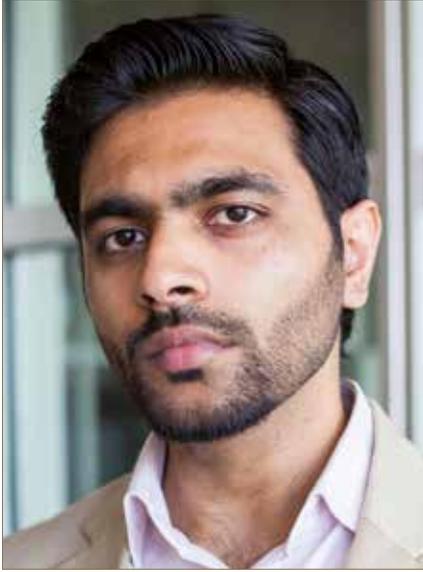


# بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ



**WAQĀS AHMED**  
EDITOR

For those sincerely seeking an answer to the question, 'what is Islam?', the question 'what is Makkah?' becomes pertinent. So it was an honour for me to put together the world's first volume of its kind in the English language dedicated to a multi-dimensional portrait of the Holy City of Makkah.

This publication promotes no particular viewpoint and instead serves as a platform that hosts and curates diverse perspectives. As such, it is supported by multiple organisations of varying backgrounds and includes insights from many of the world's leading theologians, poets, anthropologists, philosophers, artists, geographers, historians and philanthropists, as well as from eminent religious institutions, international organisations and indeed the Makkan authorities. We are grateful for their esteemed contributions.

As well as being the universal direction of prayer for Muslims worldwide, Makkah is host to the world's largest and most phenomenal annual religious gathering – the *Hajj*. This Holy City is thus a living, breathing celebration of unity – not only of the Divine, but indeed of all things physical and metaphysical.

In underscoring the glory and majesty of the Blessed City, this publication offers a timely opportunity to reflect on the history of Makkah as well as envision its future. How can Makkah retain its cultural history, egalitarian ethos and spiritual essence whilst embracing the dynamic technological, consumer and logistical realities of the 21st century? How can greater interaction between pilgrims be fostered so that they all enjoy the fruits of

Islamic diversity? And how can Muslims be inspired by the birthplace of their faith to perpetuate a spirit of mutual respect, understanding and peace across the Muslim world and beyond? Through poetry, metaphysical reflection, diplomatic discourse and extraordinary tales of history, these and many other themes will be explored in this volume.

Those not of the Islamic faith are traditionally restricted from entering Makkah. Famous historical accounts by Ibn Battuta, JL Burckhardt, Richard Francis Burton, Muhammad Asad and Malcolm X among others have intrigued many who must therefore rely on their imaginations alone. In this volume, we seek to further enrich the world's understanding of this Sacred City by including reflections from – among many others – a British musician, a German diplomat, a Jewish collector, an Italian Cardinal, a Central Asian poet and a North African anthropologist.

There is little else that can be said here which has not been said more eloquently and with greater authority in the following pages. For the Muslim *Ummah*, this is a chance to celebrate its heritage, contemplate its current condition and be inspired by the ethics of compassion and justice laid out in the Holy City over fourteen hundred years ago. For the international community – those that Muslims traditionally refer to as their brothers and sisters in humanity – this publication presents an opportunity to better understand the cultural origins and philosophical worldview of their two billion co-inhabitants on Planet Earth. **F**