The prophet Muḥammad (d. 11/632) is regarded by Muslims as God’s messenger to humankind. In addition to God’s word—the Qur’an—which he conveyed over the course of his life as it was revealed to him, Muḥammad’s own words—called hadith—have a very special place in the lives of Muslims. Many of Muḥammad’s hadiths explicate the divine message and consequently form a natural companion to the Qur’an. They wield an authority second only to the Book of God and are cited by Muslims as testimonial texts in a wide array of religious, scholarly, and popular literature—such as liturgy, exegesis, jurisprudence, oration, poetry, linguistics, and much more besides. Preachers, politicians, and scholars alike rely on hadith to establish the truth of their positions, and laypeople cite them in conversations in their daily lives. These sayings disclose the ethos of the earliest period of Islam, the culture and society of seventh-century Arabia, and the literary milieu of the time. Since they also form an integral part of the Muslim psyche, they reveal the values and thinking of the medieval and modern Muslim community. Most importantly, they provide a direct window into the inspired vision of one of the most influential humans in history.

Collecting Muḥammad’s words was a major preoccupation for scholars through the centuries, resulting in a profusion of compilations. The focus of most compilers was doctrinal and legal. They aimed to collect sayings that would guide the community in its practice, and the larger part of their compilations explicated rules of ritual worship and civic and criminal regulations. What is more,
they couched these sayings within the lengthy scholarly apparatus of authentication.

Among these abundant legally grounded and specialist-oriented collections, *Light in the Heavens* (*Kitāb al-Shihāb*), the compilation of the Fatimid chancery official, Egyptian Shāfi‘ī judge, and Sunni Hadith scholar al-Qaḍī al-Quḍā‘ī (d. 454/1062) stands out. Although its content overlaps with other collections, its overall conceptualization is distinctively pietistic, ethical, and pragmatic. The larger part of the collection’s sayings are devoted to encouraging universal human values such as truthfulness, compassion, and courage, and conversely to discouraging immoral behaviors such as deception, arrogance, and oppression. Al-Quḍā‘ī was a specialist of Hadith—and considered a trustworthy transmitter by his peers and by later scholars—but he compiled his book for the nonspecialist. Unlike other compilations, *Light in the Heavens* consists mainly of pithy one-liners containing just the hadith text; the authenticating chains of transmission and accompanying reports al-Quḍā‘ī placed in a companion scholarly book, *Musnad al-Shihāb* (*The Transmissions of the Shihāb*). The accessibility and wide relevance of *Light in the Heavens* has resulted in its being used for centuries as a teaching text for children as well as adults, and many of its sayings are dearly familiar to individuals of different denominations and ethnicities—whether Shi‘i or Sunni, scholar or layperson, Arab, Persian, Turk, or South Asian.

**Prophet Muḥammad: Life, Lessons, and Legacy**

Abū l-Qāsim Muḥammad ibn ‘Abd Allāh ibn ‘Abd al-Muṭṭalib, from the prominent clan of Hāshīm of the Ḥijāzī tribe of Quraysh, was born in Mecca around ad 570. Located between the two great empires of the Zoroastrian Sassanids in Persia and the Christian Byzantines in Syria, the majority of those living in the arid Arabian Peninsula at this time were pagan and nomadic; some settlements flourished around oases or wells, among them the shrine city of Mecca. Muḥammad’s family, believed by Muslims to be descended from the prophet Abraham (Ibrāhīm) through his son Ishmael
(Ismāʿīl), served as guardians of the Kaaba, a sacred shrine built by Abraham. According to information preserved in the Muslim record, even in his childhood, Muḥammad stood out among the Meccans, who singled him out with the honorific title “The Trustworthy One.” Orphaned in infancy, he was brought up by his grandfather ʿAbd al-Muṭṭalib, then by his uncle Abū Ṭālib, whom he accompanied on trade expeditions to Syria.

