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# The Quran in Context

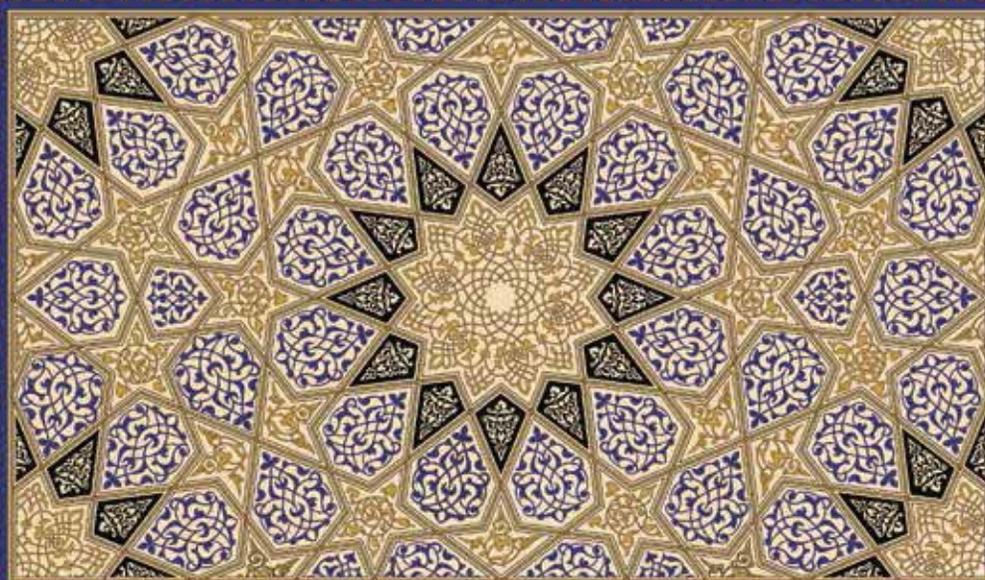
College of the Humanities Professor teams up with distinguished scholars  
to author a game-changing book that interprets the Quran.

by Nick Ward

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# THE STUDY QURAN

A NEW TRANSLATION AND COMMENTARY



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The Study Quran: A New Translation with Commentary

Edited by Seyyed Hossein Nasr (Editor-in-Chief), Caner Dagli, Maria Dakake, Joseph Lumbard (General Editors), and Mohammed Rustom (Assistant Editor). New York: HarperOne, 2015: <http://harperone.hc.com/studyquran/>

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As a member of a five-scholar team (led by world-renowned authority of Islamic thought Seyyed Hossein Nasr), Associate Professor in the College of the Humanities at Carleton University, Mohammed Rustom has recently released a groundbreaking book entitled *The Study Quran: A New Translation with Commentary*. Covered by CNN news on two different occasions, along with a number of other leading media venues throughout North America, *The Study Quran* has already sold over 40,000 copies. It is quickly becoming the standard teaching text in colleges and universities for courses on the Quran, Islam and Muslims.

*The Study Quran* is a new translation and full running commentary on the Quran that provides a critical understanding of Islam's sacred text by helping to explain its vast layers of meaning. This project, nearly a decade in the making, is based on over forty classical and modern exegetical sources.

For Rustom, working on *The Study Quran* has been a remarkable experience:

"It has undoubtedly deepened my appreciation of the commentarial tradition upon Islam's sacred scripture. Being responsible for a portion of the commentary in *The Study Quran*, which alone took several years to complete, the project has given me a window into the seriousness and vast knowledge of the great Quran commentators of the past."

*The Study Quran* showcases over twelve hundred years of insights on the Quran from some of Islam's greatest Quranic interpreters, such as Tabari, Baghawi, Maturidi, Tusi, Qurtubi, Baydawi, Tabrisi, Sulami, Razi, Tusi, Qummi, Zamakhshari, Alusi, Maybudi, Kashani, Ibn 'Ashur, and 'Allama Tabataba'i. The work also incorporates insights upon the Quran from many key philosophers, mystics, theologians, and poets across the board in the Islamic tradition, namely Avicenna, Ibn Taymiyya, Ghazali, Ibn 'Arabi, Qadi 'Abd al-Jabbar, Suhrawardi, Mulla Sadra, 'Ayn al-Qudat, and Rumi.

