**RELS 39900-01 Islamic Origins: Did Muhammad Exist?**

**Fall 2018**

MW 2-3:20 PM, Kauke 141

Sarah Mirza

Office hours: MWF 1-2 PM, Kauke 005

This course is about a particular subfield in Islamic Studies that is highly politicized, prone to vicious infighting, home to ultra-skeptical arguments that challenge the conventional history of the origins of Islam, as well as brilliant historical insights and circuitous reasoning alike. There is a lot to be learned from this, in relation to both methods applied in the history of Islam and the discipline of Religious Studies. We will be repeatedly introduced to the conventional/“traditionalist” history of the origins of Islam as based on classical Islamic sources, usually by way of our authors dismissing it, and that will be the extent of our exposure to it. Our focus instead will be on methods and evidence used by scholars of Islamic Origins, organized under various topics of debate. This course demands that you be open to seriously considering extremely skeptical arguments, as well as examining how a single inscription on a coin or building can overturn an entire historical narrative. The course is reading intensive, and the readings are highly technical. I will help you navigate them, concerning both their overarching concerns and details, but I expect you to read them in relation to each other and to develop interest, early on in the semester, in tracing the history of particular arguments as the subjects of your papers.

Though this class does not require you to have previous background in Islam, it is methodologically advanced and requires that you have some experience reading highly specialized literature in Religious Studies or Historiography.

Keep these questions in mind as you prepare for discussion:

1. How is the historical evidence used and which methods are applied to its analysis?

2. Does any given argument characterize Islamic Origins as an unusual historical case?

3. Which larger academic frameworks are being applied to a particular argument (including influence from other fields)?

4. What are the criteria for historical accuracy used by a given argument, and what should our criteria in this field be?

Required materials:

Fred Donner, *Muhammad* *and the Believers* (Belknap, 2012) **ISBN-13:** 978-0674064140

Donner is a key figure in the field of Islamic Origins, and we will be reading his latest book in its entirety. Use this book throughout the course to get your bearings in the overall narrative of Islamic Origins.

All readings except for Donner's book are available on Voices: http://islamorigins.voices-old.wooster.edu/

Password for readings: goldziher

It is your responsibility to obtain the readings for the paper assignments.

Assessment:

quizzes: 13 @ 7 points each (91 points)

influence map: 4 points

influence paper: 85 points

bibliography: 20 points

final paper: 100 points

total: 300 points

More than one unexcused absence results in one letter grade dropped for every absence thereafter. If you spend class time on your phone or laptop, you are absent.

Once a week you will be given a quiz dealing with the thesis of one or more of the day's readings. Guiding reading questions are posted along with the readings, on Voices. Keep these questions in mind, for each source:

When and where does the author locate Islamic origins?

What are the principle counter-arguments to the author's thesis?

Which primary sources are being used?

**Individual students will be assigned responsibility for starting off the following week's discussion through raising an issue of interest to them in the reading.**

If you are absent with a valid excuse (illness, family emergency), it is your responsibility to schedule a make-up quiz with me *prior to the next class session*. Failure to do so will result in the loss of all points for that quiz. Make-up quizzes will feature different questions from those given in class.

I expect you to bring hard copies of the readings to class. If you require any accommodations for learning disabilities, please inform me.

Be aware of the definition of plagiarism and the penalties at Wooster:

<https://www.wooster.edu/students/diversity/oisa/academic-concerns/integrity/>

Readings Schedule:

assignment due dates and books that we will read in their entirety are given in **bold**

readings may be subject to change based on class progress

1. Conventional Narrative and historiographical problems

* Week 1

Aug 22

A brief history of Islamic Origins

* Week 2

Aug 27

Robinson, blog post “History and Heilsgeschichte in early Islam: Some observations on prophetic history and biography”

Günther, “Assessing the Sources of Classical Arabic Compilations: The Issue of Categories and Methodologies”

Aug 29

Hughes, Abrahamic Religions: on the uses and abuses of history, ch 6 and conclusion

Al-Azmeh, The Arabs and Islam in late antiquity ch 1

1. Historical Muhammad and locale of nascent Islam

* Week 3

Sept 3

Hagen, review of Nagel “The Imagined and the Historical Muhammad”

Crone, "What do we actually know about Mohammed?"