At twenty-five, he married Khadijah, a forty-year-old widow for whom he had served as trading agent. He had six children with her: two sons, Qāsim and ʿAbd Allāh, nicknamed al-Ṭayyib and al-Ṭāhir, who both died in infancy, and four daughters, Zaynab, Ruqayyah, Umm Kulthūm, and Fāṭimah, who survived into adulthood. After Khadijah’s death, Muḥammad’s concubine, an Egyptian Copt named Māriyah, bore him a son, Ibrāhīm, who also died in infancy. Muhammad’s line continued through his youngest daughter, Fāṭimah, who married Abū Ṭālib’s son and Muḥammad’s ward, ʿAlī. ʿAlī later became the first imam for the Shiʿa, and fourth caliph for the Sunnis. In a saying in this collection, Muḥammad says, “My kin are like Noah’s Ark—those who climb aboard are saved, those who waver are drowned” (§11.1).

Muḥammad was a thoughtful and quiet man who often went to the mountains outside Mecca to meditate. During one such visit to Mount Ḥirāʾ—at forty years of age, in ca. AD 610—he received what he believed was a revelation from God. The archangel Gabriel appeared before him and said, «Recite in the name of your lord, the creator.» This was the first of many revelations, which would be memorized by believers and later compiled into the codex of the Qurʾan. Muḥammad believed he had been charged as God’s messenger (rasūl Allāh) and selected as the seal of the prophets, a group which included major biblical figures such as Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, and Jesus. With the creed “There is no god but God” (lā ilāha illā llāh), he began to call others to the new religion of Islam (literally, “commitment [to God]”). He first approached Khadijah, then ʿAlī, who both accepted Islam, then ʿAlī’s brother Jāʿfar. After a few years, he approached other
members of Quraysh who were close to him. Abū Bakr was one of the earliest converts and later became Muḥammad’s father-in-law; after Muḥammad’s death he would become the first Sunni caliph. Muḥammad also preached to the Arabians who came to Mecca for the annual pilgrimage. Slowly the numbers grew.

The revelations of the Meccan period, and Muḥammad’s own orations from this time, were doctrinal and apocalyptic, calling to the worship of the one creator; urging humility, pious deeds, accountability for one’s actions, and compassion for the disadvantaged; and warning of the imminent hereafter. In a saying in this collection, Muḥammad explains the exhortatory approach of his mission, stating: “I was sent with profound words” (§3.3). Using desert imagery and camel metaphors, these words painted rhythmic, vivid scenes of the delights of paradise and the agonies of hellfire. They elaborated on Muḥammad’s miraculous night journey to Jerusalem, and his ascension through the seven heavens to the throne of God, where the five daily prayers were prescribed. They preached kindness to orphans, help to widows, and generosity to the needy. And they condemned idol worship, materialism, and common pagan Arabian practices such as female infanticide and blood vengeance.

Angered by Muḥammad’s anti-establishment message, the Mec-cans began persecuting him and his followers. In AD 615, Muḥammad sent some of his vulnerable followers to Abyssinia across the Red Sea to seek refuge with the Christian Negus; they later rejoined the Muslims in Medina. In AD 616, the Meccans instituted a social boycott against Muḥammad’s clan, demanding they turn him over, but Abū Ṭālib, patriarch of the Hāshim clan, refused; the boycott ended after a few months. In AD 619, both Abū Ṭālib and Khadijah died. Abū Lahab, another of Muḥammad’s uncles, became the new leader of the Hāshim, and he deprived Muḥammad and the Muslims of clan protection. With his life in danger, Muḥammad began to look for a safe haven from which to preach his message. He approached the tribe of Thaqīf in Taif, but they refused him shelter. Then in AD 621 a group from the northern oasis of Yathrib came to Mecca for the
pilgrimage and accepted Islam. The following year, AD 622, they came back in greater numbers, and invited Muḥammad to make their city his home. After thirteen years of preaching in Mecca, Muḥammad emigrated to Yathrib. The year would be counted as the first of the Hijri Islamic calendar (named for the Hijrah, or emigration), and the city would henceforth be known as the City of the Prophet, in Arabic Madīnat al-Nabī, commonly shortened to Madīnah (Medina).

