

Recommended by Frederick M. Denny

Frederick Matthewson Denny, *An Introduction to Islam*
(Pearson Prentice-Hall, Fourth Edition, 2011)

This introductory text places Islam within a cultural, political, social, and religious context, and examines its connections with Judeo-Christian morals. Its integration of the doctrinal and devotional elements of Islam introduces readers to the ways Muslims think and live, with a view to engendering understanding and breaking down stereotypes.

John Renard, *Seven Doors to Islam: Spirituality and the Religious Life of Muslims*
(University of California Press, 1996)

Employing a historical perspective, this book provides an interesting and accessible guide to Muslims' basic beliefs, ethical values, devotional practices, and social-cultural institutions. Topics include the Qur'an and the Hadith (the record of the oral teachings of Muhammad) in Islamic spirituality; the liturgical calendar; the Five Pillars of ritual practice; aesthetics of sound and vision as found in poetry, architecture, and the decorative arts; and how Muslims have sought fulfillment through the centuries by following the examples and testimony of their faith's great teachers and spiritual guides. Numerous illustrations are included.

Martin Lings, *Muhammad: His Life Based on the Earliest Sources* (Inner Traditions, 2006)

This internationally acclaimed biography of the Prophet Muhammad presents original translations of primary sources from those who knew him, presented in an inspiring narrative style. The final edition, based entirely on eighth- and ninth-century biographical sources and the Hadith, covers the spread of Islam into Syria and beyond during the Prophet's lifetime. This book helps general readers understand why Muhammad's life holds such importance in the Islamic world, interweaving verses from the Qur'an artfully with biography.

Fazlur Rahman, *Islam* (University of Chicago Press, 1979)

Rahman presents a concise but comprehensive history of one of the major world religions in this volume, from its birth in the seventh century CE through modern times. In particular, the author emphasizes the intellectual tradition of Islam.

Fazlur Rahman, *Major Themes of the Qur'an* (University of Chicago Press, 2009)

A well-written introduction to the foundational text of Islam, this work covers such themes as Allah (God), society, revelation, and prophecy. Rahman's scholarship promotes mutual understanding in our interconnected world and separates the actual contents of the Qur'an from religious and cultural traditions often practiced in the name of Islam.

Abdullah Yusuf Ali, *The Holy Qur'an: Text, Translation, and Commentary* (Amana, 1989)

Ali provides a clear, respectful translation of Islam's sacred scripture in a traditional biblical English style (similar to that of the King James Bible). On each page is a facing Arabic text, so this edition is also useful for students of Arabic. There are many detailed footnotes that explain passages, terms, and ideas and provide helpful cross-references. Each of the Qur'an's 114 chapters, known in Arabic as sūras, has a helpful introduction and summary. An extensive topical index is also provided.

A. J. Arberry, *Sufism: An Account of the Mystics of Islam* (Harper Torchbooks, 1970)

This is an excellent first book to read on Sufism. The profoundly respected scholar A. J. Arberry is widely known for his English translation of the Qur'an (*The Koran Interpreted*, 1955). Sufism provides an accessible and highly reliable overview of the topic covering God's word, the life of the Prophet Muhammad, forms of asceticism and mysticism, varieties of Sufi orders, Sufi theory and practice, Sufi theosophy, Persian Sufi poets, and the decay of Sufism (although it should be noted that it is returning in characteristically independent and vigorous forms throughout the world). The book includes many wonderful quotations of Sufi textual passages in English.

Michael Wolfe, ed., *One Thousand Roads to Mecca: Ten Centuries of Travelers Writing about the Muslim Pilgrimage* (Grove Press, 1997)

This richly informative and engaging collection of personal stories by pilgrims visiting the holy city of Mecca begins with pious Muslim accounts from the medieval period (1050–1326), which are followed by those of European “renegades, impostors, slaves, and scholars” who traveled to the holy city from the 1500s to the early 1800s, and ends with the “Jet Age Hajj, 1947–90,” including accounts by Malcolm X and the editor of this volume, Michael Wolfe. The book includes maps, a glossary, and a detailed index.

Annemarie Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam* (University of North Carolina Press, 1978)

Mystical Dimensions of Islam explores the history of Sufism (Islamic mysticism) in a balanced manner. The author, a well-known scholar of Eastern religions, conveys the mood and vision of Sufism in a way unrivaled by the work of any other scholar. Schimmel provides a comprehensive analysis of the traditions of Sufism, often known only by association with the Whirling Dervishes of Turkey. This anthropological treatment analyzes weighty philosophical questions such as free will, predestination, and good and evil.

Frederick M. Denny, ed., *Atlas of the World's Religions* (Oxford University Press, 2007)

This atlas contains a section on Islam with thirty color maps, numerous color illustrations, and a running text covering pre-Islamic Arabia, Arabia at the time of Muhammad, the spread of Islam, the history of Shia Islam, the rise and spread of Sufism, the spread of

Islam in Southeast Asia, the Ottoman Empire, Islam in Africa, Islamic modernism and Islamic revival, modern Islam, Central Asia and China, Israel and the Arabs, the spread of Islam in the modern world, and varieties of Islam today. This atlas is widely available for use in American public library reference collections.

Cyril Glassé, *The New Encyclopedia of Islam* (Rowman and Littlefield, 2008)

The New Encyclopedia of Islam is a comprehensive, authoritative, and hospitable guide for thoughtful readers who may have no prior knowledge of Islam. For users who are well grounded in Islamic studies, this reference work serves as a superb desktop friend when a quick recheck is needed of facts, dates, spelling, and the precise definitions of technical terms and topics.

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***Inside the Koran: A Journey into the Heart of Islam* (Antony Thomas, director, 2008)**

An acclaimed documentary film, *Inside the Koran* focuses on the Islamic holy scripture by means of a topical treatment of its teachings in the everyday life of Muslims in the real world. These topics include the relationship between the sexes, Islam's roots in Judaism and Christianity, tolerance and intolerance both within and beyond Muslim contexts, the differences between Sunni and Shia Islam, crime and punishment, and the ways in which the Qur'an is printed, reproduced, and dispersed globally. Some controversial issues are addressed about how the scriptural text evolved from early Islamic history into its contemporary canonical form. The film concludes with a discussion of the "twenty-first-century Qur'an," with a focus on the impact of the Internet.

***Journey to Mecca: In the Footsteps of Ibn Battuta* (Bruce Neibaur, director, 2009)**

This superb production dramatically traces the pilgrimage of the legendary medieval Muslim traveler Ibn Battuta from his home city of Tangiers to the sacred Arabian city of Mecca in 1325 CE. The narrative is based on Ibn Battuta's personal diary account of the journey, which included being attacked by bandits and suffering through sandstorms, among other dangers. After crossing all of North Africa, Ibn Battuta was persuaded by a new friend to join a caravan of 10,000 pilgrims journeying south from Damascus to Mecca in relative safety. Ibn Battuta and his fellow Muslims are portrayed by excellent actors, and the sacred sites are rendered with convincing medieval settings and details. But the film is also a presentation of the ritual details of the hajj as the narrative switches in a respectfully entertaining manner from the historical settings to the contemporary context. The action flows in its proper liturgical pattern in the Mecca of today, with its tall modern buildings overlooking the ancient open-air hajj mosque with its central cubical Ka'aba structure marking the center of the world for Muslims, toward which they prostrate themselves from all directions on the globe in their five daily prayers.