

LECTURE 5: A VERY SHORT INTRODUCTION TO READING THE QUR'AN

1 European Readers of the Qur'an

- Whether or not to translate is theological point
- First Latin translation in 1143 by Robert of Ketton
- First translated into English in 1734 by George Sale
- Thomas Carlyle said of Qur'an "it is as toilsome reading as I ever undertook. A wearisome confused jumble, crude, incondite; endless iterations, long-windedness, entanglement...Nothing but a sense of duty could carry any European through the Koran."¹
- New investigations in mid-19thC with Theodor Nöldeke: construct the Qur'an chronologically
- Suggested chronology: Ernst (p39ff) & [Comparative Index to Islam : QUR'AN \(answering-islam.org\)](http://ComparativeIndextoIslam:QUR'AN(answering-islam.org)):

Surah No.	Surah Name	English Name	No. of Verses	Place	Chronological Order
1	Al-Fatihah	The Opening	7	Mecca	5
2	Al-Baqarah	The Cow	286	Madina	87
3	Âl 'Imran	The Family of 'Imran	200	Madina	89
4	An-Nisa'	Women	176	Madina	92
5	Al-Ma'idah	The Table	120	Madina	112
6	Al-An`am	The Cattle	165	Mecca	55
7	Al-A`raf	The Elevated Places	206	Mecca	39
8	Al-Anfal	The Spoils of War	75	Madina	88
9	At-Taubah	Repentance	129	Madina	113
10	Yunus	Jonah	109	Mecca	51
11	Hud	Hud	123	Mecca	52
12	Yusuf	Joseph	111	Mecca	53
13	Al-Ra`d	The Thunder	43	Madina	96
14	Ibrahim	Abraham	52	Mecca	72
15	Al-Hijr	The Rock	99	Mecca	54
16	An-Nahl	The Bee	128	Mecca	70
17	Bani Isra'il	The Israelites	111	Mecca	50

¹ Quoted in Ernst, *How to read the Qur'an*, 23.

18	Al-Kahf	The Cave	110	Mecca	69
19	Maryam	Mary	98	Mecca	44
20	Ta Ha	Ta Ha	135	Mecca	45
21	Al-Anbiya'	The Prophets	112	Mecca	73
22	Al-Hajj	The Pilgrimage	78	Madina	103
23	Al-Mu'minun	The Believers	118	Mecca	74
24	An-Nur	The Light	64	Madina	102
25	Al-Furqan	The Criterion	77	Mecca	42
26	Ash-Shu`ara'	The Poets	227	Mecca	47
27	An-Naml	The Ant	93	Mecca	48
28	Al-Qasas	The Narrative	88	Mecca	49
29	Al-`Ankabut	The Spider	69	Mecca	85
30	Ar-Rum	The Romans	60	Mecca	84
31	Luqman	Lukman	34	Mecca	57
32	As-Sajdah	The Adoration	30	Mecca	75
33	Al-Ahzab	The Allies	73	Madina	90
34	Saba'	Sheba	54	Mecca	58
35	Fatir	The Creator	45	Mecca	43
36	Ya Sin	Ya Sin	83	Mecca	41
37	As-Saffat	The Rangers	182	Mecca	56
38	Sad	Sad	88	Mecca	38
39	Az-Zumar	The Companies	75	Mecca	59
40	Al-Mu'min	The Forgiving One	85	Mecca	60
41	Ha Mim	Ha Mim	54	Mecca	61
42	Ash-Shura	The Counsel	53	Mecca	62
43	Az-Zukhruf	The Embellishment	89	Mecca	63
44	Ad-Dukhan	The Evident Smoke	59	Mecca	64
45	Al-Jathiyah	The Kneeling	37	Mecca	65
46	Al-Ahgaf	The Sandhills	35	Mecca	66
47	Muhammad	Muhammad	38	Madina	95
48	Al-Fath	The Victory	29	Madina	111
49	Al-Hujurat	The Chambers	18	Madina	106
50	Qaf	Qaf	45	Mecca	34
51	Adh-Dhariyat	The Scatterers	60	Mecca	67
52	At-Tur	The Mountain	49	Mecca	76
53	An-Najm	The Star	62	Mecca	23
54	Al-Qamr	The Moon	55	Mecca	37
55	Ar-Rahman	The Merciful	78	Madina	97
56	Al-Waqi`ah	That Which is Coming	96	Mecca	46