In the year 1/622, with Muḥammad’s arrival in Medina, a new phase began for Islam. Now at the head of a polity, Muḥammad occupied the additional roles of governor, legislator, and military commander. Medina was home to the pagan tribes of Aws and Khazraj, whose majority accepted Islam, and the Jewish tribes of Naḍīr, Qaynuqāʾ, and Qurayẓah, whose majority remained Jewish. These tribes signed a pact of mutual defense and cooperation, designating themselves a unified community who pledged obedience to “God and Muḥammad.” The Muslim tribes of Medina came to be known as the Allies, and those who migrated to Medina with Muḥammad or soon thereafter came to be known as the Emigrants. Both groups would be lauded by later Muslims for their service to Islam in its difficult early phase. Collectively, they are known as Muḥammad’s companions, about whom he said, “My companions are like stars—those who follow them will be guided” (§11.2).

Muḥammad lived in Medina for the next, and final, ten years of his life. The Quraysh continued to menace him, and there were several military skirmishes between them, as well as larger pitched battles, including Badr, Uḥud, the Trench (or the Confederates), and lastly, the Conquest of Mecca. There were also disagreements within Medina between the Muslim and Jewish tribes. The latter, according to the Muslim sources, had plotted secretly with the Mecccans against Muḥammad, and he subsequently expelled two tribes from the city and executed the members of a third. He also fought the Jews of Khaybar, a northward oasis, who had allied with the Meccans against him. Eventually, Muḥammad emerged victorious,
and by the end of the tenth year, the larger part of the residents of the Arabian Peninsula had accepted Muḥammad as their prophet.

In these years, Muḥammad prescribed further rites of worship and piety: the annual alms-levy, fasting in the month of Ramadan, and the hajj pilgrimage to Mecca. He exhorted kindness to parents and charity for all. He also legislated on civic affairs and criminal issues, giving rulings which were to become binding precedents. Preaching, guiding, and counselling, Muḥammad promoted consciousness of God, individual and collective piety, a strong moral fiber, social justice, and compassion for all God’s creatures.

In 10/632, Muḥammad performed his only hajj to Mecca, what came to be known as “The Farewell Pilgrimage.” According to the Shiʿa, he publicly appointed ʿAlī as his successor immediately afterward at a place called Ghadīr Khumm. Upon his return to Medina, Muḥammad fell ill, and a few months later, in the year 11/632, passed away at the age of sixty-three. In just twenty-three years, Muḥammad had integrated pagan Arabia into a dynamic community united under the banner of monotheistic Islam. Within two decades, Muslims would conquer Syria, Iraq, Iran, Egypt, and North Africa. In twenty more years, they would reach Spain in the West and Central Asia and Sind in the East. Over time, with the efforts of teachers, savants, and mystics, Muḥammad’s message would spread even further.

HADITH: TRANSMISSION, COLLECTION, AND TOOLS OF SCHOLARSHIP

Muḥammad’s hadith include his many sermons and speeches, his answers to questions, his verbal responses to life situations, and also his deeds and gestures. There is a correspondingly rich history of hadith transmission and collection. And medieval Muslim scholars and modern academics have developed an extensive set of critical tools for their assessment.

Muḥammad lived in an oral milieu where writing was limited to important documents, and literary production was overwhelmingly that of the spoken word. The Qur’ān describes him as “ummi,”
which according to some interpretations means “unlettered.” Other understandings differ, but whether Muḥammad was lettered or not, his words are the product of his oral milieu, and their orality is intrinsic to any discussion of their style and authenticity. The formal verbal productions of primarily oral communities are rooted in mnemonics-based aesthetics. They are permeated with stylistic devices that are a physiological aid to memorization. Like the Qurʾan, and similar to orations and proverbs by others from this period, Muḥammad’s sayings are condensed, rhythmic, and visual. These rhetorical features—combined with the attested powerful memories of oral societies and the early Muslims’ compelling motivation to preserve the words of their adored prophet—ensured the continuity of Muḥammad’s teachings.

Muḥammad’s sayings were transmitted orally for about 150 years, relayed by word of mouth over several generations. Early transmitters narrated hadiths in divergent modes: Muḥammad’s deeds and gestures were transmitted in their gist, while his words were transmitted partly in their gist and partly verbatim, in a mode in between the meaning-based transmission of historical reports and the verbatim transmission of the Qurʾan and poetry. Muḥammad’s family and close companions were the first narrators. The subsequent generation of Muslims, known as “followers,” and the generation after them, called “followers of the followers,” continued the work of preservation. Among these early hadith transmitters, we find master narrators who regularly taught hadith in the urban centers of Islam.

