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The Quran

Central Holy Book of Islam



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The Central Holy Book of Islam

THE QURAN

(c. 570-632)



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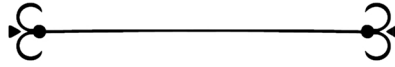
THE QURAN



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The Quran - Central Holy Book of Islam



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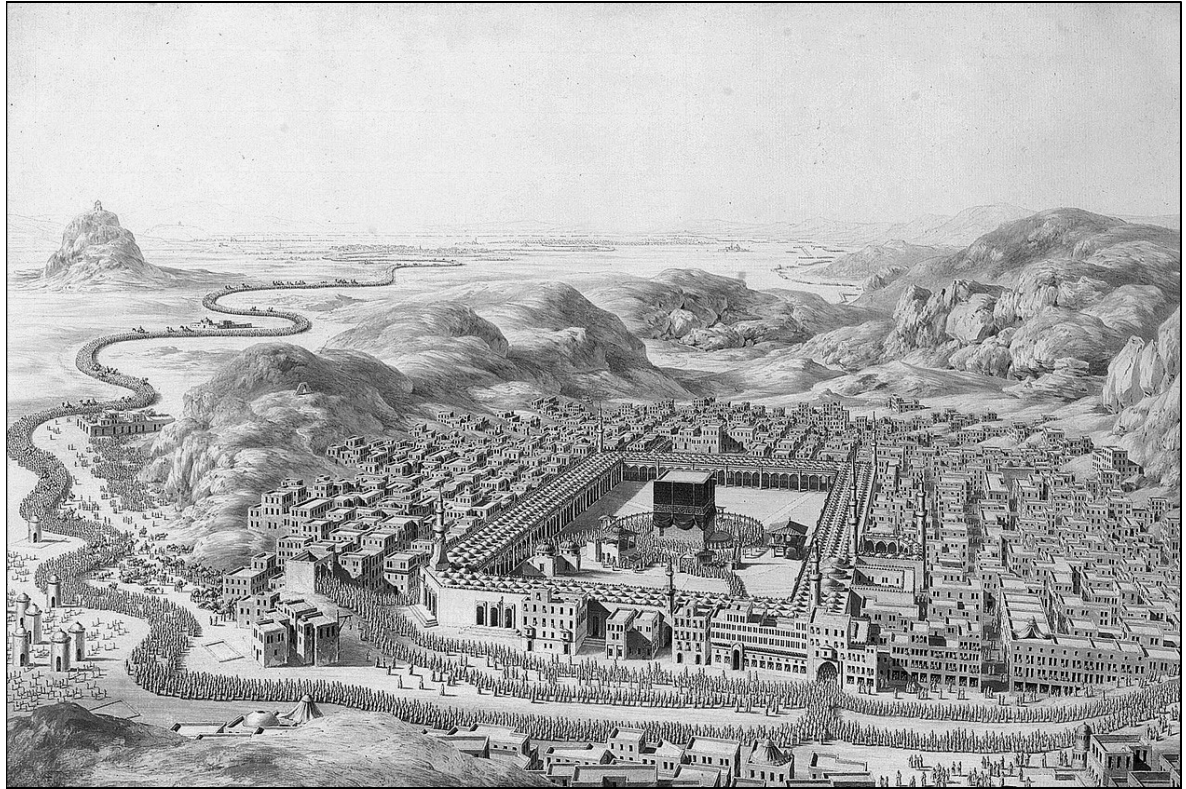


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The Translations



Mecca, a city in the Hejaz region of western Saudi Arabia — the Prophet Muhammad's birthplace



Depiction of Mecca by Louis-Nicolas de Lespinasse, 1787



Makkah Al Mukarramah Library is believed to stand on the spot where Muhammad was born, also known as the Bayt al-Mawlid (House of the Birth)

Brief Introduction: The Quran



The Central Holy Book of Islam, the *Quran* ('the recitation' or 'the lecture') is believed by Muslims to be a revelation directly from God (Allah), providing a complete code of conduct across all facets of life. The text is organised into 114 chapters (suwar), which comprise individual verses (ayah). Besides its religious significance, the *Quran* is widely regarded as the finest work of Arabic literature and has significantly influenced the Arabic language. Muslims believe the text was orally revealed by Allah to the final Islamic prophet Muhammad through the angel Gabriel incrementally over a period of about 23 years, beginning on the Laylat al-Qadr when Muhammad was 40 and concluding in 632, the year of his death. The text is regarded as Muhammad's most important miracle, a proof of his prophethood, and the culmination of a series of divine messages, starting with those revealed to the first Islamic prophet Adam, including the holy books of the Torah, Psalms and Gospel in Islam.

