

the Qur'an:  
an encyclopedia

edited by  
oliver leaman

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ



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# The Qur'an: an Encyclopedia

The Qur'an is the source of inspiration for one of the world's major religions, followed today by over a billion people. It plays a central role in Islam and ever since it appeared over fourteen centuries ago has been the subject of intense debate. Some of this has been carried out by Muslims and some by those hostile or indifferent to Islam, producing a very wide range of views.

Authored by 43 international experts, the objective of *The Qur'an: An Encyclopedia* is to present this diversity of thought, approach and school in order to give a strong appreciation of the range of response that the text has provoked throughout its history. It provides students and researchers with a powerful one-volume resource covering all aspects of the text and its reception.

Islam and the Qur'an are much in the news today and there is a public debate going on in which things are said about the Qur'an without much knowledge or understanding of the book.

Every effort has been made to help the reader use the encyclopedia as an investigative tool in Qur'anic studies. The volume assumes no previous knowledge of the Qur'an, Islam or Arabic. Technical terms are explained in the text itself and the style of each entry is designed to be as self-contained as possible. Entries are cross-referenced and many include a brief bibliography. At the end of the work there is a substantial annotated bibliography providing a detailed guide to the most significant books, journals and articles in Qur'anic studies. Three comprehensive indexes are included.

The readership will include those seeking basic information on the Qur'an; in addition, the substantial number of longer entries means that it will also be used by specialists.

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*Edited by*  
**Oliver Leaman**

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وَالسَّلَامُ عَلَىٰ مَنْ اتَّبَعَ الْهُدَىٰ

**Peace to all who follow guidance (20.47)**





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# Introduction

I have for a long time felt that it would be very helpful for there to be a reference work on the Qur'an which is not enormous in size and written only for the specialist, and yet which is more substantial than some of the very short introductory works on the topic. It is the aim of this book to bridge that gap between the highly scholarly and technical text and the rather skimpy elementary books. Even a cursory glimpse at the contents will reveal that we have not eschewed scholarship. Many of the entries are substantial and deal at some length with the intricacies of the subject matter. Others are brief and explain relevant terms and ideas in a concise manner. This is not a dictionary of the Qur'an and no attempt has been made to explain every term that appears in the Book. Some terms have been selected for discussion because they are so crucial to understanding the Book, and others which are less central have been included for discussion because they are interesting. We also wanted to give readers a taste of the style of dictionaries and glossaries of the Qur'an so that they could usefully use these and know what to expect.

Contributors to this volume come from a wide variety of backgrounds. Some are Muslims, some are not, and some have no religious beliefs whatsoever. They are united in being interested in the Qur'an. The authors come from

all doctrinal backgrounds and readers should expect to find a wide variety of views in this book. We do not in any way attempt to present the last word on any of the topics raised, quite the reverse. The editor has included accounts that often go against each other in order to illustrate to readers the contested nature of interpretation that exists in the subject area. What this volume represents is very much interpretation and commentary, *tafsir* in Arabic, an attempt at understanding the text of the Qur'an.

This is a collection of entries on the Qur'an, not Islam, but it is of course difficult to separate the two. There is a good deal of discussion of Islam, and not all of it relates apparently closely to the Qur'an, but readers will find that it does pertain to the Book in a more subtle way. This is the problem of commentary; one never knows how much extraneous material one is allowed to bring in to help interpret the text. Readers will find that this very topic was much discussed by commentators on the Qur'an, and the different views on what might be introduced, and what should be excluded, help define the different theological and religious schools in Islam.

It is always difficult thinking of what to put in and what to leave out of a work of this kind, and we certainly have not put in everything that is relevant to the topic of the Qur'an, its commentators

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and those issues which are related to it. On the other hand, we have tried to present a reasonably comprehensive guide to some of the most important concepts and figures in the Book, together with its commentators. Many important commentators and thinkers have not been discussed here, and not all the concepts

of the Qur'an have their own entry; it is not our aim to produce a complete guide to everything relevant. We have tried, however, to include the most important concepts and figures, and those thinkers who are representative of different schools of thought in the interpretation of the Qur'an.