Over the century and a half of primarily oral transmission, we see a steady increase of concurrent written transcription. A fraction of Muḥammad’s words was written down during his lifetime and immediately after, in written collections of hadith called šahīfah. In the generation following, notebooks of hadith made their appearance. These notebooks were used as aide-mémoire, and master narrators from the followers and followers’ followers are reported to have transcribed hadith into such notebooks for use in their teaching sessions. Although some of the early Muslims were against
writing hadith for fear they may be confused with the text of the Qur’an, there were others who deemed it beneficial and they cited Muḥammad himself encouraging the practice.

Following the introduction of paper from China in ca. 132/750 and the corresponding burgeoning of writing in the third/eighth and fourth/ninth centuries, hadith (and other early verbal materials) were systematically transcribed in written books. Over the following centuries, some of these hadith collections attained canonical status. For Sunnis, the “six books”—of al-Bukhārī (d. 256/870), Muslim (d. 261/875), Abū Dā‘ūd (d. 275/888), al-Tirmidhī (d. 279/892), al-Nasā’ī (d. 303/915), and the sixth either Ibn Mājah (d. 273/887) or, depending on the listing, Mālik (d. 179/796)—are trusted compilations. Two popular collections were put together by al-Nawawī (d. 676/1277, both translated into English).6 Al-Quḍā’ī’s *Light in the Heavens* was another text with substantial currency. For the Twelver Shi’a, trusted compilations are those by al-Kulaynī (d. 329/940) and Ibn Bābūyah (d. 381/991), and two by al-Ṭūsī (d. 672/1273), together known as the “four books.” For the Fatimid-Ismā‘īlī Shi’a, the hadith citations of al-Qāḍī al-Nu‘mān (d. 363/974) are authoritative: *Sharḥ al-akhbār* for historical and doctrinal material, and *Da‘ā‘im al-Islām* for legal hadith. A significant Zaydī Shi’i work is *Musnad al-Imām Zayd*, attributed to Zayd ibn ʿAli Zayn al-ʿĀbidīn (d. 122/740). There is some overlap in the contents of the Sunni and Shi’i collections, but there are also distinct differences.

Of the tens of thousands of sayings that have come down to us, a good number are likely genuine. But erroneous transmission, inaccurate copying, and deliberate fabrication to further sectarian or political agendas gave rise to a profusion of materials in which the chaff became mixed with the grain. Muslim scholars developed a complex set of tools and terms to assess a hadith’s authenticity. One of the tools considered most effective by Sunni scholars was assessment of a hadith’s “chain of transmission” (*isnād*), that is, the reliability of the sequence of narrators and the trustworthiness of each narrator.7 The stronger the chain of transmission, the stronger
the probability was of a saying being genuine. They categorize the material on the basis of this probability as sound, good, weak, and a few in-between categories. The Shi’a, in contrast, deem long isnāds and accompanying biographical verifications unnecessary and even misleading: as long as an imam or his appointee has attested to the genuineness of a hadith, it is considered authentic.8 Western scholarship on Hadith has proliferated since the late nineteenth century—the earliest works focused on “Hadith criticism,” while more recent works have inspected its myriad aspects.9 Modern Western scholars do not, however, appear to have written about *Light in the Heavens*.

**Al-Qāḍī al-Quḍā’ī (d. 454/1062): Career and Books**

The compiler of *Light in the Heavens*, al-Qāḍī al-Quḍā’ī, was a jurist of the Sunni-Shāfiʿī school of legal thought, and an eminent scholar of Hadith and history who flourished in Fatimid Cairo. His full name was Abū ʿAbd Allāh Muḥammad ibn Salāmah ibn Jaʿfar ibn ʿAlī ibn Ḥakmūn al-Quḍāʿī (thus an affiliate of the clan of Quḍāʿah from the tribe of Ḥimyar). The biographical sources refer to him most frequently as “judge of Egypt” and “compiler of *Light in the Heavens*.”10

A senior government official for the Shiʿi Fatimids, al-Quḍāʿī performed several singular functions for them. He was judge over their Sunni subjects; he traveled in 447/1055 to Constantinople as Fatimid emissary to the Byzantine court;11 and he served (indirectly) in their chancery, being scribe for a time for the vizier ʿAlī ibn Aḥmad al-Jarjarāʾī (d. 436/1045). Although the sources do not mention specific interactions, al-Quḍāʿī would presumably have had contact with the eminent Fatimid scholar al-Muʿayyad al-Shīrāzī (d. 470/1078), who was head of the chancery from 443/1051 to 448/1056.

