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Abstract

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Full Text

HEAVENON EARTH

A Journey Through Sharia Law by SADAKAT KADRI

Bodley Head Pounds 18.99 ebook Pounds 9.99 pp352

It was the London bombings of July 7, 2005 that prompted Sadakat Kadri to begin his research into sharia, Islamic religious law. A qualified barrister, he had already written a book on western law, but was frustrated by the lack of reliable information about sharia during the heightened emotions after the bombings. The "journey" he subsequently undertook was both literal (he spent months travelling in Muslim countries) and academic. His book provides a compelling overview of the historical events that shaped Islamic law, and an admirably even-handed account of its often fraught position today.

Sharia is derived not only from the Koran, but also from a body of opinions laid down over the centuries by jurists. Even among Muslims it can mean many different things. In the West, it is often viewed as being suffused with violence, its punishments varying from stoning to beheading. Kadri shows that such measures have always been more exception than rule. In 500 years of Ottoman control, there is evidence for only one instance of stoning. Muslims, Kadri writes, have "always sought to transcend sins more than suppress them".

The past few decades, though, have seen an upsurge in violent interpretations of sharia (Kadri traces this back to the creation of Israel in 1948), which have created conflicts within Muslim society as well as between fundamentalists and the West. While Kadri makes no claim to possess the solutions to these problems, he sees hope in the vast majority of Muslims who, even if they differ in the detail of their interpretations, still view sharia as a path towards peace. His book greatly enriches our understanding of a much misunderstood subject.

Available at the Sunday Times Bookshop price of Pounds 16.99 (inc p&p) and Pounds 9.99 (ebook) on 0845 271 2135

Credit: IAN CRITCHLEY

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