57	Al-Hadid	The Iron	29	Madina	94
58	Al-Mujadilah	She Who Pleaded	22	Madina	105
59	Al-Hashr	The Exile	24	Madina	101
60	Al-Mumtahanah	She Who is Tested	13	Madina	91
61	As-Saff	The Ranks	14	Madina	109
62	Al-Jum`ah	The Day of Congregation	11	Madina	110
63	Al-Munafiqun	The Hypocrites	11	Madina	104
64	At-Taghabun	The Cheating	18	Madina	108
65	At-Talaq	The Divorce	12	Madina	99
66	At-Tahrim	The Prohibition	12	Madina	107
67	Al-Mulk	The Kingdom	30	Mecca	77
68	Al-Qalam	The Pen	52	Mecca	2
69	Al-Haqqah	The Inevitable	52	Mecca	78
70	Al-Ma`arij	The Ladders	44	Mecca	79
71	Nuh	Noah	28	Mecca	71
72	Al-Jinn	The Jinn	28	Mecca	40
73	Al-Muzammil	The Mantled One	20	Mecca	3
74	Al-Mudathir	The Clothed One	56	Mecca	4
75	Al-Qiyamah	The Resurrection	40	Mecca	31
76	Ad-Dahr	The Time	31	Madina	98
77	Al-Mursalat	The Emissaries	50	Mecca	33
78	An-Naba'	The Tidings	40	Mecca	80
79	An-Naziat	Those Who Pulled Out	46	Mecca	81
80	`Abasa	He Frowned	42	Mecca	24
81	At-Takwir	The Cessation	29	Mecca	7
82	Al-Infitar	The Cleaving Asunder	19	Mecca	82
83	At-Tatfif	The Defrauders	36	Mecca	86
84	Al-Inshiqaq	The Rending	25	Mecca	83
85	Al-Buruj	The Constellations	22	Mecca	27
86	At-Tariq	The Night-Comer	17	Mecca	36
87	Al-A`la	The Most High	19	Mecca	8
88	Al-Ghashiyah	The Overwhelming Calamity	26	Mecca	68
89	Al-Fajr	The Dawn	30	Mecca	10
90	Al-Balad	The City	20	Mecca	35
91	Ash-Shams	The Sun	15	Mecca	26
92	Al-Layl	The Night	21	Mecca	9
93	Ad-Duha	The Early Hours	11	Mecca	11

94	Al-Inshirah	The Expansion	8	Mecca	12
95	At-Tin	The Fig	8	Mecca	28
96	Al-`Alaq	The Clot	19	Mecca	1
97	Al-Qadr	The Majesty	5	Mecca	25
98	Al-Bayyinah	The Proof	8	Madina	100
99	Al-Zilzal	The Shaking	8	Madina	93
100	Al-`Adiyat	The Assaulters	11	Mecca	14
101	Al-Qari`ah	The Terrible Calamity	11	Mecca	30
102	At-Takathur	Worldly Gain	8	Mecca	16
103	Al-`Asr	Time	3	Mecca	13
104	Al-Humazah	The Slanderer	9	Mecca	32
105	Al-Fil	The Elephant	5	Mecca	19
106	Al-Quraysh	The Quraish	4	Mecca	29
107	Al-Ma'un	The Daily Necessaries	7	Mecca	17
108	Al-Kauthar	Abundance	3	Mecca	15
109	Al-Kafirun	The Unbelievers	6	Mecca	18
110	An-Nasr	The Help	3	Madina	114
111	Al-Lahab	The Flame	5	Mecca	6
112	Al-Ikhlās	Purity (of Faith)	4	Mecca	22
113	Al-Falaq	The Daybreak	5	Mecca	20
114	An-Nas	Mankind	6	Mecca	21