Al-Quḍāʿī’s scholarship was highly respected, especially in the collection and transmission of hadith. Sunni scholars deemed al-Quḍāʿī to be a “trustworthy” (*thiqah*) transmitter of hadith. His student Ibn Mākūlā (d. 475/1082) praised him, saying: “He has mastered many different sciences... I know none in Egypt who approach his stature.”12 Writing a century later, the jurist al-Silafī
(d. 576/1180) said of him: “His fame absolves me from lengthy expositions . . . he is counted among the trustworthy and reliable transmitters.” An indication of al-Quḍāʾī’s eminence in the field of Hadith scholarship is the fact that he is cited in the chains of transmission of numerous well-regarded compilations.

Following Ibn Mākūlā and al-Silafī, several prominent medieval biographers chronicled al-Quḍāʾī’s career and writings. They tell us that al-Quḍāʾī heard and transmitted hadith in his homeland of Egypt, as well as during his travels in Syria en route to Constantinople, in Constantinople, and in Mecca and Medina, where he performed the hajj in 445/1053. They record the names of his teachers, including several distinguished scholars. And they tell us about his students, saying he transmitted hadith to men who would become well-known jurists in their own right. One student, Muḥammad ibn Abī Naṣr al-Ḥumaydī (d. ca. 450/1058), declared that the “Shihāb turned me into a shihāb,” that is, a star.

Al-Quḍāʾī produced thirteen major books on a wide range of subjects. Five are extant, namely:

1. *Light in the Heavens: Sayings of the Prophet Muḥammad* (Kitāb al-Shihāb fi l-amthāl wa-l-mawāʿiẓ wa-l-ādāb: alf kalimah wa-miʾatā kalimah min ḥadith al-nabī ṣallā-llāhu ʿalayhi wa-ālihi wa-sallam, lit. Book of the blazing star containing aphorisms, counsels, and directions for refined behavior: 1,200 maxims from the hadith of the prophet). It has been published in several trade editions.


3. *A Treasury of Virtues: Sayings, Sermons and Teachings of ʿAlī* (Dustūr maʿalīm al-ḥikam wa-maʾthūr makārim al-shiyam min kālām amīr al-muʿminīn ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib, lit. A compendium of signposts of wisdom and a documentation of qualities of
virtue from the words of the commander of the faithful ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib), a collection of “words and eloquent sayings, wise maxims and counsels, directions for refined behavior, answers to questions, prayers and communions with God, and preserved verse and allegories” ascribed to Imam ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib. It is a companion volume to Light in the Heavens, published in several editions, including a Library of Arabic Literature edition and translation.

4. *The Book of Reports about the Prophets, the History of the Caliphs, and the Rule of the Princes* (*Kitāb al-Inbāʿ an al-anbiyāʾ wa-tawārīkh al-khulāṣaʾ wa-wilāyat al-umarāʾ*), also called Al-Quḍāʾi’s History: From the Creation of Adam to the Year 427 [1036] (*Tārīkh al-Quḍāʾi: min khalq Ādam ḥattā sanat 427 AH*), and also called *Springs of Information and Branches of Reports about the Caliphs* (*ʿUyūn al-maʿārif wa-funūn akhbār al-khalāṣaʾ*), a book on the history of the prophets and caliphs up to the reign of the Fatimid imam-caliph al-Ẓāhir. It has been published in several editions.


