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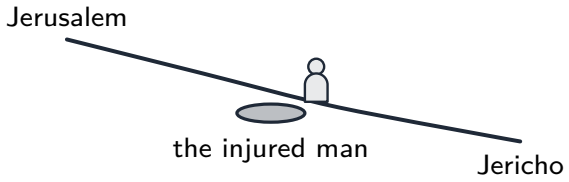
- **Context**: when, where and for whom was it written or revealed?
- **Interpretation**: how do different groups read it?
- **Primary or secondary**: a sacred text or a believer's account is primary; a scholar's study is secondary.

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]



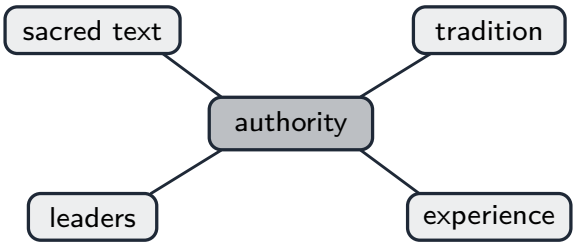
2.3 Explain why many Muslims see a **translation** of the Qur'an as an interpretation, not the Qur'an itself. [4]

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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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