- Early commentators suggest different chronologies
 - See also Islam Dayeh “Al-Haswamim: Intertextuality and Coherence in Meccan Surahs, in Angelika Neuwirth et al *The Qur’an in Context*, pp461-498 and James White *How to read the Qur’an* pp52-53

2 Literary and Historical Readings of Surah 18 The Cave

- What did you think of surahs 3, 18 and 19?
- Qur’an usually read thematically/systematically, but can be read as whole surahs – can you discern a structure to the surah 18? What are its themes?

2a) A Literary Reading (based on Ernst)

- Surah 18 “most mythical” section of Qur’an
- Has “ring composition”:

1-2 book without crookedness

109 ink = book image

2 warning to unbelievers

102-6 warning to unbelievers

2-3 promise of paradise to faithful

107-8 paradise promised to faithful

4-5 rejects incarnation

110 Md only a man inspired by God

5 deceitful ancestral tradition

109 limitless words of God’s revelation

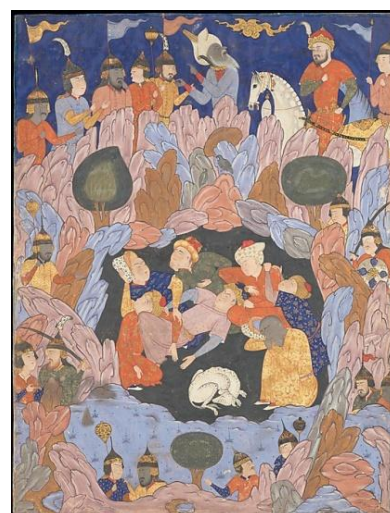
6 consolation to rejected-messenger

110 assurance that he is inspired

8 sign of earth’s beauty is a test

105 sign as object of disbelief

- 9-31 (24 verses) The sleepers:
 - Rip van Winkel?
 - 7 Sleepers of Ephesus from Jacob Sarug (450-521) about believers in reign of Decius (249-51)



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- 32-59 Parables and Debate (28 verses)
- 60-82 Story of Moses and al-Khidr (24 verses)
 - Al-Khidr / The Green One is a mysterious, deathless prophet who teaches Moses.
 - Sufis use this story to show need for mystical experience
- 83-101 The Horned-One (Dhul al Qarnain) 20 verses
 - 2 horns of ram = Ammon = Zeus = Alexander the Great
 - Alexander as archetypal world ruler



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² "The Seven Sleepers of Ephesus ", Folio from a Falnama (Book of Omens) c1550s Iran. No pages. Cited 27th February 2023. Online: ["The Seven Sleepers of Ephesus", Folio from a Falnama \(Book of Omens\) | The Metropolitan Museum of Art \(metmuseum.org\)](https://www.metmuseum.org)

³ No pages. Cited 27th February 2023. Online: [watchers04_09.jpg \(299×294\) \(bibliotecapleyades.net\)](https://www.bibliotecapleyades.net/imagenes_alien/watchers04_09.jpg) / https://www.bibliotecapleyades.net/imagenes_alien/watchers04_09.jpg.

- Supports morality and fact of judgement(!)
- Ernst: indicates breadth of appropriation of previous stories (cf Lecture 4 Handout)
- Commentator Muhammad Asad: aya 7 as key for surah “we have willed all beauty on earth be a means by which we put man to a test”
 - 7 Sleepers abandoned all for their faith
 - Moses and the sage show importance of intellect and truth-seeking
 - Horned-One shows world power and wealth is not in conflict with righteousness

2b) A Historical Reading

- Helpful literary analysis, but what about historical analysis?
- In Mecca, at time of opposition, maybe 5th year of Muhammad’s mission⁴
 - “Ask Muhammad: Who were sleepers in the cave? Who was the mighty king who reached the confines of both East and West? What is the Spirit?”
 - Muhammad promised to answer their questions tomorrow
 - cf aya23-24 and possible presumption on Muhammad’s part
 - Took 15 days to answer, and the question of the Spirit remained unanswered

3 Reading about Mary the Mother of Jesus (and Sister of Aaron?)

- Have done some literary criticism and some historical criticism, now for some source criticism
- Qur’an uses the Bible eg s7:54 re 6 day creation, but seems to get some things wrong
 - Who are surahs 3:33-64 and 19:1-40 about?
 - What is similar/different to the Bible’s account? How does Ezekiel 43 shed some light here?

