to improve your scholarly skills. I will help you choose your subject matter and recommend you a few additional readings thereof.

Group presentations should normally involve three students and be no longer than 10 minutes. All students will be asked to participate in the presentations scheduled for sessions 15, 18 and 25 (see Section 6 above).

The midterm exam will cover Sections I–III of the programme (on which see Section 2 above). It will consist of three sections in which you will be respectively asked to (1) briefly respond (in no more than 150 words) to two out of four short questions, (2) write a brief essay (of c. 500 words) on a general topic that you will have to choose out of two, and (3) undertake a textual analysis (of c. 500 words) by likewise choosing between two texts. Each section of the midterm exam will be worth 1.25 points; 0.25 additional points will be for style. Your midterm grade will be that of your midterm exam.

The final exam will cover Sections IV–VII of the programme. Like the midterm exam, it will consist of three sections in which you have to (1) briefly respond (in no more than 150 words) to two out of four short questions, (2) write a brief essay (of c. 500 words) on a general topic that you will have to choose out of two, and (3) undertake a textual analysis (of c. 500 words) by once more choosing between two texts. Like in the midterm exam, each section of the final exam will be worth 1.25 points; 0.25 additional points will be for style. As mentioned above (see Section 5), your final grade will be calculated as a weighted average of four scores including your two exams, your paper, and your participation throughout the course.

You will be allowed to bring your class and home notes to both exams, provided they are handwritten. No other materials will be admitted, though.

## **8. Collection of student work for assessment**

Saint Louis University – Madrid Campus is committed to excellent and innovative educational practices. In order to maintain quality academic offerings and to conform to relevant accreditation requirements, we regularly assess our teaching, services, and programs for evidence of student learning outcomes achievement. For this purpose we keep on file anonymised representative examples of student work from all courses and programs such as: assignments, papers, exams, portfolios, and results from student surveys, focus groups, and reflective exercises. Thus, *copies of your work for this course, including exams, oral presentations, and/or submitted papers may be kept on file for institutional research, assessment and accreditation purposes.* If you prefer that Saint Louis University-Madrid Campus does not keep your work on file, you will need to communicate your decision in writing to your professor.

## **9. Academic accommodations**

In recognition that people learn in a variety of ways and that learning is influenced by multiple factors (e.g., prior experience, study skills, learning disability), resources to support student success are available on campus. Students who think they might benefit from these resources can find out more about:

- course-level support (e.g., faculty member, departmental resources, etc.) by asking your course instructor; and
- university-level support (e.g., tutoring/writing services, Disability Services) by visiting the Academic Dean's Office (San Ignacio Hall) or by going to [http://spain.slu.edu/academics/learning\\_resources.html](http://spain.slu.edu/academics/learning_resources.html).

Students who believe that, due to a disability, they could benefit from academic accommodations are encouraged to contact Disability Services at +34 915 54 58 58, ext. 204, send an e-mail to [counselingcenter-madrid@slu.edu](mailto:counselingcenter-madrid@slu.edu), or visit the Counseling Office (San Ignacio Hall). Confidentiality will be observed in all inquiries. Course instructors support student accommodation requests when an approved letter from Disability Services has been received and when students discuss these accommodations with the instructor after receipt of the approved letter.

## **10. Office hours and e-mail**

W 11.00–12.00 and by appointment in San Ignacio Hall (3rd floor, Room 5). E-mail contact: [segoviamail@gmail.com](mailto:segoviamail@gmail.com)

## **11. Appendix: Optional trip to Cordova**

Integrated into the fall offering is an optional excursion to Cordova for first-hand experience of Islamic culture and archaeology.

In this trip you will be given the opportunity to visit the ruins of the fortified Arab-Muslim medieval palace-city 'Medina Azahara,' located on the western outskirts of present-day Cordova, before going on a tour around the Umayyad capital to watch and become acquainted with the city's Islamic legacy, followed by a night visit to its once Great Mosque. Additionally you will also have the chance to join an archaeological workshop at the University of Cordova and to visit a few iconic places of Cordova's current neo-Andalusian revivalism.

The provisional schedule for the trip is as follows:

### Friday, Oct. 17

06.30 Departure from Madrid (by train)

08.15 Arrival to Cordova

10.00 **Visit to the ruins of Medina Azahara** with Prof. Rafael Blanco from the University of Cordova or his assistant and the archaeologist responsible for the restoration of the ‘Salón Rico,’ who will show us some places not often visited:

(More information on Medina Azahara can be found here:

<http://english.turismodecordoba.org/seccion/medina-azahara>

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Medina\\_Azahara](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Medina_Azahara))

16.30 **General tour around Cordova** with Prof. Blanco or his assistant, focusing on **the city’s Islamic legacy**; additionally, you will have the opportunity to join an **archaeological workshop** at the **University of Cordoba** led by Prof. Blanco

20.00 **Night visit to Cordova’s Great Mosque**

(More information here:

<http://english.turismodecordoba.org/seccion/the-mosque-cathedral-of-cordova>

<http://www.elalmadecordoba.com>)

### Saturday, Oct. 18

10.30 **Islamic revival in present-day Cordova:** Prof. Emilio González Ferrín from the University of Seville and the art historian Enrique Hiedra will take us on a visit to a few **iconic places** testifying to such revival

(A recent article in English by Prof. González Ferrín – ‘Al-Andalus: The First Enlightenment’ – can be read here:

[http://www.academia.edu/3347289/Al-Andalus\\_The\\_First\\_Enlightenment](http://www.academia.edu/3347289/Al-Andalus_The_First_Enlightenment))

17.00 Free afternoon–evening

### Sunday, Oct. 19

09.00 Return to Madrid (by train)

For more information on the applicable fees, please contact Student Life.

*More information on Cordova and its Islamic legacy here:*

<http://english.turismodecordoba.org/historia.cfm>

<http://english.turismodecordoba.org/muslim-cordova.cfm>