Overview of Course / Learning Goals

This course is a thorough investigation of the female figures who are mentioned in the Qur'an. In this context, we give attention to the wide-ranging depictions of femaleness, including in sexual relations, in kinship relations, in divine-human relationships, and with regard to female embodiment and social roles. We explore how females—old, young, barren, fertile, chaste, profligate, reproachable, and saintly—enter Qur’anic sacred history and advance the Qur’an’s overarching didactic aims. We cover narratives of sacred history, parables, and stories that allude to particular events said to have occurred in the nascent Muslim polity.

Students will gain a greater facility with Qur’anic didactic themes, will probe core issues related to gender and sexuality in the Qur’an, and will consider potential ethical and ministerial implications of the course themes. Students will also gain skills in the area of academic writing and analysis of the Qur’an. Where relevant, students will have opportunities to hone preaching using tropes within the stories that we cover and/or opportunities to consider how to work with these texts in Muslim and/or interfaith contexts. The course is particularly suited to those who have prior Qur'anic studies exposure; however, accommodations will be made for those who are newer to the discipline who would still like to take the course.

Readings and Course Materials


All other required materials for this course are supplied in PDF and online. Each week you are responsible for closely reading the required readings listed on the syllabus for that day. In general, read the Qur’anic verses in the order listed on the syllabus as we will be paying attention to patterns in the revelatory order of Qur’anic verses as well as to their content. Please read the scriptural selections carefully and thoroughly and in the original Arabic if possible. General recommended books and resources are listed at the end of the syllabus. Students are expected to prepare for class by browsing the online discussion forums in advance of the lecture to facilitate the creation of a learning community.
Grading and Assignments

1) Weekly Discussion Post & Comments on other students’ posting (total 70%)

Most weeks students will post a reflection (approximately 200 words) in response to a prompt or on an angle of their choosing. These reflections should be polished and well written, as if for an online publication such as a professional blog. (Use short citations for course materials and full citations for any sources not included on the syllabus or supplemental reading list.) You need only post for a total of 7 weeks; the weeks you post are of your choosing. These reflections are due by 10pm on the Sunday before the class meets - see course portal for further details and rubric.

Each week you will comment (approximately 100 words) on the posting of at least two other students in class. This is due by 12:00pm on the Monday the class meets. Your comments should be constructive, professional, and well written. Note that promptness in online submissions also factor in the evaluation, but extensions are available upon request.

2) Final Course Product: Sermon, op-ed, detailed research proposal or lesson plan - (total 20%)

This assignment is an opportunity to apply your learning in the course to serve your own congregation, constituents, or particularly niche scholarly audience. The sermon, op-ed, or detailed two-hour lesson plan (approximately 1500 words) should explicitly draw upon the course themes and texts. A draft of this assignment (approximately 750 words) is due in the appropriate online discussion forum by Monday, March 25th at 12:00pm. You will receive instructor and peer feedback to take into consideration as you revise your work. You should incorporate the feedback and submit to the instructor on the appropriate online forum your final product by April 22nd (contact me in advance if you will need an extension until April 29th or May 6th). Extensions beyond May 6th are granted only for extenuating circumstances.

Between March 25th and April 8th – plan to offer feedback (approximately 100 words each) on the final product draft of at least five of your peers. The quality and general timeliness of your feedback is factored into your final project evaluation. Comments should be professional and well written. See the course portal for details and evaluation rubric.

Students will also discuss their final product before the class in the last weeks of the course. This is a colloquium-style discussion, not a formal conference-style presentation.

3) Reflection on Learning - (total 10%)

Before 10pm on Sunday, April 28th upload your polished final product along with a self-reflection on your learning (of approximately 250– 500 words) that reflects in some way upon your growth over the course. Where were areas in which you grew intellectually or spiritually? What lingering questions do you have? How do you expect to apply the knowledge that you gained in your further education or professional calling? This reflection might even take the form of a work of poetry, visual art, or another such creative expression.
Policy and Accommodations
Students are expected to fully and completely adhere to the academic honesty policy of Hartford Seminary. Please inform me at the beginning of the course of any necessary accommodations. Note that reoccurring late work or absenteeism may result in a grade deduction, but extensions are granted for legitimate reasons. Please request extensions in a timely manner, as circumstances allow.