⁴ Ibn Ishaq, *The Life of Muhammad*, transl by Alfred Guillaume (Karachi: OUP 2001), pp133-141. Ibn Ishaq 85-151AH/704-770AD, ed by Hisham d212 or 218AH/831 or 837AD, and in Tabari 224-310AH/843/929AD. This seems equivalent to 2-4 generations post-Apostolic. More useful information at [Ibn Ishaq - Wikipedia](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ibn_Ishaq) / https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ibn_Ishaq

- Individual stories of Mary and Zechariah in s19, become merged in s3
 - ?like in Luke 1-2?
 - And, Mary's mother vow for baby to end up in Temple s3:35 is like...(and apocryphal *Gospel of James/Infancy Gospel of James/Protoevangelium of James*, c. AD145)
- Seems odd, but not necessarily a Qur'anic invention:
 - S19:23-26 the birth of Jesus and the miraculous river is found in *Pseudo Gospel of Matthew* (c600-625)
 - Whole story of s19 is set in temple – cf Ezekiel 43:1-12, 44:1-3 and an anticipation of the Messiah⁵
 - Mary and Aaron being linked are also in *Pseudo Gospel of Matthew* and *Hymn of Ephrem* (Syrian, c306-373)⁶
 - “Hail Mary, O dove who bear the eagle of the old days! Hail Mary, pure and sacred young woman, O residence of the heavenly king! Hail Mary, Rod of Aaron! Hail Mary, closed gate that is not opened! Hail Mary, breathing temple of the exalted God! Hail Mary, rod of strength and lamp of light! Hail Mary, who received the greeting of Gabriel and gave life to the House of Adam!”⁷
 - Mary is related to Aaron in allegorical fashion in Ephrem's *Hymns on the Nativity*: “The Rod of Aaron flourished and the dry wood bore fruit. Its symbol today received its explanation: it is the virginal womb that bore.”⁸
 - Mary as unifier of Jews/Moses and Christians/Christ
 - Explains why Holy Spirit might be seen as Angel Gabriel⁹
- See ch9 of Michael Lodahl, *Claiming Abraham: reading the Bible and the Qur'an side by side*, Brazos Press, 2010 and Suleiman A Mourad “Mary in the Qur'an: A Reexamination of Her Presentation” in Reynolds, ed., *Qur'an in its Historical Context*, pp.163-174.

⁵ More “apocryphal” information here: [Golden Gate \(Jerusalem\) - Wikipedia](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Golden_Gate_(Jerusalem)) / [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Golden_Gate_\(Jerusalem\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Golden_Gate_(Jerusalem))

⁶ More information about him here: [Ephrem the Syrian - Wikipedia](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ephrem_the_Syrian) / https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ephrem_the_Syrian

⁷ Michael Marx, ‘Glimpses of Mariology in the Qur'an: from hagiography to theology via religious-political debate’, on p542 and 544 from the liturgy of the Syriac Orthodox Church, date unclear in Angelika Neuwirth, Nicolai Sinai, Michael Marx ed., *The Qur'an in Context, Historical and Literary Investigations into the Qur'anic Milieu* (Leiden: Brill, 2009). See [Chora_1200_983.jpg \(1200×983\) \(cornucopia.net\)](https://cornucopia.net) / [Chora_1200_983.jpg \(1200×983\) \(cornucopia.net\)](https://cornucopia.net) for some great art on this theme.