What makes *The Study Quran* particularly significant is that it is designed to be accessible to non-specialists and scholars. Non-specialists will find in this work a helpful resource to understanding each of the Quran's verses (as well as the various debates surrounding their interpretation); and scholars will find in the commentaries effective summaries of the wide range of commentaries and interpretations of each Quranic verse, thereby

saving them the trouble of having to consult numerous exegetical texts when researching a particular verse or cluster of verses. At nearly one million words in length, the commentary on the Quran, which summarizes its theological, philosophical, spiritual, historical, and linguistic interpretations, is far more extensive than other commentary available in any European language.

In addition to the commentary and a brand new, highly precise and eloquent translation of the Quran, this single volume also includes fifteen essays on aspects of the Quran and its interpretive traditions by some of the leading scholars in the field. Essay contributors include M. A. S. Abdel Haleem, Ingrid Mattson, Walid Saleh, Hamza Yusuf, Mustafa Muhaqqiq-i Damad (a leading scholar in Iran), and Ahmad al-Tayyib (the former Grand *mufti* of Egypt and current rector of Al-Azhar University).

Other special features of *The Study Quran* are its extensive topical indices and detailed topographical maps which are centered around the history of the early Muslim community.

Given its comprehensive nature, Rustom believes this project has the potential to do much good.

"In many ways, *The Study Quran* is both a snapshot of the manner in which Muslims have historically understood the Quran, while also being a contemporary presentation of the Quran and its interpretation. With this latter point in mind, the commentary presented in *The Study Quran* also has an eye on addressing a variety of pertinent contemporary concerns. Indeed, *The Study Quran* is a much needed, scholarly guide in a time when confusion about the Quran and Islam is still so prevalent."

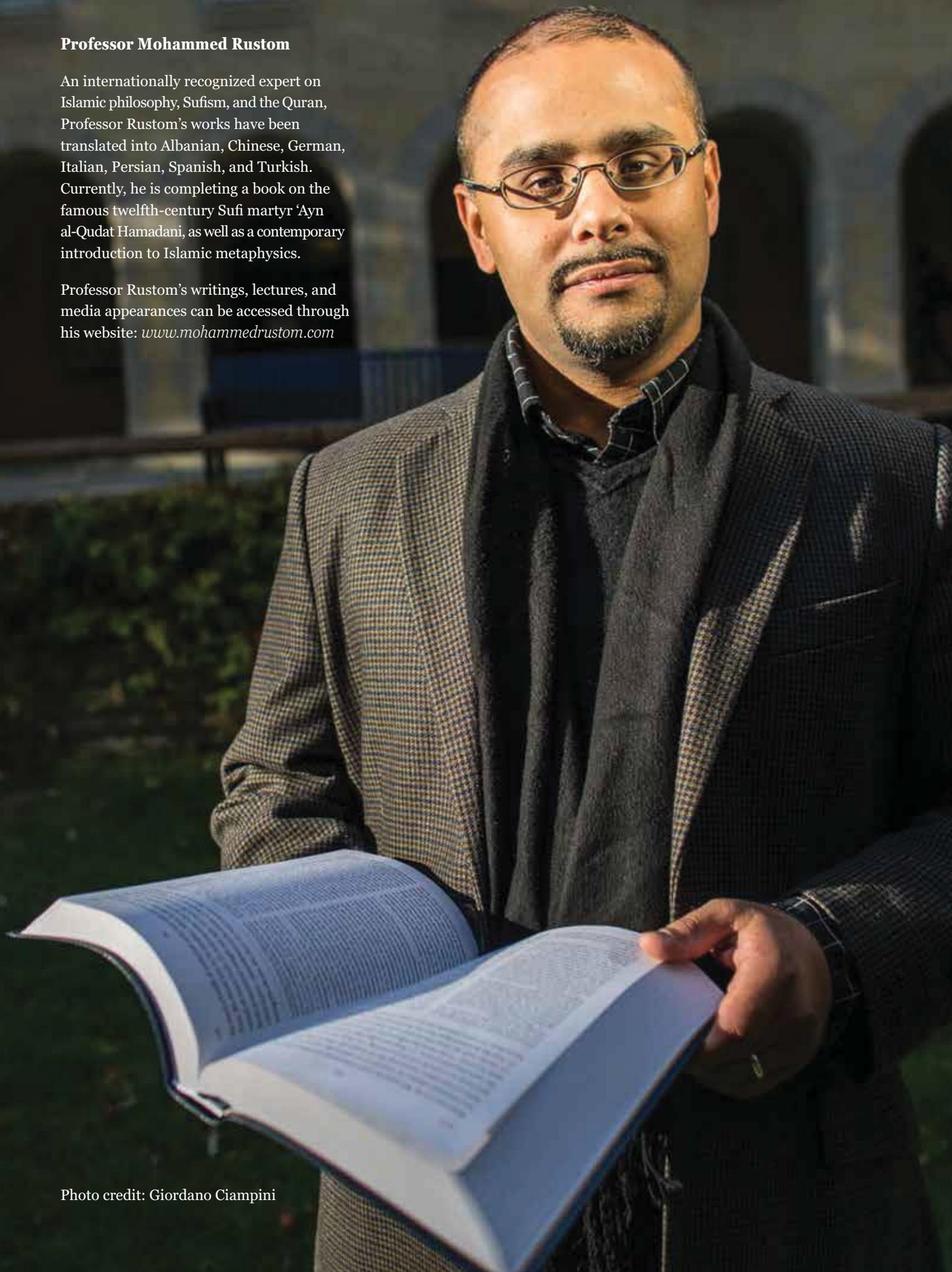
As can be seen from the endorsements provided, scholars have been coming out in droves to express their support for *The Study Quran*.