COURSE SCHEDULE

Week 1 — Introductory Lecture – Jan. 28th
1) Read in advance essays by Mattson, Lumbard, Haleem and Saleh in SQ, pp. 1587–1658. Come prepared to discuss any issues in these reading for which you would like further clarification. These readings are beneficial for all students but especially important for those with little prior exposure to the Qur’ān and/or the academic study of the Qur’ān.
2) Post to the discussion board: What drew you to this class? In what contexts have you studied the Qur’ān before this class? What do you hope to learn from this course on an intellectual and/or professional sphere?

Week 2 — The Qur’ān in the Arabian Context – Feb. 4th
1) Qur’ān: Read Sūrat al-Masad (111) and Sūrat al-Falaq (113) along with related commentary in SQ; come prepared to discuss figure of Imra’ at Abī Lahab (the wife of Abī Lahab), who is known in the early secondary sources as Arwā Umm Jamīl bint Ḥarb; note as well as al-Naffāthāti fī al-ʿUqad (the blowers [f.] on knots)
2) Browse handout entitled “Dramatis Personae” in order to familiarize yourself with the Qur’ānic female figures
3) If you have little prior exposure, familiarize yourself with a biographical work on the Prophet Muhammad; see me for recommendations.

Week 3 — Introduction of Prophets and Families in Early Qur’ānic Verses – Feb. 11th
1) Qur’ān: Read Sūrat Sād (38) and browse commentary in SQ; note how different figures and their families are mentioned
2) Browse handout entitled “Qur’ānic Female Figures and Families by Surah and Approximate Revelatory Sequence”

Week 4 — Qur’ānic Cosmology, Teleology, and Qur’ānic Narrative Structure – Feb. 18th
1) Qur’ān: Read Sūrat al-ʿArāf (7) and browse commentary in SQ; pay close attention to the figures mentioned, to the settings of events, to the role of dialogue in advancing the narrative, and to the reoccurring didactic themes
2) Qur’ān: Read, Sūrat Ṭā Hā (20) verses 98–135 and browse commentary in SQ; pay close attention to verses 117–23
3) Qur’ān: Read Sūrat al-Baqarah (2) verses 21–48 and browse commentary in SQ; pay close attention to verses 30–39
Week 5 — More Matriarchs in Meccan Qur’anic Retellings of Sacred History – Feb. 25th

1) Qur’an: Read Sūrat Maryam (19) and browse commentary in SQ; pay close attention to depictions of the following figures/families: Imra’at Zakariyyā (wife of Zachariah), Āl Ya’qūb (House of Jacob), Maryam (Mary), Ahl Maryam (family of Mary), Umm and Abū Maryam (mother and father of Mary), Ibn Maryam (Mary’s Son, Jesus), Ahl Ismā’īl (family of Ishmael)

2) Qur’an: Read Sūrat Āl ‘Imrān (3) verses 1–66 and browse commentary in SQ; pay close attention to depictions of Āl ‘Imrān (the House/Family of ‘Imrān) and to the different figures mentioned; how do the overarching themes of Sūrat Āl ‘Imrān compare and contrast to the themes in Sūrat Maryam?

Week 5 — Matriarchs in Meccan Qur’an cont. – March 4th

1) Qur’an: Read Sūrat Ṭā Hā (20) verses 1–55 and browse commentary in SQ – pay close attention to the nature of the communication between God and Moses

2) Qur’an: Read Sūrat al-Naml (27) verses 1–14 and browse commentary in SQ

3) Qur’an: Read Sūrat al-Qaṣaṣ (28) verses 1–29 and browse commentary in SQ – pay close attention to the many different female figures in this narrative, including Umm Mūsā (mother of Moses), Ukht Mūsā (sister of Moses), al-Mardā’i (the wet nurses), Imra’at al-Fir’ awn (known in the commentary tradition as Āsiyah), Imra’atāni min Madyan (two women of Midian, Moses’s future wife and her sister), and the mention of Ahl Mūsā (family of Moses)

Week 6 — Women and the Work of Prophets – March 11th

1) Qur’an: Read Sūrat Shu‘arā (26) and browse commentary in SQ; pay attention to the depictions of the she-camel, of Ahl Lūṭ (family of Lot), and the mention of ’ashīratika al-’aqrabīn (your [Muhammad’s] closest kin); compared to other retellings of sacred history that we have seen, what is the driving message of this sura?