Soon after Muhammad's death, the *Quran* was compiled on the order of the first caliph Abu Bakr (the Prophet's closest friend and father-in-law) in c. 634 by the companions, who had written down or memorised parts of the text. Caliph Uthman established a standard version, now known as the Uthmanic codex, which is generally considered the archetype of the *Quran* known today. There are, however, canonical variant readings transmitted through oral tradition, with minor variations in wording and nuance that may lead to subtle differences in interpretation, while preserving the core message of the Prophet. Some argue that the conflicting manuscript evidence, textual variants (such as the Sanaa manuscript) and historical sources suggest a more gradual and complex process of compilation and canonisation.

Born in Mecca in c. 570, Mohammad was believed to have been sent to the Arabic community to deliver the people from immorality. Receiving his first revelation at the age of 40 in a cave called Hira in Mecca, he started to preach the oneness of Allah in order to stamp out idolatry of pre-Islamic Arabia. This led to opposition by the Meccans, with Abu Lahab and Abu Jahl as the most famous enemies of Muhammad in Islamic tradition. Suffering persecution, Muhammad and his Muslim followers fled to Medina, an event known as the Hijrah, until Muhammad returned to fight the idolaters of Mecca, culminating in the semi-legendary Battle of Badr, conceived in Islamic tradition not only to be a battle between the Muslims and pre-Islamic polytheists, but also between the angels on Muhammad's side against the jinn and false deities siding with the Meccans. After securing victory, Muhammad is believed to have cleansed Arabia from polytheism and advised his followers to renounce idolatry for the sake of the unity of Allah. As manifestation of Allah's guidance and example of renouncing idolatry, Muhammad is understood as an exemplary role-model in regards of virtue, spirituality and moral excellence. His spirituality is revealed by his journey through the seven heavens (Mi'raj). His behaviour and advice became known as the Sunnah, which forms the practical application of Muhammad's teachings.

The *Quran* presents itself as a guide for humanity (2:185). It alludes to significant narratives found in biblical and apocryphal texts. While it devotes considerable space to some of these narratives, it does not quote any paragraph from these sources directly, but summarises and uses different versions of some in different sections. Islamic theorists tend to explain this situation as the Quran's focus on the moral

lessons to be drawn from events. This allusive style and summarisation entail many explanatory efforts (exegesis). To extrapolate the meaning of a particular Quranic verse, Muslims rely on *tafsir*, a commentary, often in conjunction with translations of the text. During prayers, the *Quran* is recited only in Arabic. A person who has memorised the entire 114 chapters is called a *hafiz* (female *hafiza*). Ideally, verses are recited with a special kind of prosody reserved for this purpose called *tajwid*.

The revelations traditionally classified as “Meccan” constitute two-thirds of the *Quran*. It is stated that these revelations were transmitted orally during this period and then recorded in the years leading up to the Hijrah, a period referred to as the Medinan period (622-632). The Meccan period is known for relying on an oral tradition — including narratives related to the *Quran* — which is generally considered to have undergone a degree of textual evolution alongside other religious narratives. The poetic style and frequently repetitive composition of the *Quran* as we know it today are seen as a consequence of the traditional oral communication method of this period. It is thought that the text began to be written down towards the end of the Meccan period. According to tradition, some of the Quraysh captives taken in the Battle of Badr were given the opportunity to be freed after teaching the Muslims the simple script of that time and thus a group of Muslims became literate. Initially transmitted orally, the *Quran* began to be recorded on tablets, bones and the broad, flat ends of palm tree leaves. Most of the suras were in use amongst early Muslims since they are mentioned in numerous sayings by both Sunni and Shia sources, relating Muhammad’s use of the *Quran* as a call to Islam, the making of prayer and the manner of recitation. However, the *Quran* did not exist in book form at the time of Muhammad’s death in 632 at the approximate age of 61.

