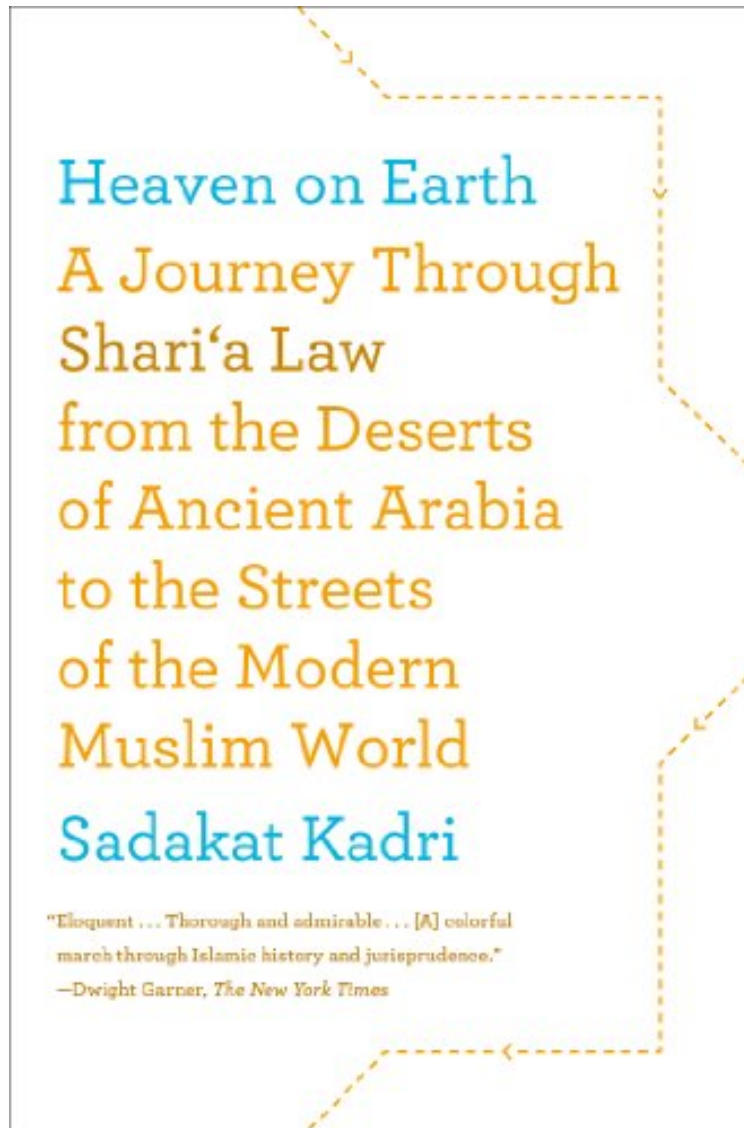


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Heaven on Earth: A Journey Through Shari'a Law from the Deserts of Ancient Arabia to the Streets of the Modern Muslim World

Sadakat Kadri

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Streets of the Modern Muslim World:

