

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

By Sadakat Kadri

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Ever since 9/11, fears about the shari‘a?Islamic law?have 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 shari‘a 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 shari‘a 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.

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Editorial Review

Review

“**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 shari‘a 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 shari‘a 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 as conveying ‘the idea 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 Reviews*

“This 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 ‘shari‘a,' stop and read this book first. It's a fascinating and often witty account of the evolution of the shari‘a 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 nation 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 shari'a 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 shari'a, or to defend it. He has demystified it . . . **With tact and fine writing, [Kadri] has helped us to understand what shari'a 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 Review of Books*, and he is the winner of the 1998 Shiva Naipaul Memorial Prize for travel writing. He lives in London.

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