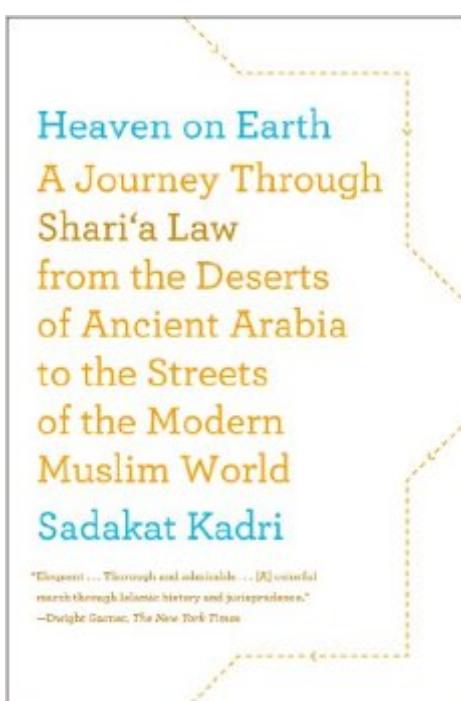


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Heaven On Earth: A Journey Through Shari'a Law From The Deserts Of Ancient Arabia To The Streets Of The Modern Muslim World



Synopsis

Ever since 9/11, fears about the shariâ ^aâ •Islamic lawâ •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 shariâ ^a is currently perceivedâ •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 shariâ ^a is shaping political crises and the lives of more than a billion Muslims worldwide, Kadri clarifies the realities of modern Islamâ •and helps us anticipate how it is going to look in the future.

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Customer Reviews

Sadakat Kadri's "Heaven on Earth" is an amazing work that takes the reader through the history of Islam through the development of the shari'a, the path devout Muslims hope to follow to come closer to God. As the author makes clear, Islam as any other religion, is rife with conflicting interpretations of the Quran that developed over time and that continue today. Western civilization experienced the same sort of rifts as Christianity developed and split and split again. Kadri does a superb job at explaining the history of the development of Islamic jurisprudence and by doing so

illuminates present day conflicts within Islam and between Islam and the West. I've read Karen Armstrong's Biography of Mohammed and her History of Islam, both are good basics, and while a basic knowledge of Mohammed's life and the development of Islam make Kadri's book even better, his writing and organization stand on their own. Providing knowledge and provoking thoughts are Kadri's strong points, and he is unafraid to tackle the hard issues throughout this book. The inextricable linkage in Islam between the State and religion is one aspect of the development of shari'a that continues to be difficult for western readers to comprehend, although the US has its share of those who want the nation to be defined as a "Christian nation" so perhaps the linkage is not so difficult to understand. Islamic scholars have had to wrestle with questions of how to interpret the Quran, its conflicts, its changes, and how to interpret its contents in accord with the world as it is. These processes are not so different from that undergone by other religious scholars attempting to understand their own traditions (with the attendant biases and agendas operating in any interpretation). Kadri's three year work on this book shows, and it should be read by anyone who wants to better understand how the jurisprudence of Islam developed and exists in myriad forms today.

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 sÃ©ance 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."

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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.

Learned a great deal about the history and breadth of different cultures understanding of the Koran and the practice of Islam. It is as varied as Protestant Christianity and shares the same violent tendencies when religious conservatives try to impose their understanding of religious text on people with modern understanding of revelations. Its a good idea to make a note of different historical players in order to do some outside research to better understand the history. As for the author, the book, despite its frequent references to pogroms, maintains a pleasant equilibrium when presenting a sometimes violent history. That said the book is not for everyone. Our UU Sunday book club over the past 10 years has tackled a variety of religious text. We all agreed that we came to a better understanding of this subject because of our discussion group.

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.

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