*The Study Quran: A New Translation with Commentary* was released by HarperOne on November 17, 2015, with an official book launch in Atlanta at the annual joint-meeting of the American Academy of Religion and the Society for Biblical Literature. There were also a number of events related to *The Study Quran* which were held throughout North America, including such venues as George Washington University's Media Center; Politics and Prose, a major local bookstore in DC; College of the Holy Cross; Harvard University; Georgetown University; Zaytuna College; the University of Houston; Yale University; Princeton University and the University of Toronto.

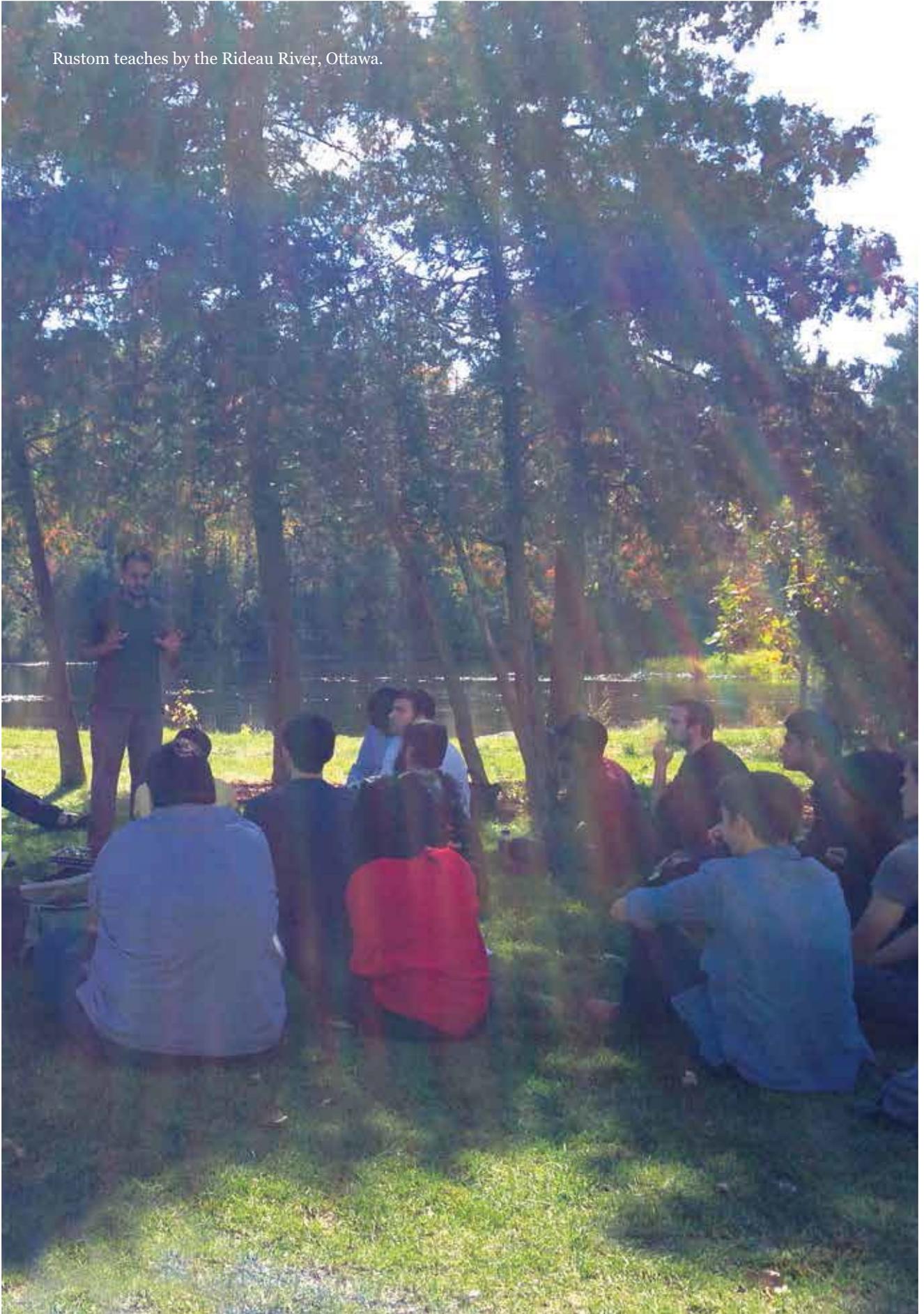
## **Professor Mohammed Rustom**

An internationally recognized expert on Islamic philosophy, Sufism, and the Quran, Professor Rustom's works have been translated into Albanian, Chinese, German, Italian, Persian, Spanish, and Turkish. Currently, he is completing a book on the famous twelfth-century Sufi martyr 'Ayn al-Qudat Hamadani, as well as a contemporary introduction to Islamic metaphysics.

Professor Rustom's writings, lectures, and media appearances can be accessed through his website: [www.mohammedrustom.com](http://www.mohammedrustom.com)



Rustom teaches by the Rideau River, Ottawa.



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# Critical Praise for *The Study Quran*

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**“This scholarly yet accessible work speaks directly to the tensions and misunderstandings of our gravely polarized world. It should be on the shelves of libraries and universities throughout the English-speaking world. The contributors guide the reader through the intricacies of the sacred text in a way that lays bare the superficiality, selectivity and inaccuracy of some modern interpretations of the Quran at a time when this is sorely needed.”**

Karen Armstrong, author of *Fields of Blood*

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“*The Study Quran* could not be more timely. This painstaking work will do much to enlighten and inform the reading strategies of all who seek to understand the Holy Writ of Islam, especially as it relates to the beliefs and practices of Muslims.”

Sherman A. Jackson, King Faisal Chair of Islamic Thought and Practice, The University of Southern California

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“A major milestone for the study of the Qur’an. Elegantly written, the project is ambitious yet amply fulfills its promise. Invaluable for anyone interested in understanding the Qur’an and essential reading for students of the Qur’an at all levels.”

