

# Western Academia and the Qur'ān: Some Enduring Prejudices

MUZAFFAR IQBAL

*Muslim World Book Review*  
30:1, 2009, pp. 6-18

In the recent flowering of literature on the Qurʾān in the West, Brill's *Encyclopaedia of the Qurʾān* (*EQ*) stands out: it is the first and so far the only multi-volume reference work on the Qurʾān in English; it is the most ambitious and extensive project Western academia has undertaken on the Qurʾān; it is massive (some 2,919 pages in five volumes, with an additional 860 pages of five indices in the sixth volume); it took thirteen years to complete; and it makes the claim of providing "rigorous, academic scholarship on the Qurʾān...scholarship that grows from a plurality of perspectives and presuppositions" (*EQ* 1, p. ix). It contains 694 articles (although the description on the back cover as well as on Brill's website claims that it has "nearly 1000 entries in five volumes"); and its articles fall into two categories: those "that treat important figures, concepts, places, values, actions and events to be found within the text of the Qurʾān or which have an important relationship with the text; and essay-length treatments of important topics within the field of qurʾānic studies" (*EQ* 1, p. xii). The description on the back cover of *EQ* further states, rather vaguely: "hundreds of scholars, both Muslim and non-Muslim, have collaborated in the creation of this work" (though when counted, there are 278 contributors, of which only about twenty percent are Muslims).

"Both the desire to take stock of the field of qurʾānic studies at the turn of the century and an interest in seeing this field flourish in the new millennium prompted our initial conversations," the General Editor states in the Preface. "From its inception, then, *EQ* has gazed both backwards and forwards and this dual visioning has shaped the structuring of

this encyclopaedia. As the associate editors and I proceeded with the planning, we were determined to create a reference work that would capture this century's best achievements in qur'ānic studies. But we also wanted *EQ* to stimulate even more extensive scholarship on the Qur'ān in the decades to come" (*EQ* 1, pp. ix-x). Yet more important than this retrospective and prospective vision was the editors' desire to "make the world of qur'ānic studies accessible to a very broad range of academic scholars and educated readers" (*EQ* 1, p. x). The editors had to make a number of basic decisions regarding defining features of their project of which two are especially significant: (a) they decided to use English-language lemmata in order to facilitate use by those scholars who do not have command of the Arabic, even as they recognized that it would inevitably result in the loss of the precision offered by transliterated Arabic entry-words; and (b) they did not make *EQ* an encyclopaedia of the Qur'ān *and its interpretation*, resolving to formally exclude the latter even as they recognized that virtually every article in *EQ* would necessarily have to draw upon the corpus of Qur'ānic exegesis.

As a more extensive examination of certain individual entries was undertaken in a previous review of *EQ* (*Journal of Qur'ānic Research and Studies*, vol. 3, issue 5, pp. 5-45; available at [www.iequran.com/eq-rev.pdf](http://www.iequran.com/eq-rev.pdf)), the present review will primarily explore the following aspects of *EQ*:

- (I) The fundamental premise and claims which have shaped the overall structure of this six-volume work;
- (II) Source material from which its content is drawn;

(III) Intellectual ancestry.

**I. FUNDAMENTAL PREMISE AND CLAIMS**

**a. Fundamental Premise:**

The fundamental premise upon which *EQ* is based is stated by the General Editor in the preface: “[T]here is no single academic tradition of Qur’ānic scholarship. Centuries of Muslim scholarship on the Qur’ān constitutes a timeline that overlaps with that of generations of Western scholarship on the text. And neither of these categories, inexact as they are, represent a single, monolithic approach or a unique, overriding methodology. Both between and within the worlds of Muslim and Western Qur’ānic scholarship one finds vigorous and contentious debate....*Scholarly perspectives can no longer be neatly pinned to religious identification* and good scholarship is flourishing in this richly plural environment. The editors of *EQ* have striven to capture that plurality within the pages of this encyclopaedia, wanting this work to represent the widest possible range of rigorous, academic scholarship on the Qur’ān” (*EQ* 1, p. xi, emphasis added).