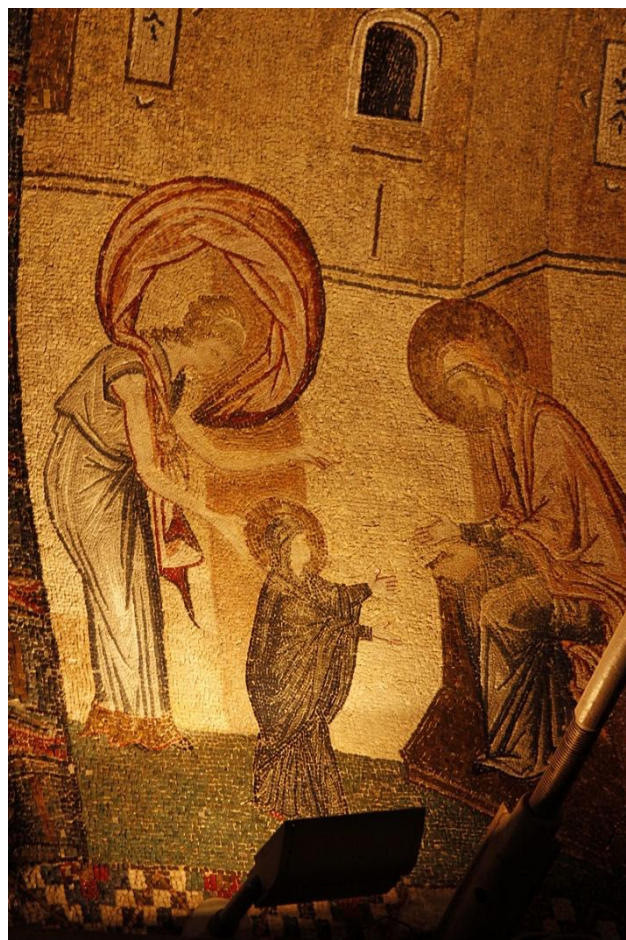
⁸ Marx, ‘Glimpses of Mariology’, p553.

⁹ Michael Lodahl, *Claiming Abraham: reading the Bible and the Qur'an side by side*, (Brazos Press, 2010), p142.



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¹⁰ By Gryffindor - Own work, Public Domain, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=2551539>

¹¹ By © José Luiz Bernardes Ribeiro / , CC BY-SA 3.0, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=16832738>



- Use of “Magnificat” in s3:26, but on Muhammad’s lips
 - As well as a “unifier”, Mary is used to challenge Christians to see Jesus truly as son of Mary and not as son of God AND to challenge Jews that Mary/Jesus are important
- “Qur’an was aware of oral traditions about biblical characters but not of the Bible itself”¹²
 - Makes no distinctions between traditions and canon eg calls characters by nicknames¹³ – recognised but not “loudly pushed” the logic of this¹⁴
- That said, could we be use surah 3 another way? Eg:

1: God be praised! Let us extol Him,
 He sent His beloved, to rescue us all through his name!
 Mary’s son, his name is Jesus,
 God sent him to save us, from all of our guilt and our shame!

2: The angels said, O Mary! God has chosen you,

¹² Gabriel Said Reynolds, *The Emergence of Islam: Classical Traditions in Contemporary Perspective*, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2012), pp126-133.

¹³ Reynolds, *Emergence of Islam*, p128.

¹⁴ Lodahl, *Claiming Abraham*, p109.

He's purified and made you holy, He selected you.
Above all other women, in all the Worlds He made,
He's chosen and preferred you, Mary, don't forget this word.