Dr. Michael Sells, Barrows Professor of the History and Literature of Islam, University of Chicago

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**“A work of extraordinary significance, *The Study Quran* makes accessible in English Islam’s sacred scripture along with an array of material necessary to appreciate the nuances of the text. An invaluable and much needed resource for understanding the Quran. A monumental accomplishment.”**

Ali Asani, Professor of Indo-Muslim and Islamic Religion and Cultures and Director of the Prince Alwaleed bin Talal Islamic Studies Program, Harvard University

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Rustom at Dow's Lake, Ottawa.

darkness, unseeing. 18 Deaf, dumb, and blind, they return not. 19 Or a cloud-burst from the sky, in which there is darkness, thunder, and lightning. They put their fingers in their ears against the thunderclaps, fearing death. And God encompasses the disbelievers. 20 The lightning all but snatches away their sight. Whenever it shines for them, they walk therein, and when darkness comes over them, they halt. Had God willed, He would have taken away their hearing and their sight. Truly God is Powerful over all things. 21 O mankind! Worship your Lord, Who created you, and those who were before you, that haply you may be reverent: 22 He Who made for you the earth a place of repose and the sky a canopy, and sent water from the sky by which He brought forth fruits for your provision. So do not set up equals unto God, knowingly. 23 If you are in

protection, since membership in the Islamic community grants one certain legal and social rights and protections. But this "light" is taken away at death when the hypocrisy is unmasked (T).

18 When recited aloud in Arabic, *deaf, dumb, and blind* (*ṣummūn bukmūn ʿumyūn*) is startlingly evocative, in its very sound, of this deafness, dumbness, and blindness (cf. 2:171; 17:97). Deafness and blindness are mentioned frequently in the *Qurān* (e.g., 5:71; 6:25; 6:39; 10:42–43) and refer to spiritual insensibility. The commentators mention the good, the truth, and guidance as realities lost to those so described (T). They *return not* to guidance (2:116) or to Islam, as this likely refers to the hypocrites; or they do not repent and take heed.

19 *Or* indicates a continuation from their parable in v. 17. Some commentators (T) mention a tradition from Ibn ʿAbbās that the Prophet, when asked, said that *al-raʿd* (*thunder*) is the name of an angel in the clouds, while others see this as an invalid and gratuitous attribution, since the word *raʿd* as "thunder" was well known to Arabs (cf. 13:13; Q). *Samāʾ* (pl. *samāwāt*), here *sky*, is also translated "Heaven," "firmament," or even "ceiling" depending on its context.

20 See 2:17c.

21 *That haply* (*laʿalla*) occurs frequently in the *Qurān* and is sometimes rendered "that perchance" or "that someone might." It can be seen to present a theological problem, as it implies anxiety or hope, qualities usually associated only

with creatures. Some solve this matter by saying that the hope of God is tantamount to a promise, as nothing could stand in its way (Z), or that the hope is connected to the subject of the statement, not to God.

22 It is reported that the Prophet was asked, "O Messenger of God, what is the greatest sin in the Sight of God?" and he replied, "To set up equals to God, though He created you." *Fruits* (*thamarāt*) here is understood in both the most general sense of natural produce that can be used for food and the symbolic sense of spiritual sustenance for the soul. Earth and sky imagery similar to that mentioned in this verse can be found in 21:31–32; 50:6–7; 79:27–31.

23 *Our servant* refers to the Prophet. The *ʿijāz* ("inimitability" or "power to incapacitate [arguments against it]") of the *Qurān* (a term not used in reference to the *Qurān* in the text itself) stems from its intrinsic beauty, clarity, eloquence, and levels of meaning. Similar challenges to produce something like the *Qurān* are made in 10:38; 11:13; 17:88. The *Qurān* is the central miracle (*muʿjizah*, from *ʿijāz*) of Islam in that it "incapacitates" challengers' arguments against it, as miracles do in general. That the Prophet was "unlettered" (see 7:157c) forms the background of this challenge. This verse is Madinan, though other similar challenges had been revealed in Makkah. See the essay "Obstacles Faced in the Translation of the *Qurān*."