This blurring of the boundary between the work of those who believe that the Qur’ān is a revealed text (Muslims) and those who do not consider it to be so (non-Muslims) also articulates the principles by which editors solicited contributors and thus both Muslim and non-Muslim scholars were invited to become part of this project. This was based on the editors’ opinion that only “*some* Muslims feel strongly that no non-Muslim should even touch the Qur’ān, to say nothing of reading and commenting upon it...[while] there are those who choose to ignore non-

Muslim scholarship on the Qurʾān as irrelevant or inherently flawed and misinformed, others welcome the contributions non-Muslim scholars have made to this field” (*EQ* 1, p. xiii, emphasis added). This pluralistic approach, the General Editor notes with pleasure, was welcomed as “most scholars who were invited to contribute accepted with enthusiasm and alacrity, pleased to see the appearance of a reference work that would foster continued development within the field of qurʾānic studies” (*EQ* 1, p. xiii).

While it is theoretically possible for both good and bad scholarship to flourish in any field and in any religious or non-religious milieu, the case of Qurʾānic studies is exceptional because, seen from the Muslim perspective, the Qurʾān is a Book unlike any other: between its covers is a text that comes from beyond the human realm, even as it is in a language spoken by human beings. Muslims believe the Qurʾān is the actual Word of God, revealed to the unlettered Prophet, Muḥammad, whose very name brings to their hearts a state of unmatched reverence and to their tongues salutations of blessings and peace. Thus, although the Qurʾān entered the flow of human history over a well-defined period of twenty-three years (610-632 CE), it remains supra-human at so many levels of its existence. For Muslims, it is *the Book*, the very source of guidance, a definitive, final, and magisterial verdict on the human condition, sent down from the Protected Tablet (*al-lawḥ al-mahfūz*) as the criterion of truth and falsehood (*al-furqān*).

To abolish or blur the boundaries between the approaches to the Qurʾān of those who believe it to be the very Word of God, as Muslims

believe, and those who do not believe it to be so, is to confound the very criteria by which the Qurʾān divides all humanity into three categories: (i) those who believe it to be a truly revealed Book; (ii) those who do not believe so; and (iii) those who say with their tongues what they do not in reality believe in their hearts. Since belief and disbelief in the Divine origin of the Qurʾān have consequences for both this and the next world (*al-dunyā wal-ākhirā*), to do away with such a fundamental demarcation for the purposes of so-called objective scholarship is to simultaneously annul the consequences of belief and disbelief; in fact, it amounts to a deconstruction of the entire Qurʾānic schema which gives glad tidings to those who believe in it and live a virtuous life, promising that they shall enter the Abode of Peace, the Paradise with its unimaginable delights and enchantments, where they shall dwell forever in the infinite Mercy of their Lord; and warning the other two categories of people of a perpetual Hellfire which will neither consume nor conserve (*la tubqī wa la tadhar*).

Furthermore, this fundamental premise on which the *EQ* is based (succinctly stated by the General Editor as: “scholarly perspectives can no longer be neatly pinned to religious identification”) and the consequent blurring of the boundary between belief and disbelief in the Book’s Divine origin is untenable at another level: the Qurʾān declares that Allah has sealed the hearts and the hearings of those who do not believe and *over their eyes is a veil* (Q 2:7); and *there are among them such as [seem to] listen to thee [O Prophet], but over their hearts We have laid veils which prevent them from grasping the truth, and into their ears, deafness* (Q 6:25); and *whenever you recite the Qurʾān, We place an invisible barrier between you and those who do not believe in the Hereafter; for, over their hearts We have laid veils*