Sept 5

Hoyland, “Writing the Biography of the Prophet Muhammad: Problems and Solutions”

1. Origins of the Qur’an and the Qur’an in Context

* Week 4

Sept 10

Steenbrink, “New Orientalist suggestions on the origins of Islam”

Luling, A Challenge to Islam for Reformation, Intro and excerpts

Sept 12

Luxenberg, The Syro-Aramaic Reading of the Qur’an excerpts

Wild, "Lost in Philology? The Virgins of Paradise and the Luxenberg Hypothesis"

**choices for Influence Paper due (failure to submit your choice on time will result in the loss of 10 points on the paper)**

* Week 5

Sept 17

Sperl, “ The Literary Form of Prayer: Qur'ān sūra One, the Lord's Prayer and a Babylonian Prayer to the Moon God”

van Bladel, “Heavenly cords and prophetic authority in the Quran and its Late Antique context”

Younes, “ Charging Steeds or Maidens Doing Good Deeds? A Re-Interpretation of Qurʾān 100 (al-ʿādiyāt)”

Sept 19

Shoemaker "Christmas in the Qur'an: The Qur'anic account of Jesus' nativity and Palestinian local tradition"

**Influence map due**

* Week 6

Sept 24

Griffith, “al-Nasara in the Qur’an”

Crone, “Jewish Christianity in the Qur’an” part 1

Sept 26

El-Badawi, The Qur’an and the Aramaic Gospel Tradition ch 1

Al-Azmeh, address to IQRA meeting 2013, “Implausibility and Probability in Studies of Qur’anic Origins”

1. Islam as messianic movement, social movement, or economic and ecological factors

* Week 7

Oct 1

**Crone and Cook, Hagarism** ch 1-5

Oct 3

**Crone and Cook, Hagarism**, skim ch 6-7, read ch 8-9

**influence paper due**

FALL BREAK

* Week 8

Oct 15

**Crone and Cook, Hagarism**, ch 10-12

Oct 17

**Crone and Cook, Hagarism** ch 13-14

Wansbrough, review of Hagarism

* Week 9

Oct 22

Crone, Meccan Trade, Introduction and Conclusion

**Bibliography for final paper due**

1. The nature of religious identity

Oct 24

Wansbrough, The Sectarian Milieu, ch 3 “Identity”

* Week 10

Oct 29

**Donner, Muhammad and the Believers,** ch 1-2

Oct 31

**Donner, Muhammad and the Believers,** ch 3-4

* Week 11

Nov 5

**Donner, Muhammad and the Believers,** ch 5

Nov 7

Elad review of Donner, “Community of Believers..." part 1 and part 2.8 and conclusion

**bring in a review of Donner or an essay by him to discuss**

* Week 12

1. The effects of polity

Nov 12

Johns, “Archaeology and the History of Early Islam: The First Seventy Years”

Hoyland "New documentary texts..."

Nov 14

Luxenberg, “A new interpretation of the Arabic inscription in Jerusalem’s Dome of the Rock”

Darling, “’The Vicegerent of God, from Him We Expect Rain’: The Incorporation of the Pre-Islamic State in Early Islamic Political Culture”

* Week 13

Nov 19

Nevo and Koren, Crossroads to Islam ch 3-5

Foss, review of Crossroads to Islam

THANKSGIVING RECESS

* Week 14

Nov 26

Whelan, “Evidence for early codification of the Qur’an”

1. Uniqueness of Prophethood, or Not?

Nov 28

Makin, Representing the Enemy short excerpts

Makin, "Sharing the concept of God..."

* Week 15

Dec 3

Margoliouth, “Origin and import of the names Muslim and Hanif”

Rubin, “Hanafiyya and Ka’ba”

Dec 5

Jacques, “Munafiqqun and Hanafiyya”

Dec 12, 3 PM

**final paper due, in hard copy at my office**

Paper Assignments:

Late paper assignments will suffer a 2 point deduction per calendar day late. If the paper is submitted within 24 hours of the deadline, 1 point is deducted.

For each of these assignments you must ascertain that all of your sources are academic ones, as plenty of authors write best-selling and popular books on "Islamic Origins" (e.g. Tom Holland, Bat Ye'or, Robert Spencer, etc.). Nor should you be reading texts written for use in religious instruction for believers.

For both papers, you will need to obtain and read some books in their entirety. Most of these are available only through CONSORT or OhioLink and need to be requested online. They may take more than a week to arrive. Ask me or the Library Help Desk for help in requesting books and PLAN IN ADVANCE!!

**Influence map:**

In preparation for the Influence paper, submit your list of sources to review: two critical influences on your text, and two later sources that your text has influenced.