5 of 5 people found the following review helpful. Heaven on Earth
By Van E. Langley
Heaven on Earth: A Journey Through Shari'a Law from the Deserts of Ancient Arabia to the Streets of the Modern Muslim World
There is no better way to understand current events in the Islamic world (e.g. the "Islamic Spring") than to carefully read this outstanding historic summary of the origins and growth of "Shari'a" law and politics from pre-Islam to 2012. This is an outstanding read, covering politics, war, law and philosophy; once finished, you can read your morning newspaper and place current developments in the Muslim world in a comprehensive context. Congratulations to the author!
Van E. Langley, J.D.
15 of 17 people found the following review helpful. Kadari reveals the truth about the Islamic legal history
By Israel Drazin
Sadakat Kadri gives readers a good history of Islam beginning with the life of Muhammad and continuing to the present. He focuses mostly on the development of the Islamic legal system, how it changed in remarkable ways. The basic document of Islam is the Qur'an; however much of its original meaning is unclear or no longer relevant: "most of the Qur'an's 114 chapters had been overruled - 71 of them, according to one authoritative estimate." Islamic scholars explain that "God's responses to changing circumstances meant that many older verses of the Qur'an could be legally ineffective." Muslims differ as to when the Qur'an appeared. It "was first enunciated by the Prophet Muhammad during the 620s." It is not composed chronologically, but organized according to the size of its chapters. Its name means "recitation," and many are convinced that it wasn't written down until after Muhammad's death. Others insist that he had it written during his lifetime. Some say that Allah composed it. Others insist that it existed as long as Allah. This later view suggests that the Qur'an's content has nothing to do with divine will or earthly circumstances; it is truth personified. However, this view seems to be contradicted by its changes due to altered circumstances. Shari'a is Islamic laws, from inheritance to warfare. The name conveys "the idea of a direct path to water - a route of considerable importance to a desert people." However, it is more than that. Water is a sustainer of life. As one Syrian jurist put it: "If it had not been for the fact that some of its rules remain [in this world] this world would [have] become corrupted and the universe would [have been] dissipated." Changes in human circumstances also resulted in changes in the shari'a. As with the US Constitution, Muslim scholars differ how to interpret it. Some are open to modern interpretations, seeking how the ancients might have resolved legal questions that they knew nothing about. Others are strict constructionists and insist that God manifested his will through the shari'a; obliging Muslim judges to interpret shari'a according to its ancient no longer relevant meaning. Kadri writes that this traditional approach has "the whiff of a sance about it... (and) seems akin to ancestor worship" The third part of the Islamic legal system is the fiqh, meaning "deep understanding." These are legal decisions by Muslim jurists designed to explain the Qur'an and shari'a. Like religious leaders of other religions, they "Hypothesized fantastically unfortunate dilemmas: what Muslims should do on a desert island, for example, if they found themselves pining away alongside a dead shipmate, a pig, and a flask of wine (clue: avoid the pig and alcohol until desperate)." Different Islamic schools have different interpretations of fiqhs. The fourth and most troubling in every religion is the hadiths, the stories told about the ancients, from Muhammad on, with the idea that religious people should copy their age-old behavior. Kadri points out that most of these tales are filled with fantastic events, pure inventions, and many were written to justify certain behaviors that are not explicit in the shari'a or fiqh and are contrary to its spirit. The fifth level is fatwas. These are religious opinions issued by any religious leader and are only binding on Muslims who attached themselves to the religious leader who issued the opinion. Thus, Pakistan's schools "refused on religious principle to put their clocks forward for the summer, because the muftis in charge considered daylight saving time to be an unholy innovation." Another important example is that the ancient laws never allowed the murder of civilians. Yet, Osama bin Laden bizarrely relied on a fatwa by ibn Taymiyyah (1263-1328) to justify killing non-combatants, Muslim and non-Muslims, during and not during war. Ibn Taymiyyah decision only addressed the conditions of his time. He allowed Muslims to defend themselves against the attacks by Mongols and to kill Muslims soldiers who had joined the Mongol forces in self defense during the battles. There is no overall religious body in Islam today which decides which ruling is correct, Islam has no Pope capable of resolving earthly disputes, and, as a result, there is much disagreement among Muslims about how to act. The only certainty, as with the other religions today, is that Islam is generally more conservative today than it was in the past. Thus, for example, "The very idea that Muslims might blow themselves up for God was unheard-of before 1983, and it was not until the early 1990s that anyone anywhere had tried to justify killing innocent Muslims who were not on the battlefield. The arguments for violence are recent." The results are macabre. "After a twenty-seven-year-old woman killed herself and an eighty-one-year-old Jewish man outside a shoe shop on Jerusalem's Jaffa Road in January 2002, for example, the only moral qualms expressed by the Egyptian jurist Yusuf al-Qaradawi concerned the propriety of a female martyr traveling to her death unchaperoned."
3 of 3 people found the following review helpful. Excellent read
By Autie11
Makes a pretty dense and controversial subject very accessible. Really like his wry style of writing. Had previously borrowed it from the library and decided to buy it as I couldn't complete reading it in time and thought this would be a good book to keep at home for reference.

Ever since 9/11, fears about the shariaIslamic lawhave been spreading. A word that originally conveyed nothing more

sinister than a direct path to water has become associated not with salvation but with brutality and compulsion. And as the legal historian and human rights lawyer Sadakat Kadri realized when he began writing this book, we are all worse off for not knowing its true meaning. In *Heaven on Earth*, Kadri recounts Islam's thrilling and turbulent history with wit and precision and shows how fourteen hundred years of tradition have been turned upside down in just forty years by hard-line extremists. Traveling through more than half a dozen countries, he explores how the sharia is currently perceived by scholars, critics, and ordinary believers alike. *Heaven on Earth* is a brilliantly iconoclastic tour through one of humanity's great collective intellectual achievements. At a time when the sharia is shaping political crises and the lives of more than a billion Muslims worldwide, Kadri clarifies the realities of modern Islam and helps us anticipate how it is going to look in the future.