which prevent them from grasping it, and into their ears, deafness (Q 17:45). One cannot discount this spiritual deprivation when considering scholarship on the Qurʾān, for spiritual receptivity is a sine quo non for drinking from this font of guidance and partaking of even a ray from this ocean of light. But even if one were to declaim this as a religious perspective on the Book and that there is no real relation between the spiritual state of a person writing an encyclopedic article and his or her intellectual output, there still remains a very specific linkage between the Qurʾān and whosoever says anything about it: the Qurʾān demands that one must settle the fundamental issue of its authorship before any further interaction can occur. This choice simultaneously determines one's position regarding the veracity or otherwise of the Prophetic claim of Muhammad, son of ʿAbd Allāh, whose truthfulness was avouched even by his fiercest opponents who called him *al-Ṣadīq* and *al-Amīn*, the truthful and trustworthy. Thus, whatever decisions one makes, one's scholarly output is framed by certain *a priori* commitments, one way or the other; there is no room for "neutral" scholarship as far as the Qurʾān is concerned. The fundamental premise of *EQ* ("scholarly perspectives can no longer be neatly pinned to religious identification") is thus false, as scholarship on the Qurʾān does indeed neatly fall into two categories: (i) by the pens of those who take the Qurʾānic claim to being the actual Divine Word as their point of departure; and (ii) by those who do not believe so. Both good, well-grounded, and fully engaged scholarship and its poor, sloppy, and diffident antipode of course exist in both of these well-defined categories, but such judgments occur in second-order domains.

### **(b) Claims**

**(i) Claim for Pluralistic Perspectives:**

Since *EQ* claims to be a work of “rigorous and academic scholarship...a scholarship that grows from a plurality of perspectives and pre-suppositions” (*EQ* 1, xi), scholars who have contributed to this project should therefore be known to hold a plurality of perspectives and pre-suppositions. A quick examination of the list of contributors, however, reveals that an overwhelming majority of the contributors holds only one foundational perspective on the Qur’ān—a modernist, relativistic, evolutionary perspective that takes the text of the Qur’ān as a human construction and that calls for a historicist hermeneutic. While they may differ in methodology and technique, most differences among these scholars are peripheral to this foundational perspective. This is true of both Muslim as well as non-Muslim contributors. Nor, of course, is this accidental. When the editors of *EQ* composed their lists of contributors, they were of course already aware of the perspective from which the scholar would write. Thus when they invited someone who calls himself a “secular Muslim”, or someone whose approach to the Qur’ān is well-known to be steeped in Western feminism, they already knew the nature of the contribution such scholars would make to the project. The choice of scholars enlisted for the project thus reflects considered preferences and intellectual affinities of the editors. It is also not incidental that similar preferences mark the other work of the General Editor of *EQ* (see McAuliffe, Jane Dammen. Ed. *The Cambridge Companion to the Qur’ān*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006). Similarly, when the editors decided that, out of 278 contributors, only about 20 percent would be Muslims—and those mostly of a particular academic lineage—they kno-

wingly and consciously decided in favor of a certain perspective, notwithstanding the otherwise contentious claim that “religious affiliation is of no consequence in academic scholarship” (*EQ* 1, xi). Furthermore, Muslim contributions to the project are largely peripheral, and do not include most of the articles dealing with fundamental concepts, ideas, and terms of the Qurʾān. It is also noteworthy in this context that although there are 278 authors in the list of contributors, 128 have contributed only one article, 61 have contributed two articles each, and 37 authors have written three articles; thus about 47.5% of *EQ* (330 articles) comes from the pen of only 53 authors, 95% of whom are non-Muslim and whose Orientalist approach to the Qurʾān can border on the polemical.

Thus the claim that *EQ* includes a plurality of perspectives may well be true, but these perspectives stem from the same font—that which negates, ignores, or considers irrelevant the phenomenon of revelation (*wahy*) as understood in Islam. The perspective that emerges in the absence of this fundamental precept may produce a host of mutually differing opinions, but they cannot be said to be arising out of a plurality of fundamental premises; they all rest on the supposition that the Qurʾān is not the actual Word of God—at least, not as the Qurʾān itself claims—but a human construct, originating orally at a specific time and place and undergoing textual permutations like all other oral texts.

This is not to say that non-Muslims cannot or should not write on the Qurʾān, or works by non-Muslims are necessarily filled with biases; all that is being said is that a minimum level of scholarly detachment, humility, and respect are essential components for treating a Book held

sacred by one fourth of humanity. A good example of such scholarship can be found in Toshihiko Izutsu's two books on the Qur'ān, *God and Man in the Qur'ān* and *Ethico-Religious Concepts in the Qur'ān*.