**Influence Paper:**

Trace the responses to and influence of one critical text (how the sources talk to each other).

6-7 pages, 12 point Times Roman font

All references must be provided with in-text citations in either MLA or Chicago Style; a bibliography of all texts used must be provided. Needless to say, internet sources must be avoided like the plague.

You must trace at least two critical influences on the text in question, and the use, influence, rebuttal, etc., of that text in at least two later sources. This paper must show that you both understand the significance to the field of the text your are tracing, as well as the primary theses and methods of the other sources you use. You may use book reviews to help situate yourself and understand the debates, but your analysis of the sources must be based on intensive use of the authors' own arguments.

A. Wansbrough, Qur'anic Studies or The Sectarian Milieu

B. Crone, Meccan Trade

C. Nevo and Koren, Crossroads to Islam

D. Luxenberg, The Syro-Aramaic Reading of the Qur'an

E. Luling, A Challenge to Islam for Reformation

**Working bibliography on one your final paper choice:**

Supply a list of 10 primary sources with their locations and dates (literary and documentary), and at least 10 secondary sources, 3 of which must be books. The bibliography should show that you recognize the relationship between various secondary sources and have identified the key texts on the issue you are studying. (hint: track these relationships through the introductions of books and through footnotes)

**Final Paper**

10 pages, 12 point Times Roman font, utilizing 10 secondary sources, at least 3 of which must be books. All 10 sources must be used in a substantial way in your paper, rather than as random or unsubstantial references and quotations. All references must be provided with in-text citations in either MLA or Chicago Style; a bibliography of all texts used must be provided. Even though some of these academics blog and grant interviews, internet sources will not be the subject of analysis here and must be avoided like the plague.

You have three different types of papers as options:

A. Methodology: compare/contrast the conclusions arrived at through two different methods and argue for which is less problematic or more insightful. You must identify which precise historical questions these methods are applied to.

i) linguistic/textual

ii) archaeological

iii) numismatic

iv) epigraphic

v) use of non-Muslim literary sources to interrogate Muslim literary sources

vi) literary/rhetorical analysis of texts or scripture as literature

vii) borrowing and foreign parallels

viii) historical precedents and contact

B. Arguments: considering at least four different arguments on one of these issues, explain which conclusions can be accepted and which cannot and why.

i) location of Muhammad in the Hijaz

ii) Jewish messianism and eschatology as formative to Islam

iii) the meaning and target audience of the Dome of the Rock inscriptions

iv) explanations for earliest documentary sources that mention Muhammad

v) conclusions of non-Muslim literary sources for the Prophetic era

vi) evidence for early and late codification of the Qur'an

vii) the extent of the religious reforms of 'Abd al-Malik

C. Book Review: provide a thorough study of one entire book that takes the argument of the book apart using other sources. Your book review must address political and academic motivations for the argument being made in the book, through making consistent connections between political and academic methods. Your study of motivations must be based entirely on evidence and not on speculation. Correlating political and academic methods is more difficult than it sounds; speculation, assumptions, and "commonsense" or "logical" arguments will not be countenanced. This is a paper topic that is easy for students to fail. Note that you will not only need to cover the entire book but also any related work or evidence by the author(s) that show development of their views.

i) Meccan Trade

ii) A Challenge to Islam for Reformation

iii) The Syro-Aramaic Reading of the Qur'an

iv) Qur'anic Studies or The Sectarian Milieu

v) The Death of a Prophet

vi) Representing the Enemy

vii) Crossroads to Islam

viii) Ohlig and Puin, all works in English

ix) Popp, all works in English

**This paper should have a precise thesis and argument and directly address the question set. It must critically evaluate the validity of the academic source materials used, rather than simply accepting them as true and valid by default, and show sophisticated, balanced, comprehensive and nuanced understanding of the subject matter at hand, and the academic debates about it. It should follow methodological standards, show an awareness of wider academic theory and self-criticism, as well as historical primary source criticism, and an understanding of the limitations of the utility of certain sources, as well as the limitations of our knowledge as academics as a result of the methods and sources we have used. Claims in the paper should be consistently referenced (within the text; a citation in the bibliography is not sufficient) and substantiated with supporting academic material. The tone and language should be precise, to a good standard of written English, and written in a suitable academic tone and style. Grade A papers will offer an original synthesis of or critical insight into the academic source material used, rather than simply repeating it or siding with one particular author.**