2) Qur’an: Read Sūrat al-Naml (27) re-read beginning verses, finish the sura, and browse commentary in SQ; pay attention to the overarching themes across the narratives in this sura and pay attention to the following figures/families: Ahl Mūsā (family of Moses), Wālidā Sulaymān (parents of Solomon), Malikat Saba’ (Queen of Sheba), Ahl Sāliḥ (family of Šāliḥ), Āl Lūṭ (House of Lot), Ahl Lūṭ (the family of Lot), Imra’at Lūṭ (wife of Lot); what are the driving themes of this sura? How does this sura build upon Sūrat al-Shu‘arā?

3) Qur’an: Read Sūrat Hūd (11) and browse commentary in SQ; pay attention to the following figures/families in particular: Ahl bayt Ibrāhīm (family of the House of Abraham), Imra’at Ibrāhīm (wife of Abraham), Ahl Nūḥ (family of Noah), Banāt Lūṭ (daughters of Lot); what are the driving themes of this sura? How does this sura build upon previous accounts of these figures?
Week 6 — Women and the Work of Prophets, cont. — March 18th

1) Qur’an: Read Sūrat al-Ḥijr (15) verses 49–99; how do the depictions of Abraham and the family of Lot compare and contrast with previous depictions?
2) Qur’an: Read Sūrat al-Dhāriyāt (51) and browse commentary in SQ; what new information does this sura add to the stories we have previously seen?
3) Review handout on female speech in the Qur’an and review readings from the previous week; our conversations on these figures continue. Also, work on draft final project ideas to have posted in the appropriate online forum by next week, March 25.

Week 8 — Gender and Family Dynamics – March 25th

1) Qur’an: Read Sūrat Yūsuf (12) and browse commentary in SQ; pay particular attention to mentions of Āl Yaʿqūb (House of Jacob), Imra’at ʿAzīz Miṣr (wife of the viceroy of Egypt), Niswatun fī-l-madīnah (women of the town), Ahl Yaʿqūb (family of Jacob), and Abawā Yūsuf (parents of Joseph)
2) Make sure that your final project proposal is posted into the appropriate online forum.

Week 9 — Family of the Prophet Muhammad – April 1st

1) Qur’an: Read Sūrat al-Ahzāb (33) and browse commentary in SQ; pay particular attention to mentions of Ummahāt al-Muʾminīn (Mothers of the Believers, i.e., wives of the Prophet Muhammad), Azwāj al-Nabī (wives of the Prophet, i.e., Muhammad), Ahl al-Bayt (family or “people of the house” of the Prophet Muhammad) and Nisāʾ al-Nabī (women of the Prophet, i.e., Prophet Muhammad)
2) Qur’an: Read Sūrat al-Taḥrīm (66) and browse commentary in SQ; come prepared to discuss the structure and themes of this sura in detail

Week 10 — Other Female Followers of the Prophet Muhammad – April 8th

1) Qur’an: Read Sūrat al-Muntahanah (60), Sūrat al-Ṭalāq (65), Sūrat al-Mujādilah (58), Sūrat al-Ḥijurāt (49), and browse related commentary in SQ
2) Qur’an: Read Sūrat al-Nūr (24) verses 1–36, Sūrat al-Nisāʾ (4) verses 1–36, and browse commentary in SQ; in what ways do the issues presented in these verses relate to other suras we have read?

Week 11 — No class due to Reading Days – April 15th

There are no new reading assignments to allow for work on “final products” for the course; the remainder of course meetings will be devoted to workshopping/presenting. Please be mindful of deadlines and be sure to sign up for a week to discuss your work.

Week 12 — Final Projects Due & Project Presentations – April 22nd

Week 13 — Continuing Final Project Presentations – April 29th

Week 14 — Finishing Final Project Presentations and Concluding Course – May 6th