**(ii) Claim for Impartiality:**

One has to search hard to find an article in *EQ* that is not replete with characteristic features of the Orientalist approach to the Qur'ān. Such features include a thoroughgoing epistemological skepticism, a casting of doubts on even the most authentic Muslim material, uncertainty and ambiguity—all regarding a Book which claims to have absolutely no doubt (*la rayba fīhi*), a self-referential Book which states that *it has been sent down with Truth* (Q 6:114; 10:108; 13:1; 17:5; 39:41; 45:6) in order to take humanity from the darkness into light through a Guidance that is sure and certain. Just like the Orientalists, the approach of almost all writers of major and defining articles of *EQ* is defined by their sheer lack of understanding—or thoroughgoing refusal—to treat (or entertain the possibility of) the Qur'ān as a revealed text containing specific and non-negotiable features such as a set of fundamental beliefs (*‘aqā'id*) which do not undergo any evolutionary change and specific acts of worship (*‘ibādāt*) which cannot be altered by any human being. The three most fundamental beliefs enshrined in the Qur'ān are the Unicity of Allah (*tawḥīd*), Prophethood (*risāla*), and the return of all things to Him Who created them in the first place (*ma'ād*). Orientalists consider these to have evolved through the historical experience of humanity, or through an irrational fear of the unknown, or because of the psychological needs of human beings. They even consider the very concept of God to be a human invention or whimsical fancy. Gerhard Böwering's article "God

and his [*sic*] Attributes” is a tell-tale sign of *EQ*’s implication with Orientalist approaches to the Qur’ān. He first states that “Muḥammad proclaimed the Qur’ān ‘in the name of Allāh,’” and then goes on to explain why Allāh is the name of God in the Qur’ān in a manner which Muslims would consider nothing but blasphemy: “From his youth, Muḥammad was intimately familiar with this name [Allāh] for the supreme God since his father’s name was ‘Abdallāh, ‘servant of Allāh.’ *It seemed most natural to him, therefore, to employ the word ‘Allāh’ for God in his qur’ānic proclamation, rather than to introduce a totally new name for his monotheistic concept of God*” (*EQ* II, p. 317, emphasis added). The conclusion which most naturally emerges from this construction is that the Prophet himself must have chosen a name for the Divine “in his qur’ānic proclamation!”

The Orientalists consider *‘ibādāt* (specific acts of worship) mere rituals which grow out of a social milieu, rather than acts ordained by the Creator in form as well as content. As such, they attempt to trace the “evolution” of both form and content of acts of worship and then try to find why a certain interpretive community accepted, rejected, or modified pre-existing rituals. For Muslims, on the other hand, specific acts of worship are obligatory, prescribed by none other than their Creator, and exemplified by the Messenger whose character has been praised in the Qur’ān as “sublime” (*al-khuluq al-‘azīm*), thus requiring as close an imitation as possible of the way the Prophet performed them. In other words, specific acts of worship, such as *ṣalāt*, *ḥajj* and *ṣawm*, have not evolved out of any social milieu to be modified or altered;; are not predicated on pre-existing evolutionary models; and are not human constructs awaiting academics to explain them away.

The stark contrast between the Muslim understanding of this aspect of religion and the Orientalists' dissection of the same, regurgitated in the pages of *EQ*, can be demonstrated by examining the article on "Prayer" (*EQ* IV, p. 215-231). "Muḥammad's proclamation of the Islamic scripture," we are told, "occurred in an environment that was fully familiar with ways of worship rooted in the Arab tribal cult and in some measure aware of normative and sectarian forms of prayer practiced in the organized religions of the Middle East" (*EQ* IV, p. 215)." Thus begins the rhetorical construction of the historical/social framework in which the Qur'ānic proclamation of *ṣalāt* supposedly "evolved". The article then attempts to establish "historical links" with the "variety of gnostic, esoteric, magic and mystical rituals...in the general religious environment in which Muḥammad's own awareness of worship and prayer emerged" (*EQ* IV, 215). Having traced these links back to rabbinic Judaism, eastern Christian monasticism, the followers of Mazdaean Zoroastrianism, and the followers of Manicheanism, the author then attempts to find antecedents of form and content of *ṣalāt* and states that "prior to his prophetic call, the orphan and merchant Muḥammad shared the religious ideas of his clan: his uncle, Abū Lahab 'Abd al-Uzzā, was a staunch adherent of the Arab tribal religion and his guardian and protector, Abū Ṭālib, never adopted Islam" (*EQ* IV, p. 216). It then unabashedly states—without referring to any source—that "Muḥammad himself took part in the pagan rites at the Ka'ba and sacrificed a white sheep at the shrine of the goddess al-Uzzā. He believed in the world of demons whom the Arabs of Mecca believed to be God's comrades and next of kin, to whom they of-

