



# Dangerous Knowledge: Orientalism and Its Discontents

*Robert Irwin*

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## **Dangerous Knowledge: Orientalism and Its Discontents** Robert Irwin

The publication of Edward Said's hugely influential *Orientalism* in 1981 called into question the entire history of the Western study of Islamic culture, condemning this scholarly tradition as one that presented inaccurate and deliberately demeaning representations of Islamic peoples and institutions—so much so that the words "Oriental" and "Orientalist" have come to take on the most negative connotations.

But what is Orientalism, and who were the Orientalists, and how did Western scholars of Islamic culture come to be vilified as insidious agents of European imperialism? In Robert Irwin's groundbreaking new history, he answers this question with a detailed and colorful story of the motley crew of intellectuals and eccentrics who brought an understanding of the Islamic world to the West. In a narrative that ranges from an analysis of Ancient Greek perceptions of the Persians to a portrait of the first Western European translators of Arabic to the contemporary Muslim world's perceptions of the Western study of Islam, Irwin affirms the value of the Orientalists' legacy: not only for the contemporary scholars who have disowned it, but also for anyone committed to fostering the cross-cultural understanding which could bridge the real or imagined gulf between Islamic and Western civilization. *Dangerous Knowledge* is a both riveting and entertaining history, a bold argument, and an urgent redress of our conceptions about Western culture's relationship with its nearest neighbor.

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