Eloquent . . . Thorough and admirable . . . Kadri's background gives him a grounded and many-angled perspective on Islamic law. He finds a great deal to admire in it, and he is deft at dispelling myths . . . [A] colorful march through Islamic history and jurisprudence . . . [Kadri] explores these complicated issues with probity but also good humor. Dwight Garner, *The New York Times* A vivid history of Islam . . . Kadri's writing is full of elegance and wit. The *New Yorker* A carefully researched history of how Islamic jurisprudence has evolved since the seventh century . . . [Kadri] writes with a breezy, witty tone and excels at synthesizing Islamic scholarship for a general reader. He provides a lively intellectual history of Islam. Mohamad Bazzi, *The New York Times Book Review* *Heaven on Earth* is an evolutionary look at Islamic jurisprudence that is subtle, generous and--rather improbably--dryly hilarious . . . What makes this book so good isn't just that it manages the odd feat of delivering a discriminating, magisterial history of sharia that's also quite funny; it's that its humor isn't merely incidental. Kadri's tone--gently skeptical, wittily deflationary, and most of all darkly delighted by the absurdities of history--is perfectly consonant with the substance of his project. Gideon Lewis-Kraus, *NPR.org* Measured [and] accessible . . . With the enthusiasm for complexity of a practicing lawyer, and the empathy of one descended from devout Indian Muslims, Kadri embraces this most controversial of topics with humor, heart and hope. Brook Wilensky-Lanford, *San Francisco Chronicle* Learned, level-headed, engaging, [*Heaven on Earth*] deserves praise on every front . . . [Kadri] finds that the kinds of sharia now trumpeted by theocrats and militants always owe more to human arrogance than to divine inspiration. Boyd Tonkin, *The Independent* An ambitious, accessible survey from the first notions of a direct path to water' in the time of Muhammad when no written form of the moral law yet existed . . . With occasional personal travel details added to an engaging scholarly history, Kadri offers a readable, useful companion to the Qur'an. Kirkus sThis is a beautifully nuanced and incisive study of a subject beset by misunderstanding. A timely and important achievement. Colin Thubron, author of *Shadow of the Silk Road* Compelling . . . Admirably even-handed . . . [*Heaven on Earth*] book greatly enriches our understanding of a much misunderstood subject. Ian Critchley, *The Sunday Times (London)* A truly penetrating and provocative book. Aatish Taseer, *The Observer (London)* If you are about to utter the word 'Islam' or 'sharia,' stop and read this book first. It's a fascinating and often witty account of the evolution of the sharia through the ages and the way it's practiced across the Muslim world now. I never thought legal history could be made into a page-turner. Kadri is a brilliant historian and an even better writer. Mohammed Hanif, author of *A Case of Exploding Mangoes* An elegantly composed model for writing cultural and intellectual history, *Heaven on Earth* explodes the notion of the Muslim world as a monolith and Islamic tradition as unchanging. David Luhrssen, *Express Milwaukee* [A] fascinating journey . . . Skilfully weaves history with travelogue to guide the reader into this most contentious and topical of territory . . . Kadri approaches these themes with unstinting humanity and intelligence, as well as great fluency. James Mather, *The Spectator* Captivating . . . *Heaven on Earth* is an erudite and instructive book. Ziauddin Sardar, *The Times (London)* Illuminating . . . Intriguing and memorable . . . [An] intellectually nimble and rigorously researched book . . . Kadri is a precise and stylish writer, as good on explicating abstruse arguments as he is at conjuring vivid scenes . . . Given how heated debates about sharia have become, and given how glancing the intellectual engagement with it is on the part of some of the most strident voices, this brave and sane book could not be more timely. Stuart Kelly, *The Scotsman* [A] brilliant and illuminating study . . . A gripping account . . . Kadri is far too subtle to either to mount an attack on sharia, or to defend it. He has demystified it . . . With tact and fine writing, [Kadri] has helped us to understand what sharia really is, and how it emerged, and that will do at least something to demolish prejudice. Boris Johnson, *The Mail on Sunday* Lively, yet scholarly . . . Kadri is an ideally positioned guide. Sameer Rahim, *The Daily Telegraph* About the Author Sadakat Kadri is a practicing English barrister and qualified New York attorney, and the author of *The Trial*. He has a master's degree from Harvard Law School and has contributed to *The Guardian*, *The Times (London)*, and the *London of Books*, and he is the winner of the 1998 Shiva Naipaul Memorial Prize for travel writing. He lives in London.