The content of the text is concerned with basic Islamic beliefs, including the existence of God and the resurrection. Narratives of the early prophets, ethical and legal subjects, historical events of Muhammad’s time, charity and prayer also appear in the *Quran*. The verses contain general exhortations regarding right and wrong and historical events are related to outline general moral lessons. The *Quran*’s style has been described as “allusive”, resulting in commentaries to explain what is being referred to.

The central theme of the text is monotheism. Allah is depicted as living, eternal, omniscient and omnipotent. He is the creator of everything, of the heavens and the earth and what is between them. All human beings are equal in their utter dependence upon Him and their well-being depends upon their acknowledging that fact and living accordingly. The *Quran* uses cosmological and contingency arguments in various verses without referring to the terms to prove the existence of Allah — a famous example being that the universe is originated and therefore needs an originator, as whatever exists must have a sufficient cause for its existence. The design of the universe is frequently referred to as a point of contemplation: “It is He who has created seven heavens in harmony. You cannot see any fault in God’s creation; then look again: Can you see any flaw?”

The *Quran* insists that Muhammad and his followers worship the same God as the Jews. Allah is the same Creator God that covenanted with Abraham. Islam regards Abraham as a link in the chain of prophets that begins with Adam and culminates in Muhammad. Muslims describe Abraham as a ‘hanif’, an archetype of the perfect Muslim, and revered prophet and builder of the Kaaba in Mecca. Stories of the prophets in the *Quran* often revolve around a certain pattern, according to which a prophet is sent to a group of people, who then reject or attack him, and ultimately suffer extinction as God’s punishment. However, the *Quran*, given its paraenetic

(didactic) character, does not offer a full narrative; but instead provides a parabolic reference to the doom of previous generations, assuming the audience is familiar with the told stories.

The most well-known verse of the *Quran* is the 'Throne Verse' (Āyat al-Kursī), the 255th verse of the second chapter, which it is widely memorised and displayed in the Islamic faith. The powerful verse describes the absolute majesty, oneness and eternal power of Allah. It explains that He is Al-Hayy (the Ever-Living) and Al-Qayyum (the Sustainer of all existence), meaning He never dies, sleeps or tires, and everything depends on Him to exist. His *Kursi* (Throne or footstool) extends vastly over the heavens and the earth, symbolising Allah's supreme dominion and knowledge. Muslims often recite the Throne Verse for spiritual defense against harm, evil and unseen forces. Muhammad taught that reciting this verse after every obligatory prayer serves as a direct path to paradise, with only death separating the believer from it. Muslims believe that reciting the Throne Verse before going to sleep ensures that a guardian angel protects the sleeper and that Satan cannot approach them until morning. Also, it serves as a concise summary of Islamic monotheism, contrasting God's infinite divine nature with the finite nature of creation.

The *Quran* holds a monumental position in world literature as the foundational text of Classical Arabic literature, shaping the linguistic, artistic and philosophical trajectories of civilisations. As a literary masterpiece, its unique rhymed prose and inimitable stylistic eloquence transformed a primarily oral Arabian culture into a sophisticated, literate society, helping to establish the definitive grammatical and rhetorical standards of the Arabic language. Beyond its linguistic impact, the *Quran* introduced profound theological, ethical and narrative frameworks that inspired centuries of cross-cultural literary traditions, deeply influencing Persian, Turkish, Urdu and even Swahili poetry and prose. Its structural complexity, vivid allegories and universal themes of justice, morality and the human condition have made the *Quran* a subject of extensive worldwide scholarship, translation and literary critique. By bridging Eastern and Western intellectual histories through its preservation of Abrahamic narratives and its catalyst role in the Islamic Golden Age, the *Quran* remains a towering pillar of world literature, which continues to inspire ethical discourse and artistic expression.



