

Culture in Perspective: the Near East and the Islamic World (A005152)

Course size *(nominal values; actual values may depend on programme)*

Credits 6.0

Study time 180 h

Course offerings and teaching methods in academic year 2026-2027

A (semester 2)

English

Gent

seminar

0.0h

lecture

independent work

Lecturers in academic year 2026-2027

Janssen, Caroline

LW21

lecturer-in-charge

Offered in the following programmes in 2026-2027

crdts

offering

Master of Science in Teaching in Languages(main subject Oriental Languages and Cultures)

6

A

Master of Arts in Oriental Languages and Cultures(main subject China)

6

A

Master of Arts in Oriental Languages and Cultures(main subject India)

6

A

Master of Arts in Oriental Languages and Cultures(main subject Japan)

6

A

Master of Arts in Oriental Languages and Cultures(main subject Middle East Studies)

6

A

Master of Arts in Global Studies

6

A

Exchange Programme Cultures and Languages in Context

6

A

Exchange Programme Global Studies and World Societies

6

A

Exchange Programme in Political and Social Sciences

6

A

Exchange Programme Oriental Languages and Cultures

6

A

Teaching languages

English

Keywords

Cultural history, Social history, history of mentalities, research perspectives, Arabic and Islamic Studies, Quranic Studies (the Qur'anic context), Arabic literature, Arabia, Near East, Ethiopia, cultural heritage

Position of the course

This course places well-defined themes from the culture/cultural history of the Near East and the world of Islam in a broad cultural perspective and analyses the dynamics of scholarly research from this point of view.

This course contributes to the following learning outcomes: 1.2, 1.3, 1.4, 1.5, 3.2, 3.3, 3.4, 5.1, 5.2, 5.3, 5.4, 5.5.

Contents

Culture in perspective is a course which focuses on the interpretation of complex themes. The student is familiarized with research perspectives and their impact on the outcome of an investigation. Complex relations between cultures are the focal point of this course.

Different themes are explored.

In the first part the interwovenness of the cultural traditions of the Near East and Arabia is the focal point. The central theme is the story of the Queen of Sheba and Solomon, whose story we follow from the Bible to the Quran, the Ethiopian Kebra Negast, to the Rastafari movement and Hollywood.

The second and most important part of this course is devoted to the Qur'anic discourse about prophets known from the Bible, in particular on Jesus and Mary, and research perspectives in the field of Early Qur'an Studies. Quranic passages

are interpreted in the late antique context. Due attention is paid to the shift in research that is the result of this approach and the new insights in the origins of the Quran from contemporary research.

A third part is devoted to the figure of Shaytan, fallen angels and demons. Here a kaleidoscopic image of Islamic culture is given: it includes the rituals of the hajj, the Quran, hadith, sufism, and literary perspectives. This is connected to the complex cultural heritage on which Islamic culture is based and the place of authors who seek out controversy.

A fourth theme that is briefly touched upon is the relation between Islam and the earth. We read the Islamic declaration on climate change and explore the theme of vegetarianism and Islam. This theme illustrates how scientists, policy makers and religious scholars attempt to strengthen their case.

Students elaborate a theme of their choice, within a given framework. The theme of the year will be announced at the beginning of the course. Students will be given the freedom to choose an orientation in accordance with their own interests and background.

This class normally includes Belgian and international students from different faculties which is an added value during class discussions.

Initial competences

This course is meant for advanced students. They have a BA level in Oriental Languages and cultures, or a minor in this field, or another field in which cross-fertilisation is possible (history, political studies, religious studies, anthropology, economics, ...). An open and critical attitude and curiosity about other cultures is essential. This course is also open for international students and will be taught in English.

Final competences

- 1 Students have an insight in the complex relations between Judaism, Christianity and the Quranic context.
- 2 Students realize that religions are diverse and have not always been what they are today; they understand that religion is more than a collection of dogmas.
- 3 Students know the main theories on the origin of the Quran and they can identify different research cultures. They have an insight in the complexity of the field.
- 4 Students learn how to be empathic and engage in the interreligious dialogue with respect for other people's opinions.
- 5 Students understand that daring to think means that one questions the existing order including results of research on a permanent basis.
- 6 Students can make a distinction between the Qur'anic context, the Qur'an as text and the interpretations of Qur'anic exegesis

Conditions for credit contract

Access to this course unit via a credit contract is unrestricted: the student takes into consideration the conditions mentioned in 'Starting Competences'

Conditions for exam contract

This course unit cannot be taken via an exam contract

Teaching methods

Seminar, Lecture, Independent work

Extra information on the teaching methods

Lectures: texts, historical backgrounds and perspectives are highlighted.

