2.1 Source status and context: sacred texts

Name: _____ Class: _____ Date: _____ **Total: 30 marks**

KEY WORDS sacred text • status • context • interpretation • primary source • parable

Objective

Learn to read **sacred texts** and other religious sources academically: what **status** a text has for adherents, how its **context** shapes it, and how it is **interpreted** differently.

You must be able to:

- explain the status of a sacred text within its tradition
- distinguish primary religious sources from secondary academic sources
- place a passage in its historical and literary context
- explain different interpretations of the same passage
- quote and explain a passage accurately

1 Key knowledge and worked examples

Status of texts

tradition	text	status for many adherents
Islam	the Qur'an	the literal word of God, revealed in Arabic; translations are seen as interpretations
Sikhism	the Guru Granth Sahib	the living Guru, treated with the respect given to a person
Christianity	the Bible	inspired by God; read literally by some, more symbolically by others
Buddhism	the Pali Canon, Mahayana sutras	the teaching of the Buddha; a guide, tested by practice

Reading a source academically

- **Status**: what authority does this text have, and for whom?

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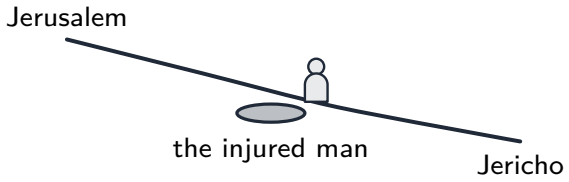
- **Context**: when, where and for whom was it written or revealed?
- **Interpretation**: how do different groups read it?
- **Primary or secondary**: a sacred text or a believer's account is primary; a scholar's study is secondary.

Worked example. The parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25–37) answers "Who is my neighbour?". Context: Jews and Samaritans were in conflict, so a Samaritan as the hero shocked the first listeners. Interpretations: an ethical teaching to help anyone in need; early Christian writers also read it as an allegory of Christ saving humanity.

2 Practice

2.1 Distinguish a **primary** from a **secondary** source in the study of religion. [2]

2.2 Explain why knowing that Jews and Samaritans were in conflict changes the meaning of the parable of the Good Samaritan. [3]



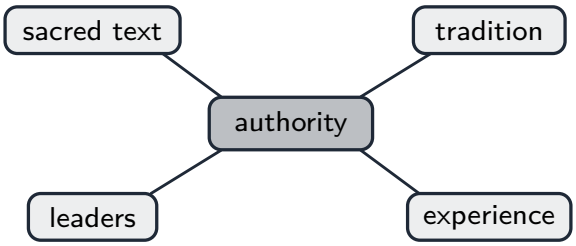
2.3 Explain why many Muslims see a **translation** of the Qur'an as an interpretation, not the Qur'an itself. [4]

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2.4 Explain **two** different ways a tradition can **interpret** its sacred text, with an example from **one** religion. [6]

3 Exam-style questions

3.1 *(Paper 2 style.)* With reference to **one** religion you have studied in depth, evaluate the role of sacred texts as a source of **authority**. [15]



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Solutions

Marking: **M1** a correct method, **A1** the correct answer, **B1** an independent mark.

Each answer shows the steps, then the **result**.

2.1

primary: a source from within the tradition, e.g. a sacred text, a prayer, a believer's account; secondary: a study about the tradition by a scholar or other observer

2.2

the first listeners would expect the Samaritan to be the villain; making him the one who helps shocks them and breaks the boundary of "neighbour"; so the parable teaches that neighbour-love crosses religious and ethnic lines

2.3

the Qur'an is believed to be the exact word of God revealed in Arabic; every translation involves human choices about meaning; so it cannot carry the full meaning or authority of the original; this is why Arabic is used in prayer around the world

2.4

literal interpretation explained; example; symbolic, allegorical or contextual interpretation explained; example; reasons for difference, e.g. branch, history, modern knowledge; academic attitude: describes both without deciding which is true

3.1

Mark with the markbands: [13-15] clearly focused on the question, accurate knowledge of beliefs, practices and texts, different views within the tradition, academic (not devotional) analysis, well-developed critical analysis, different perspectives evaluated, a reasoned conclusion; [10-12] focused, mostly accurate knowledge, analysis with some evaluation; [7-9] some focus, relevant knowledge, mostly narrative or description with limited analysis; [4-6] little focus, limited knowledge, mostly narrative; [1-3] little understanding of the question. Points that may be included: status of the text in the chosen religion explained accurately; examples of passages that guide belief or practice; role of the text in worship and daily life; other sources of authority, e.g. tradition, teachers, community, reason, experience; interpretation: who decides what a text means; differences between branches; modern questions, e.g. science, gender, translation; academic, not devotional, tone; evaluation of how far the text is the main authority; a reasoned conclusion

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