The birth of Muhammad in the 'Siyer-i-Nebi', a Turkish epic poem, 1595



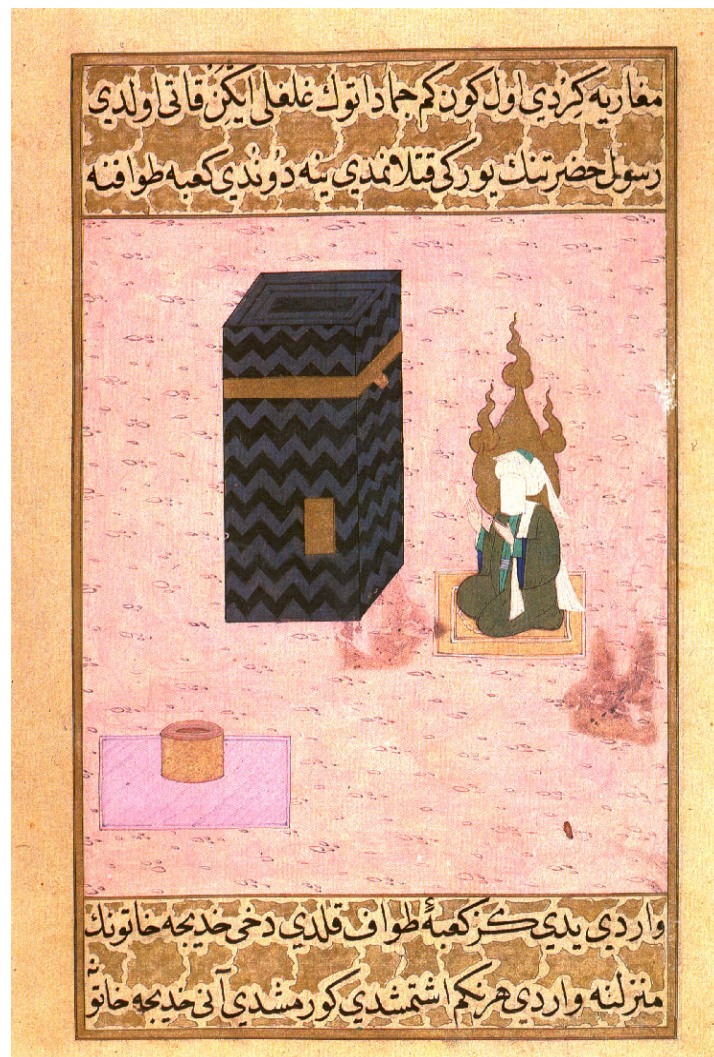
Two folios of the Birmingham Quran manuscript, an early manuscript written in Hijazi script on parchment carbon-dated to c. 568–645, overlapping with Muhammad's lifetime