The following eight works are lost:

1. *Institutions of Egypt* (*Kitāb Khīṭaṭ Miṣr*), also known as *Selected Reports of Institutions and Vestiges* (*Al-Mukhtār fī dhikr al-khīṭaṭ wa-l-āthār*), a book on the history of Egypt ascribed to al-Quḍāʾi by Yaqūt al-Ḥamawī (d. 626/1229), Ibn Khallikān (d. 681/1282), al-Maqrīzī (d. 845/1441), al-Qalqashandī (d. 820/1418), and Ibn Taghrī-Birdī (d. 874/1469), all of whom cite material from it.

2. *Qurʾān Commentary* (*Tafsīr*), in twenty volumes according to the modern scholar al-Ziriklī, first mentioned by al-Silāfī, then by al-Maqrīzī, and cited by al-Qalqashandī.

3. *The Merits of al-Shāfiʿī* (*Kitāb Manāqib al-Imām al-Shāfiʿī*), or *The Book of Reports about al-Shāfiʿī* (*Kitāb Akhbār al-Shāfiʿī*), a
hagiographical work on the merits of the founder of al-Quḍā’ī’s legal school, ascribed to him by Ibn ʿAsākir (d. 571/1176).  

4. *Compendium of Teachers* (*Muʿjam al-shuyūkh*), a biographical listing of the scholars from whom al-Quḍāʿī transmitted hadith, ascribed to him by Ibn ʿAsākir.  

5. *Book of Numbers* (*Kitāb al-ʿAdad*), ascribed to him by Ibn ʿAṭiyyah (d. 541/1147) and Ibn Bashkuwāl (d. 578/1183).  

6. *Book of Beneficial Words* (*Kitāb al-Fawāʾid*), perhaps also on hadith, ascribed to him by Ibn Bashkuwāl.  

7. *The Preacher’s Pearl and the Worshipper’s Treasure* (*Durrat al-wāʾizin wa-dhukhr al-ʿābidin*), a work on preaching, ascribed to him by Ḥājjī Khalīfah (d. 1067/1657).  

8. Ibn Mākūlā’s notes from al-Quḍāʿī’s lectures, ascribed to him by al-Silafī.  

Other titles that editors of al-Quḍāʿī’s various works have ascribed to him are variant titles of his *History*, which they list incorrectly as independent works.

**Light in the Heavens**

The full title of *Light in the Heavens* is—in rhyming Arabic—*Kitāb al-Shihāb fī l-amthāl wa-l-mawāʾiz wa-l-ādāb: alf kalimah wa-miʿatā kalimah min ḥadīth al-nabī ṣallā -llāhu ʿalayhi wa-ālihī wa-sallam*. It translates literally as “Book of the blazing star containing aphorisms, counsels, and directions for refined behavior: 1,200 maxims from the hadith of the prophet.” In some manuscripts, the work is titled *Shihāb al-akhbār*, “The blazing reports-star,” or *Al-Shihāb fī l-ḥikam al-nabawīyyah*, “The blazing star containing the wise sayings of the prophet,” or *Al-Shihāb al-nabawī*, “The prophet’s blazing star.” It is usually mentioned by its shortened title, *Al-Shihāb*—“blazing comet,” “shining star,” or “luminous planet”; the rendering as *Light in the Heavens* is an attempt to capture these various meanings in English.

The book overlaps to some degree with other well-known hadith collections. For each hadith cited in *Light in the Heavens*, the commentator al-Marāghi and the editors of *The Transmissions* list
additional sources, which include the major Sunni collections of Ibn Ḥanbal, al-Bukhārī, Muslim, al-Tirmidhī, Abū Dāʿūd, Ibn al-Jawzi, and Ibn Ḥajar al-ʿAsqalānī; many of the Shihāb’s hadith are also found in Shiʿi works, such as the collections of al-Qāḍī al-Nuʿmān and al-Ṭūsī.

System and Substance

As a popular collection of the prophet Muḥammad’s sayings for the general reader, the system and substance of Light in the Heavens’ material are straightforward and accessible. In the introduction, al-Quḍāʿī tells us that he has arranged the sayings “uninterruptedly, one following the other, omitting the chains of transmission,” which he provides separately in the companion specialist book The Transmissions. “For simplified access and ease of memorization,” he continues, he has divided the sayings into seventeen “chapters based on similarity of lexical pattern,” for example, “Whosoever does X gets Y” and “Do X and you will get Y.” This is a relatively unusual method of organization for hadith compilations, but one routinely used in collections of classical Arabic proverbs and sayings—and Light in the Heavens contains largely aphoristic material.