ferred sacrifices and from whom they sought protection” (EQ IV, p. 216).

Then, it draws the following conclusion:

As can be judged from the earliest layers of the qur’ānic proclamation, Muḥammad’s personal prayer was based on ecstatic inspiration and visions by night. He had to defend himself against the accusation of being one of the soothsayers possessed by the alter ego of a demon. The utterances of his prayer were cast in rhymed prose, marked by abrupt phrases capturing cryptic meanings. He sought refuge from demonical whisperings and disclaimed being an angel, possessing the treasures of God or knowing the unseen. He felt inspired by a holy spirit and experienced God as speaking to him directly, by revelation and from behind a veil, or indirectly through the intermediary of an angel identified as Gabriel. He claimed to have received revelation as did the earth and the bee or the prophets of old, such as Noah, Moses and Joseph. He introduced qur’ānic passages by abstruse oaths, following the old Arab custom of invoking idols or natural forces as well as emulating the oracular style (*sajʿ*) of the pre-Islamic soothsayer in the wording of the qur’ānic proclamation. Muḥammad swore by the name of God, e.g. “By God!” (*tallāhi*, Q 16:63), and, “But no! By your lord!” (*fa-lā wa-rabbika*, Q 4:65), and solemnly uttered oaths by the setting of the stars, “But no! I swear (*fa-lā uqsimu*) by the setting of the stars” (Q 56:75). He swore by the powers of nature, e.g. the heaven and its constellations (*wa-l-samāʾi dhāti l-burūj*, Q 85:1), the star (*wa-l-najm*, Q 53:1), the sun (*wa-l-shams*, Q 91:1) and the moon (*wa-l-qamar*, Q 74:32), and invoked particular times of day by oaths, e.g. the daybreak (*wa-l-fajr*, Q 89:1), the night (*wa-l-layl*, Q 92:1), the forenoon (*wa-l-duḥā*, Q 93:1) and the twilight (*wal-shafaq*, Q 84:16). (EQ IV, pp. 216-217)

The article then goes on to trace the beginning of the ritual prayer and calls the very investiture of Prophethood a “breakthrough”, in conformity with the approach of the Orientalists who consider prophethood nothing but a personal achievement of a psychological or even—when generous—a spiritual nature, achieved by an individual through person-

al striving. Then we are told that it was “after a short period of hesitation” that the Prophet “began to proclaim in Mecca the religious insights he had forged in the furnace of his personal prayer. Soon a small group of followers, most of them young and of little social standing, accepted his message and formed a nascent community which began to engage in communal prayer. This communal prayer eventually adopted characteristic elements that became constitutive for a prayer ritual, known as *al-ṣalāt*” (*EQ* IV, 217).

Muslims, of course, would hardly consider this impartial treatment! A truly impartial treatment of the subject would require a certain degree of respect, not to say anything of a full representation of the Muslim perspective on this central ritual of Islam.

**(iii) *Claim for rigorous academic scholarship***

At the core of the content of *EQ* is its lemmata, some 694 entry words which constitute and structure all that its authors have to say on the Qurʾān. Rigorous academic scholarship would demand that the lemmata, the very framework for this study and exploration of the Qurʾān, would come from the Qurʾān itself. An examination of this skeleton reveals that it is neither based on the internal coherent and integrated thematic structure of the Qurʾān nor on a consistent rubric; rather, it is an ad hoc list which fails to yield a cohesive methodological plan for a reference work. There are numerous entries which have only a remote relevance to the Qurʾān; and, conversely, the lemmata routinely omit terms, concepts, and themes which are central to the Qurʾān. For instance, *EQ* has no article on *tawḥīd*, the very core doctrine of the

Qurʾān, which states that there is one and only one God, Allah, repeated throughout the Qurʾān and central to any impartial understanding of the Book. Indeed, this is an encyclopaedia that claims to have articles treating “important concepts” of the Qurʾān, does not devote a substantial entry to this pivotal Qurʾānic concept, and yet contains entries on “Aḥmadiyya,” “African Literature,” and “Samson”!