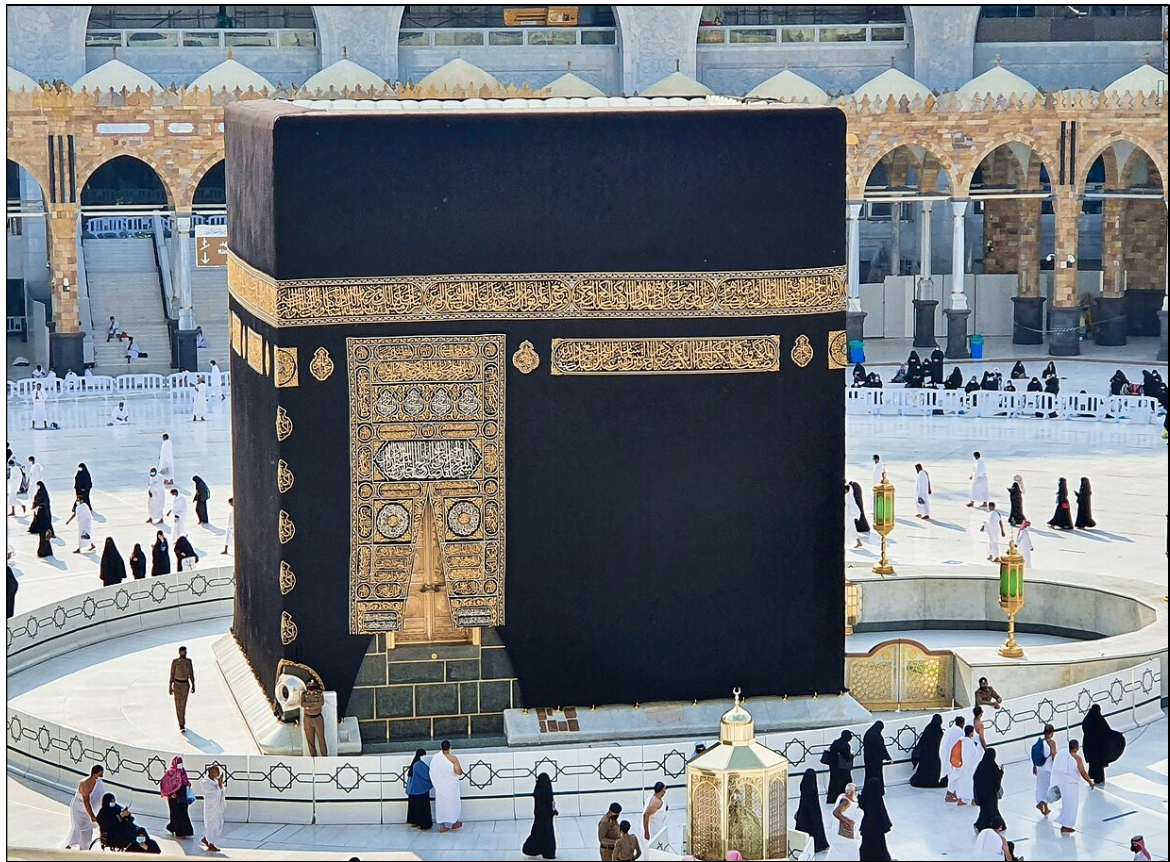
Sura al-Baqarah, verses 282–286, from an early Quranic manuscript written on vellum, mid-late seventh century



A 1594 depiction of The Battle of Badr, which was fought on 13 March 624, near the present-day city of Badr, Medina Province in Saudi Arabia. Muhammad, commanding an army of his Sahaba, defeated an army of the Quraysh led by Amr ibn Hisham, better known among Muslims as Abu Jahl. The battle marked the beginning of the six-year war between Muhammad and his tribe.



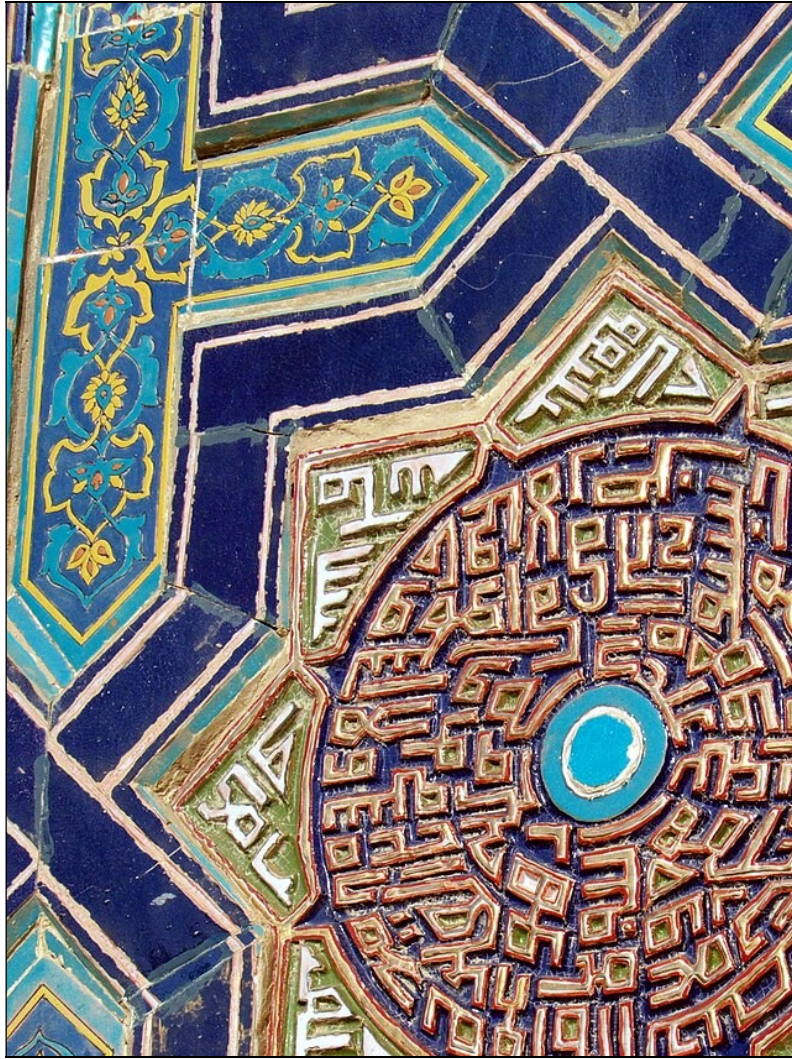
Muhammad at the Kaaba, c. 1600. The Kaaba is a stone building at the centre of Islam's most important mosque and holiest site, the Masjid al-Haram in Mecca.