3: Read Surah Alé-Imran, the 42nd verse,
Listen to its secret, brothers, pay heed to the words,
If the mother is so great, then how much greater is the son!
The son of Mary's name is Jesus, he's God's holy one.¹⁵

4 A Slightly Thematic/Systematic Reading of Jesus in the Qur'an

- 275 references to Jesus according to www.quranbrowser.com/
- Surah 4:171: "O People of the Book! Do not exaggerate in your religion nor utter anything concerning God except the truth. The Messiah, Jesus son of Mary, was only a Messenger of God, and His Word, which He conveyed to Mary, and a spirit from Him. So believe in God and His Messengers, and say not 'Three' – Cease! (It is) better for you! God is only One God. Far is it removed from His transcendent majesty that He should have a son. His is all that is in the heavens and all that is in the earth. And God is sufficient as Defender." (Pickthall, 2005).
 - What can we agree with? What should we disagree with?
- Qur'anic "Positives":
 - - Prophet – Deuteronomy 18:15-22, 1 Kings 19:16, John 1:45, Acts 3:22-26, Hebrews 1:1f
 - Priest – Exodus 28:40-41, Leviticus 21:10-12, Zechariah 3, Hebrews 3-10
 - King – 1 Samuel 16:11-13, 2 Samuel 7:1-7, Psalm 2, Matthew 16:13-17, Acts 2
 - - Creative – Genesis 1, Psalm 33:6
 - Powerful & accomplishes God's purposes – Isaiah 55:10-11
 - With God and distinctly divine – John 1
 - Jesus also:
 - Created life, healed the sick and raised the dead (Surah 5:110)

¹⁵ Song written by Wycliffe Bible Translators in Sylhet, Bangladesh.

- Came with clear revelation (Surah 43:63)
 - Is a sign and mercy (Surah 19:21, 21:91)
 - Is righteous (Surah 19:19 cf all others who have sinned: Adam (7:22-23), Abraham (26:82), Moses (28:15-16), David (38:24-25), Jonah (37:141-144), Muhammad (48:1-2))
 - Will come back for judgment (Surah 43:61 and 4:159)
- But negatives too!
 - Not a son
 - Not crucified (surah 4:157)
 - “Islam represented a fourth theological/Christological position within the religious milieu of the seventh-century Middle East.”¹⁶
 - Neither Nestorian, Chalcedonian or Monophysite; but Arian-ish plus docetic/gnostic on Jesus’ death
 - Again, Islam cannot seem to deal with a God who is both transcendent and immanent, who is absolute and present, who is the God of Isaiah 57:15¹⁷ and John 1 – Islam doesn’t start with the revelation previously given and see “God from below” or “Jesus from below”
 - Emphasises physical link to Abraham eg surah 2:135
 - So, read the Qur’an with a friend?

5 Some Resources for Further Study

Ahmed, Hasanuddin, *Introducing the Quran – how to study and understand the Quran*, New Delhi: Goodword Books Pvt. Lt, 2004.

Cook, Michael, *The Koran a very short introduction*, Oxford: OUP, 2000.

Ernst, Carl W, *How to read the Qur’an, a new guide with select translations*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2011.

Hinds, Jeremy, *Qur’an Course*, via CMS, from: <http://www.word-of-life.org/category-s/113.htm>

¹⁶ Reynolds, *Emergence of Islam*, pp165-6 and Lodahl, *Claiming Abraham*, pp158-159.

¹⁷ See Richard Bauckham, *Jesus and the God of Israel* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2008) for much more detail.

Lodahl, Michael, *Claiming Abraham: reading the Bible and the Qur'an side by side*, Brazos Press, 2010.

Neuwirth, Sinai, Marx ed., *The Qur'an in Context, Historical and Literary Investigations into the Qur'anic Milieu*, Leiden: Brill, 2009. Particularly:

Michael Marx, "Glimpses of Mariology in the Qur'an: from hagiography to theology via religious-political debate", pp.533-564

Angelika Neuwirth, "The house of Abraham and the House of Amram: genealogy, patriarchal authority, and exegetical professionalism", pp.499-532

Gabriel Said Reynolds, "Reading the Qur'an As Homily: the case of Sarah's laughter" pp.585-592

Reynolds, Gabriel Said, *Qur'an in its Historical Context*, Oxford: Routledge, 2008

Gabriel Gabriel Said, *The Emergence of Islam: Classical Traditions in Contemporary Perspective*, Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2012

White, James R, *What Every Christian Needs to Know about the Qur'an*, Grand Rapids: Bethany House, 2013