Seminars: Students are encouraged to respond and reflect, in the group, on choices and positions.

Independent work: there is a written assignment which is also presented in class.

Recorded classes: There are no recorded classes, but there are a detailed syllabus and powerpoints instead. Studying these materials independently is possible.

Students who cannot be present, structurally or over a longer time span, are asked to contact the instructor before the period of their absence start.

Study material

Type: Syllabus

Name: The Queen of Sheba, the Devil and Jesus and Mary in the Qur'an

Indicative price: Free or paid by faculty

Optional: no

Available on Ufora : Yes

Online Available : No

Available in the Library : No

Available through Student Association : No

References

- Abboud (2014), Husn Abboud, *Mary in the Qur'an. A Literary Reading*. London & New York.
- Anthony (2014), Sean W. Anthony, "Muhammad, the Keys to Paradise, and the *Doctrina Iacobi*: a Late Antique Puzzle." *Der Islam* 91, 2014, pp. 243-265.
- Bowersock (2013), Glen W. Bowersock, *The Throne of Adulis. Red Sea Wars on the Eve of Islam (Emblems of Antiquity)*. Oxford.
- Donner (2002-2003), Fred M. Donner, "From Believers to Muslims: Confessional Self-identity in the Early Islamic Community." *Al-Abhath* 50-51, 2002-2003, pp. 9-53.
- Dye (2015), Guillaume Dye, "The Qur'ān and Its Hypertextuality in Light of Redaction Criticism." *Paper for the Fourth Nangeroni Meeting on Early Islam: The Sectarian Milieu of Late Antiquity?* (online raadpleegbaar op https://www.academia.edu/12358270/The_Quran_and_its_Hypertextuality_in_Light_of_Redaction_Criticism).
- Janssen, C. (2018), Maria, Jesus en de keten van revelaties en profeten. Een hypothese wat de Koran *doet* met de protagonisten van het christendom, vanuit welke mogelijke gronden en met welk effect, Brussel. (Mary, Jesus and the chain of revelations and prophets: what the Quran does with the protagonists of Christianity, on what grounds, potentially, and to what effect).
- Khalidi, T. 2003: *The Muslim Jesus*, Harvard.
- Lange, Chr. 2016: *Paradise and Hell in Islamic Traditions*, Cambridge.
- Lange, Chr. 2017: *Mohammad. Perspectieven op de profeet*, Amsterdam. (Muhammad, perspectives on the prophet).
- Praet, D. 2024: *Satan. Een geschiedenis van de Duivel*, Ghent. (Satan, A History of the Devil).
- Robin (2015), Christian Robin: *Le judaïsme de l'Arabie antique*, Turnhout.
- Robin (2012), Christian Robin, "Arabia and Ethiopia." In: Scott Fitzgerald Johnson (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Late Antiquity*. Oxford, pp. 247-332.
- Rubin (1990), Uri Rubin, "*Ḥanīfiyya* and Ka'ba. An Inquiry into the Arabian Pre-Islamic Background of *dīn ibrahīm*." *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 13, 1990, pp. 85-111.
- Shoemaker (2003), Stephen J. Shoemaker, "Christmas in the Qur'ān. The Qur'ānic Account of Jesus' Nativity and Palestinian Local Tradition." *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam*, 2003, pp. 11-39.

Course content-related study coaching

Students can ask questions during and after class and through e-mail. They are encouraged to do so if they face problems.

Assessment moments

end-of-term and continuous assessment

Examination methods in case of periodic assessment during the first examination period

Oral assessment

Examination methods in case of periodic assessment during the second examination period

Oral assessment

Examination methods in case of permanent assessment

Participation, Presentation, Assignment

Possibilities of retake in case of permanent assessment

examination during the second examination period is possible

Extra information on the examination methods

PE: oral exam based on the syllabus, the assignment and reflections on the course.
NPE: students choose a subject and write an assignment (there is a theme of the year). They present their subject in class.

Calculation of the examination mark

PE 50% (10% participation, 20% presentation, 20% assignments)

NPE 50%

If a part of the exam is not taken and the final score would be more than 10/20 the final score will be reduced to the highest non-pass score. When unsatisfactory grades are obtained on parts of the exam the final mark may be lowered.

Facilities for Working Students

1. Possible exemption from educational activities requiring student attendance.
2. Possible rescheduling of the examination to a different time in the same academic year
3. Alternative time for feedback is possible

Students need to send an e-mail (mention as subject: "werkstudent CIP") and schedule an appointment **before Oct. 1st.** in order to work out a solution.

For more information concerning flexible learning: contact the monitoring service of the faculty of Arts and philosophy