Muslims view the Kaaba as the Baytullah (House of God), built as the first house of worship dedicated to the One God (Allah). According to Islamic tradition, its foundations were raised by the Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) and his son Ismail (Ishmael). It defines the qibla, meaning all Muslims worldwide face the Kaaba during their five daily prayers, creating a powerful symbol of global unity.



The Black Stone that is set into the eastern corner of the Kaaba and is revered by most Muslims as a relic that dates back to the time of Adam and Eve. According to tradition, it was set intact into the Kaaba's wall by Muhammad in 605, five years before his first revelation.



The Throne Verse depicted on the facade of Ali Nasafi Tomb, Samarkand, Uzbekistan



The Throne Verse on a historic Kiswah cloth, 1846

George Sale 1734 Translation



Edited and Annotated by E. M. Wherry, 1882 text

George Sale (1697-1736) was an English Orientalist scholar and practising solicitor, best known for his 1734 English translation of the *Quran*. The text was commonly called *The Alcoran of Mohammed* and was dedicated to John Carteret, 2nd Earl Granville. Relying heavily on O.M.D. Louis Maracci's Arabic edition and Latin translation, Sale had access to the Dutch Church, Austin Friars' fourteenth-century manuscript of al-Baydāwī's *Lights of Revelation and the Secrets of Interpretation*, which appears to be the source for his Arabic *Quran* rather than his own personal *Quran*, catalogued MS Sale 76 in the Bodleian Library.

Sale's 1734 translation of the *Quran* is historically important, but limited and biased in its reliability by modern standards. It was the first full English translation of the *Quran* translated directly from the Arabic text rather than through French or Latin intermediaries. It remained the standard English translation from the Enlightenment until the twentieth century, influencing major Western thinkers like Voltaire, Edward Gibbon, and Thomas Jefferson. Sale included a famous, highly detailed introductory essay on pre-Islamic Arabia, Islamic doctrine, and customs that shaped Western scholarship for generations. Though praised in its time for its elegant prose, modern academic analysis reveals that it contains various omissions, interpolations, and mistranslations shaped by eighteenth-century European Orientalist biases.



The Prophet Muhammad Preaching, Folio from a Maqalat-i Al-i Rasul of Lami'i Chelebi, late sixteenth century



The Blue Qur'an is a late ninth century Tunisian Qur'an manuscript in Kufic calligraphy, probably created in for the Great Mosque of Kairouan. It is among the most famous works of Islamic calligraphy and has been described as "one of the most extraordinary luxury manuscripts ever created."

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THE KORAN:
COMMONLY CALLED THE
ALKORAN OF MOHAMMED.

Translated into English from the Original Arabic,

WITH EXPLANATORY NOTES TAKEN FROM THE MOST APPROVED
COMMENTATORS.

TO WHICH IS PREFIXED
A PRELIMINARY DISCOURSE,

BY GEORGE SALE.

TO THE RIGHT HON. JOHN LORD CARTERET.

ONE OF THE LORDS OF HIS MAJESTY'S MOST HONOURABLE PRIVY
COUNCIL.

SALE'S PRELIMINARY DISCOURSE.



End of Sample