In addition, there are conceptual problems in the way certain technical terms have been used as entry words. These conceptual problems are neither incidental nor limited to a few entries; they are rampant and can be traced to particular permutations of the modern Western understanding of religion in general as well as a particular disregard for the inherent structure of the Qurʾān. Thus, there is a host of artificial and irrelevant entries with no Qurʾānic roots (“Bahāʿīs”, “Cups and Vessels”, “Deobandis”, “Flying”, “Furniture and Furnishings”, and “Grasses”) and even some entries with obvious Christian coloring (“Bread” and “Baptism”). Another consequence of this artificial schema is arbitrary decisions regarding what and who should be included or excluded from *EQ*: certain close Companions of the Prophet are included while others are excluded, and there is no explanation for either selection or omission. Among the animals, birds, and reptiles mentioned in the Qurʾān, one finds articles on “Dog” and “Camel” but not on “Horse” and “Wolf”. The Queen of Sabā has an article, but the hoopoe carrying the letter of Prophet Sulaymān to her does not. The “Bee” and the “Ant”—both used in the Qurʾān as *sūrah* names—do not have articles devoted to them; there is merely a cursory reference to them in the entry “Animal Life”. Likewise, from the fruits and herbs mentioned in the Qurʾān, one finds

an article on “Date-Palm” but not on “Grapes”, “Olives”, or “Pomegranate”.

## II. SOURCE MATERIAL

Almost all articles of *EQ* draw on source material which has been typically used by Orientalists in their efforts to deconstruct the Qur’ān. This source material comes from both Muslim and non-Muslim works belonging to various genres such as exegeses, *sīrah* and *ḥadīth*. The material from Muslim sources is, however, simply poured into a pre-established mould, often with explanatory phrases like “Muslims believe,” “the Muslim understanding is,” “Islamic tradition says,” and so on. Thus the claim that *EQ* is based on both Muslim and non-Muslim source material is only superfluously true as the source material from Islamic tradition is not used to construct the mould or the perspective but, instead, is simply added to a pre-cast framework which renders it spurious for any scholarly insights. In addition, many contributors seem to have little familiarity with the operative norms of Muslim source material: when al-Ṭabarī or Ibn Kathīr gather all available material on a given subject in their *tafāsīr*, they do so within an existing intellectual milieu and scholarly framework wherein the hierarchy of authorities and relative position of various branches of knowledge is well understood. A scholar trained in the use of Muslim source material would approach their encyclopaedic exegeses with full awareness of the tacit, underlying assumptions, share their understanding of the hierarchical structure, and hence use this source material in a manner which would not violate scholarly norms of the tradition. Most Western scholars who have written for

*EQ* show little understanding of this aspect of Muslim source material and hence their confusion and frustration with this material which they generally lump together as unreliable, confusing, self-contradictory, and not trustworthy. In many articles, there is a cataloguing of positions: so and so said this but so and so said this—and hence there is no clear position. “Revelation and Inspiration” (*EQ* IV, pp. 437-448) is a typical example of such confusion and the lack of adequate training in reading source material. Even the aggregation of “Revelation” and “Inspiration” into one entry is indicative of a disregard for the nuances involved in the Muslim understandings of each term. Another example is Ḥafṣa (*EQ* II, 397-398). The author of this entry shows utter lack of understanding about the hierarchy of source material from Muslim sources and indiscriminately uses weak-chained material from *sīra* literature, which stand lower in rank in Islamic tradition than the ḥadīth literature for its reliability. After citing a host of mutually contradictory information about when her first husband died, the author abruptly states:

The Prophet is said to have married Ḥafṣa after ‘Ā’ish bint Abī Bakr, two months before the battle of Uḥud. Eventually Muḥammad divorced her, but later resumed the marriage bond (Ibn Sa’d, *Ṭabaqāt*, viii, 84). The circumstances of the divorce were read by Muslim exegetes into the interpretation of Q 66:3, in which the Prophet is said to have confided a certain matter to “one of his wives,” but she is said to have failed to have kept the secret. The exegetes say it was Ḥafṣa (Balādhurī, *Ashraf*, ii, 55-6) who disclosed the secret to ‘Ā’isha. The secret reportedly pertained to Muḥammad’s intercourse with his concubine Maryam the Copt, but according to others it pertained to the future of Ḥafṣa’s and ‘Ā’isha’s respective fathers (i.e. ‘Umar and Abū Bakr) as caliphs. Ḥafṣa’s image as a disobedient wife also emerges in the story that the Prophet ordered a certain woman to teach Ḥafṣa a special charm designed to

train wives not to slander and to obey their husbands (al-Zamakhsharī, *al-Fāʾiq fī gharīb al-ḥadīth*, iv, 26) (EQ II, 397-98).

There is no indication here that the author knows or understand the critical distinction needed to construct his discourse which involves as serious a matter as a divorce; he basis his construction on unsound material; he calls a historian (Balādhurī) an exegete and cites a biographic work (*Ashrāf*) as his exegetical proof! There is no indication in the text that the author has any idea about the nature of source material he is indiscriminately using for his slanderous construction. He calls Ḥafṣa, a woman whom 1.5 billion believers consider their mother whose very name brings salutations to their lips—may Allah be pleased with her—“a disobedient wife” without any right to use such a defamatory title and without any proof.

Yet another aspect of the misuse of Muslim source material is the subtext of numerous articles, with a clearly discernible derogatory undercurrent flowing through the material being quoted from the Qurʾān and Islamic tradition. “War” (EQ V, pp. 445-459) is a case in point. The entire article consists of a catalogue of various verses of the Qurʾān on the subject of war, yet between the lines lies a disparaging attempt to create confusion, as if the Qurʾān were a repository of scattered and disjointed commands: “justifying war appears to have been hard work...orders to fight came down in sūras apparently on an ad hoc basis and always in what appears to be a mobilizing rather than a legislative vein...all lack of martial zeal is debited to base motives...attempts are also made to shame the believers into fighting by construing war as a

test” (*EQ* IV, p. 457-58). The crowning feature of this entry is its last, short section, “Exegesis”, which authoritatively proclaims that it was the exegetes (not God, as understood by Muslims from the time of the Prophet until now) who gave the verses on war a legislative role!

The authors of *EQ* furthermore show a disregard for even the most basic scholarly norm of citing original sources for opinions they express or quote. Instead, a Patricia Crone, a Michael Cook or an M Arkoun themselves take the role of authorities! Where authorities are cited, a Shaked or a Sundermann stands as tall as an al-Ṭabarī (*EQ* III, 144), and a Gibb is given the chance to say the final word: “Gibb is certain that the doctrine of the last judgment in the Qurʾān was derived from Christian sources, especially from the writings of the Syriac Christian Fathers and monks” (*EQ* III, 144).

Likewise, little understanding is shown of the technical aspects of source material. A typical example is “Revelation and Inspiration”, where an authoritative statement tells us: “When the revelation actually begins, one finds a certain vagueness in the tradition about whether the Prophet initially encounters God (as seems to be suggested by Q 53:1-18; see also Ibn Ishāq, *Sīra*, 150; transl. Ibn Ishāq-Guillaume, 104-5; Ṭabarī, *Taʾrīkh*, I, 1147; trans. Watt/McDonald, *History*, vi, 67-8, where it is said *al-ḥaqq*, one of the names of God, came to him) or whether his dealings with the divine are always through the medium of Gabriel. The *consensus of the tradition* has it that the first words of the Qurʾān to be revealed were the beginnings of sūra 96, when Gabriel came bringing a cloth on which was embroidered the text to be recited. Three times the messenger tells

