

The Islam Quintet: Shadows of the Pomegranate Tree, The Book of Saladin, The Stone Woman, A Sultan in Palermo, and Night of the Golden Butterfly

Tariq Ali

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Five nuanced and powerful historical novels depicting the clashes among Muslims, Christians, and Jews from the Crusades to twenty-first-century London.

Celebrated British-Pakistani journalist and author Tariq Ali takes a mind-expanding journey through the ages with these five acclaimed works of fiction, available now in one collection.

Shadows of the Pomegranate Tree : “Ali captures the humanity and splendor of Muslim Spain” in “an enthralling story, unraveled with thrift and verve” (*The Independent*). For the doomed Moors, the fall of Granada and the approaching forces of Christendom bring not peace but the sword.

The Book of Saladin : After Saladin reclaims the holy city of Jerusalem from the Crusaders, he turns to a Jewish scribe to record his story, which Edward Said calls “a narrative for our time, haunted by distant events and characters who are closer to us than we had dreamed.”

The Stone Woman : “Ali paints a vivid picture of a fading world,” proclaims the *New York Times Book Review*, as a distant descendant of an exiled Ottoman courtier suffers a stroke in Istanbul, and his family rushes to his side to hear his last stories.

A Sultan in Palermo: In “a marvelously paced and boisterously told novel of intrigue, love, insurrection and manipulation,” cartographer Muhammad al-Idrisi is caught between his friendship with King Roger of Sicily and the resentments of his fellow Muslims (*The Guardian*).

Night of the Golden Butterfly: A Lahore-born writer living in London is called back to his homeland by an old friend who, at seventy-five, has finally fallen in love. “If Pakistan is a land of untold stories,” writes the *New Statesman*, Ali is “the country’s finest historian and critic.”

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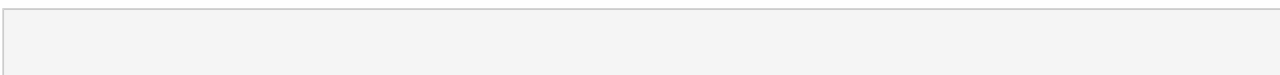
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From Reader Review The Islam Quintet: Shadows of the Pomegranate Tree, The Book of Saladin, The Stone Woman, A Sultan in Palermo, and Night of the Golden Butterfly for online ebook

Mary Ann says

These are five discrete novels unlike Paul Scott's Raj Quartet, Galsworthy's Forsyte Chronicles, or Trollope's Barchester Chronicles and, as such, can certainly be read as stand-alones. The reader will surely prefer some stories more than others. The Stone Woman was the least satisfying for me.

The author is better known as a journalist, non-fiction writer, and documentary filmmaker, and the reader will not find the beautiful literary prose of a Paul Scott with his elegant phrasing and subtle changes in tone. However, I enjoyed these stories as portrayals of Islam in different locations and historical periods.

Sekhar N Banerjee says

Not bad

Except for the last book, the other four books were not a bad read. The last book, I could not finish and gave up about half way. Of all these, the fourth one, Sultan of Palermo, I liked best - it closely follows the accepted history.

Maggie says

These five novels aren't perfect, but they're an excellent voyage through historical Islam (it's not all terrorists and mujahideen, people). My only criticism would be that, concerned as we know left wing political writer Ali is, he could have had more characters from the "common people." Ali's non-fiction is even better -- check it out.

Matt Kelland says

The first four books were truly superb, hence the five-star rating. They were magnificent evocations of Islamic life at different times and places in history, complete with all its richness and thoughtfulness. For those alone, I'd highly recommend the series.

The fifth book, however, was a huge disappointment: the contemporary setting and unappealing characters were like a Pakistani take on Salman Rushdie, but without the charm. You can skip it, and you won't have missed anything.

Lisa says

This isn't an author I was familiar with and I enjoyed reading these stories in Spain where the back and forth of history is really evident. These are about people on the edges of change and how they with it. The stories in the book quintet series (about Muslim communities on the fringes of Islamic culture/society and their relationships with non-Muslims they are in contact with--throughout five different times and places) are in general I think NOT familiar to most readers. And they should be. Ali has chosen fascinating times to write about and the history is good and pretty compelling in terms of education about why and how societies change. I can't say much for the characters and there is a lot of interest in bodily functions. The plot developments of all the books aren't of much interest to me, but they aren't boring. And they allow for a great education regarding these "edges" of empire history.

I think there is something lost in translation here, since Ali's first book won a literary prize in Spain.... I'm willing to acknowledge that.

James Romanow says

These are historical fiction featuring real people who can be found in history books, during the last couple of centuries of Islamic Empire. They are thoroughly romantic, and Islam positive novels that will appeal to the Islamic diaspora, starved of positive imagery of their faith and history.

That said the novels offer a curiously colonial in viewpoint. Ali appears to believe the conquered peoples of Europe thought the Caliphate just a bunch of wonderful guys and had no grievance - that indeed the grievance is for the soon to be evicted conquered Faithful. This is a rather curious point of view given the Arabic and Middle Eastern determination to free themselves from Western domination currently.

And it does rather elide over the sundry injuries and atrocities committed when conquering Spain for example, or expanding into France. That Christianity was capable of beastliness is unquestioned. But whether or not the courtly, sensitive educated knights stopped by Charles Martell were offering "civilization" to the conquered is certainly debatable. That the peoples of France and Spain could manage uprising and war against the Umayyad Dynasty seems to indicate all was not sweetness and light within Al Andalus.

Nuri Septilanti says

good
