The Quran: Composition, Collection, and Commentary  
NEJS 186b  
Spring 2015  
Monday and Wednesday 3:30–4:50

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Say, “If the sea were ink for the Words of my Lord,  
the sea would be exhausted before the Words of my Lord were exhausted,  
even if We brought the like thereof to replenish it.”  
Quran 18:109

Course Overview
This course begins by exploring the development and transmission of the Quranic text, comparing the views of different schools of Islamic thought with each other and with those of modern academia. It then outlines the development of the Quranic sciences or hermeneutical tools, and their employment by different schools of Islamic thought. This outline serves as the foundation for an examination of the historical development of different commentary (tafsīr) genres and their interaction with one another. Particular attention will be paid to the manner in which major theological debates are conducted through the composition of tafsīr. The focus will be upon the discussion of major Quranic themes, such as the nature of God, sacred history, and the phenomena of prophecy.

Learning Goals
By the end of the course students should be able to provide a comprehensive outline of the development of the Quranic text and identify the major theories in the debate over the historical development of the Quran. They should know the major commentators (mufassirs) and commentaries (tafsīrs) that represent different schools of Islamic thought, some of the methodologies they employ, and be able to discuss the manner in which the classical tafsīr tradition continues to influence Islamic thought in the modern period.

Assignments and Evaluation
Undergraduates will be required to write one five to seven page paper comparing different theories regarding the composition and collection of the Quran (20%), attend all classes and participate actively in close readings, this includes occasional short response essays (20%), prepare a final research paper of 12 to 15 pages on one aspect of Quranic interpretation or on a specific exegete, or school of exegesis (35%). The comprehensive
final exam will test familiarity with the various types of tafsir (commentary) studied throughout the semester (25%).

Graduates will prepare an individual in-class presentation (20%), attend an extra reading seminar for close readings with the text fully prepared for which occasional response essays will be required (20%), write a final research paper of 20 to 25 pages (35%), and sit for the final exam (25%).

Disabilities
If you are a student with a documented disability on record at Brandeis University and wish to have a reasonable accommodation made for you in this class, please see me immediately.

Academic Integrity
You are expected to be familiar with and to follow the University’s policies on academic integrity (see http://www.brandeis.edu/studentlife/sdc/ai). Any suspected instances of alleged dishonesty may be reported to the Office of Student Development and Conduct. Instances of academic dishonesty may result in sanctions including but not limited to, failing grades being issued, educational programs, and other consequences.

Texts
— The following texts are required and will be available at the Bookstore:
*The Quran and Its Interpreters*, Mahmoud Ayoub
*The Immense Ocean (al-Baḥr al-madīd)*, Aḥmad ibn ṣAjība, trans., Mohammed Aresmouk and Michael Fitzgerald

— Translations of several commentaries will be on reserve at the library, and copies of assigned sections will be available on Latte:
*Tafsīr ibn Kathīr*
*Tafsīr al-Qurtubī*, trans. Aisha Bewley
*Sufi Commentaries on the Quran in Classical Islam*, Kirstin Sands
Tentative Course Schedule

**Week 1**—January 12–14
Course overview—Early History
— Selections from al-Waḥīdī, The Occasions of Revelation (Asbāb al-nuzūl)

**Week 2**—January 21
The Composition, Compilation and Collection of the Quran

Graduate Students:
Motzki, “The Collection of the Qur’ān: A Reconsideration of Western Views in Light of Recent Methodological Developments”
Sinai, “When Did the Consonantal Structure of the Quran Reach Closure?” parts I and II

**Week 3**—January 26–28
What is Tafsīr? Tafsīr and the Quranic Sciences
Hamza & Rizvi, An Anthology of Qur’ānic Commentaries, 1–52
Selections from HarperCollins Study Quran

Graduate Students:
Walid Saleh, “The Study of Quranic Commentaries”

**Week 4**—February 2–4
The Beginning of Tafsīr; al-Tabarī: The Dean of Quranic Exegetes
Ayoub, The Qur’an and Its Interpreters, 41–54

**Week 5**—February 9–11
The Development of Sunni Tafsīr
Readings: M. b. Ṭabari, Al-Ṭabarī’s commentary on the Fāṭihah, 78–128

Graduate Students: “Tafsīr from Tabarī to Ibn Kathir: Problems in the description of a genre with reference to the story of Abraham” Norman Calder in Approaches to the Quran
Midterm recess

**Week 6**—February 23–25
Continued development of the Tafsir tradition, hermeneutic tools
**Readings:** Finish al-Qurṭubi, Selections from *The Study Quran*

**Week 7**—March 2–4—**First Paper Due March 4**
Major Developments in Shi‘ī Tafsīr
**Readings:** Allamah Ẓabatabā‘ī’s commentary on the *Fātiḥah*
Selections from *The Prolegomena to the Qur’an* on Latte
Shahrastānī’s (d. 548/1153) Commentary on *al-Fātiḥah*

**Week 8**—March 9–11
Comparing Sunnī and Shi‘ī *tafāsīr*
**Readings:** Ayoub 55–278

**Week 9**—March 16–18
Sūfī Tafsīr
**Readings:** Kirstin Sands, introduction to *Sufi Commentaries on the Quran in Classical Islam*
Tustari commentary on *al-Fātiḥah*
Qushayrī, commentary on *al-Fātiḥah* from *Laṭā’if al-īshārāt*
Ruzbihān Baqlī, commentary on *al-Fātiḥah* from ʿArā’is al-bayān

**Week 10**—March 23–25
Sūfī Tafsīr Continued
**Readings:** Ahmad Ibn ʿAjibah, *The Immense Ocean* (*al-Baḥr al-madīd*)

Passover and Spring Recess

**Week 11**—April 13–15
Comparing different schools of Tafsīr
6. “Oneness” 491–575

**Week 12**—April 20–22
Comparing different schools continued
**Readings:** *An Anthology of Quranic Commentaries:*
1. “Seeking the Face of God,” 67–125
Week 13—April 27
Comparing different schools continued

Readings: *An Anthology of Quranic Commentaries:*