Muḥammad to recite and he answers that he is unable, until finally Gabriel teaches him what to recite, and the words remain with him” (*EQ IV*, 441, emphasis added). While it is true that *al-Ḥaqq* is a Divine attribute, no scholar conversant with the use of Muslim source material would consider construing an attribute of Allah mentioned in this narration to mean that God Himself came to the cave! In addition, the full account of the beginning of revelation, reported by al-Bukhārī in his *Ṣaḥīḥ*, has a sequence of events prior to the actual appearance of Jibrīl in the cave which makes it abundantly clear that what is meant by *al-ḥaqq* in the said account is “the Truth”. Finally, the unreferenced “consensus of the tradition” about the piece of embroidered cloth that Jibrīl supposedly brought to the Prophet is not a consensus tradition by any means; in fact, it is a *mursal ḥadīth*, that is, a narration ascribed to a *tābiʿī* without a direct connection to the Prophet through a Companion. In this case, the cloth-narration is reported by Ibn Ashtah in his *al-Muṣāḥif*, on the authority of ‘Ubayd bin ‘Umayr, a *tābiʿī*, and by two other *tābiʿīs*, al-Zuhrī and ‘Amr ibn Dinār, both of whom report the same source (see *al-Itqān*, vol. 1, 76-77).

### III. INTELLECTUAL ANCESTRY

*The Encyclopaedia of the Qurʾān* carries the stamp of the Western Academy; its editors and contributors are all trained in the Academy; almost all of its articles build upon the previous academic scholarship on the Qurʾān; and its source material is drawn from the works on the Qurʾān produced by Western academia over the last two hundred years. This lineage can be traced back to the works of the nineteenth-century

Orientalists whose own texts were based on the five centuries of discourse on the Qurʾān by Christian polemicists-cum-philologists who appeared on the Western academic scene in the fourteenth century, when the Church Council of Vienna held in 1312 announced the establishment of chairs in Arabic, Greek, Hebrew, and Syriac at Paris, Oxford, Bologna, Avignon, and Salamanca. [For an excellent overview of Western Christendom’s engagement with the Qurʾān, see Norman Daniel, *Islam and the West: The Making of an Image* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1960), and the more recent Thomas E. Burman, *Reading the Qurʾān in Latin Christendom, 1140-1560* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007).]

In the final analysis, *EQ* is a work that grew out of the vast storehouse of Orientalism and, as Edward Said noted in 1978, “[t]oday an Orientalist is less likely to call himself an Orientalist than he was almost any time up to World War II.” The Orientalists of yesteryears have now reinvented themselves as academic scholars and they have re-cloaked their work in new garb. We find no signs here that a scholarly tradition can dissociate itself from the core values, assumptions, and premises of its mother-tradition. *EQ* has been called “an inaugural effort...a first attempt to create a substantial work of reference in a field that has relatively few such resources” (*EQ* 1, xii), indicating that future editions would bring to the academic world a much richer harvest. Given the fact that it has been built on the characteristic biases, claims, and prejudices of the Orientalists, no cosmetic changes or additions to *EQ* can change the fact that it is a non-representative, discourteous, and blasphemous hodgepodge of disparate material. Indeed, the Qurʾān had anticipated such

attempts and thus had decreed: *They desire to extinguish the Light of Allah with their mouths; but Allah has willed to spread His Light in all its fullness, however hateful this may be to the disbelievers (al-Şaff: 7).*

The future of Qurʾānic studies is, however, not doomed. Realizing the need for corrective measures, a group of Muslim scholars has launched a new project to produce a reference work on the Qurʾān based on fourteen centuries of Islamic scholarship. The proposed seven-volume work, *The Integrated Encyclopedia of the Qurʾān (IEQ)*, promises to present a unique blend of classical and contemporary Islamic scholarship on the Qurʾān in an accessible format while maintaining academic norms. It is meant for both Muslim and non-Muslim readers looking for an authentic source of in-depth and scholarly knowledge on the Qurʾān and its message as well as for academics and researchers, whether specializing in the field of Qurʾānic studies or working more generally in other disciplines related to Islam. For more details of this project, see: [www.iequran.com](http://www.iequran.com).