The contents of the work are listed by al-Quḍāʿī in his introduction as “testaments, directions for refined behavior, counsels, and maxims” as well as “supplications attributed to the prophet in prayer.” Most are succinct one-liners extracted from longer texts of the prophet’s sermons and speeches, from answers to questions, from responses to real-life situations, and from anecdotes about his deeds and gestures. Contextual material is provided in The Transmissions, in commentaries of Light in the Heavens, in other hadith compilations and their commentaries, in biographical works on Muḥammad, and in historical works on early Islam.

Muḥammad’s words collected in Light in the Heavens preach humane behavior and consciousness of God, and urge the reader to prepare for the imminent hereafter. They counsel repentance of sins and renunciation of worldly matters, and advocate virtuous action.
They offer practical advice on daily life issues, keen observations on human nature, and legal rulings on social and economic issues. In one chapter, they quote God directly speaking to humans. The themes, whether worldly or sublime, are couched within an Islamic pietistic framework, consonant with the teachings of the Qur’an.

Imagery is based on flora and fauna from the Arabian Peninsula, as well as cosmic and mundane objects and acts that reflect the lifestyle of the residents of early Islamic Mecca and Medina; numerous sayings also reference them literally. Camels, horses, sheep, dates, turbans, musk, vinegar, salt are all to be found, as are the blacksmith and the perfume vendor. Advice on detailed aspects of everyday life abound: “never skip dinner,” “pay a worker his wages,” and “wear white garments.”

Doctrines and practices of Islam are also abundantly described: the mandatory rites of the daily prayer, the annual alms-levy, fasting, the hajj pilgrimage, and regular and melodious recitation of the Qur’an. Prophets are held up as exemplars. Exhortations to revere and be guided by Muḥammad’s progeny, his pious companions, and the learned among the community pepper the collection.

The vast majority of the collection’s sayings are devoted to promoting upright character: honesty, integrity, affection, compassion, contentment, scrupulosity, gentleness, harmony, modesty, courage, generosity, fortitude, gratitude, justice, simplicity, trustworthiness, moderation, and forgiveness, as well as giving in charity and seeking counsel. The traits and acts warned against include deception, untruthfulness, harshness, obscenity, drink, fornication, arrogance, aggression, hypocrisy, conceit, begging, and flattery. A large number of sayings advocate the seeking of knowledge and the cherishing of wisdom, and encourage the related traits and acts of careful planning, intellectual curiosity, and asking good questions.

Reception and Renown

*Light in the Heavens* is al-Quḍāʾī’s most celebrated work. Its approachable format and humane content made it popular almost
immediately after it was compiled, and the numerous extant manuscripts and their varied places of origin suggest the book’s dissemination across the expanse of the Islamic world—from Spain in the West, through North Africa, Egypt, Turkey, Palestine, Syria, and Yemen, to India in the East. Al-Sīlāfī and Ibn `Aṣākir note its prominence in their biographies of al-Quḍāʿī, saying the collection “has spread to the corners of the earth, becoming as clearly visible in the firmament as the blazing star after which it is named.”

I have identified sixty-eight commentaries and related works on Light in the Heavens, written in Arabic or Persian, with one in Turkish, in both medieval and modern times (see details of extant works in the bibliography).

Fifty-five of these are medieval works, dating from the late fifth/eleventh century through the twelfth/eighteenth century, and ranging widely in the authors’ places of work and faith denominations. They include:

- twenty-four Arabic commentaries—including extant ones by Ibn Waḥshī (d. 502/1109), al-Nasafī (d. 537/1142), al-Rāwandī (d. 537/1142), one anonymous (d. 554/1159), two by al-Sijilmāsī (fl. 7th/13th c.), Ibn al-Warrāq (n.d.), and Bābī (n.d.), and a lost commentary by the famed litterateur Ḍiyāʾ al-Dīn Ibn al-Athīr (d. 636/1239);
- twenty-four Arabic response books that assess its isnāds (takhrīj), or offer an alphabetical rearrangement of its sayings (tartīb) or a supplement to it (takmilah), or use it as a model for their own hadith works—including extant ones by Ibn Shīrawayh (d. 509/1115), al-Uqlīshī (d. 550/1155), al-Qalʿī (d. 629/1232), Abū l-Saʿādāt (d. 634/1237), al-Ṣaghānī (d. 650/1252), al-ʿIrāqī (d. 806/1403), and al-Munāwī (d. 1030/1621), and a lost work by the well-known scholar al-Suyūṭī (d. 911/1505);
- seven Persian translations with commentaries—including extant ones by Ibn al-Quḍāʿī (fl. ca. 5th/11th c.), Zakī (d. before 567/1171), one anonymous (fl. 8th/14th c.), and Baḥrānī (fl. 10th/16th c.).
In modern times, a total of thirteen related works have been published:

- four Arabic commentaries on *Light in the Heavens* by al-Kattānī, al-Marāghī, al-Dūmī, and Disī;
- seven Arabic response works, one each by al-Kattānī (again), al-ʿAzzūzī, and al-Ḥujūjī, and four by al-Ghumārī;
- a translation into Persian by Farkhiyān, and one in French by Khawam; a third is underway in three languages simultaneously, English, Urdu, and Gujarati.\(^{34}\)

The varied denominational affiliations of the scholars who copied the work and studied it—as noted in the texts of the manuscript and in certificates of study jotted on them—reveals a broad interest across sectarian lines: Shiʿi scholars from all three major groups, Fatimid-Ismāʿīlī, Twelver, and Zaydī, studied the work as assiduously as Sunni scholars of all four major legal schools, Shāfīʿī (which was al-Quḍāʿī’s own), Mālikī, Ḥanafī, and Ḥanbalī, as well as of the lesser-known Ẓāhirī school.

*Light in the Heavens* played an important role in traditional Muslim education, particularly for young children and nonspecialists, but also for scholars, and it appears to have been a regularly featured text in madrasa curricula. For more advanced students of jurisprudence, a commentary seems to have been studied, particularly those of the Sunni Mālikī al-Sijilmāsī and the Twelver Shiʿi al-Rāwandī. The hadith specialists paid special attention to *The Transmissions*. The large number of manuscripts of *Light in the Heavens* and *The Transmissions*, and the numerous study certificates, colophons, commentaries, and *isnād*-assessments, also indicate that these were teaching texts read in numerous study circles in Egypt and elsewhere in the Islamic world.

*Light in the Heavens* was popular across the far reaches of the Islamic world, being studied by Hadith scholars in North Africa and Spain in the West, as well as Mecca in the center, and Iraq and Iran in the East. In Morocco under the Almohad dynasty (r. 514–667/1121–1269), the
Shihāb was among the hadith works prescribed for study.\textsuperscript{35} Under the Marinids (r. 642–869/1244–1465), the text’s fame continued to grow: Ibn ‘Abbād al-Rundī (d. 792/1390), the famous Mālikī Hadith scholar and Sufi shaykh who flourished in their realms, had memorized \textit{Light in the Heavens} in its entirety.\textsuperscript{36} Among the several hundred scholars who are named in the sources as having studied \textit{Light in the Heavens} and \textit{The Transmissions}—often with students of al-Quḍāʾī, or students’ students—several are from Spain, from cities such as Toledo, Seville, Granada, Almeria, Mallorca, and Valencia.\textsuperscript{37} Additionally, twenty-four scholars with connections to Iran (notably Qazvin) are identified by al-Rāfiʿī (d. 623/1226) as having studied and taught the \textit{Shihāb}.\textsuperscript{38} In Baghdad, the famous Ḥanbalī jurist, Hadith scholar, historian, and preacher Ibn al-Jawzī (d. 597/1200) is reported to have transmitted \textit{Light in the Heavens}.\textsuperscript{39} In Cairo, it was taught to public audiences by al-Quḍāʾī and his students in the sixth/thirteenth century; three centuries later, the renowned Shāfiʿī Hadith scholar, judge, and historian Ibn Ḥajar al-ʿAsqalānī (d. 852/1449) also taught \textit{The Transmissions} in Cairo to a scholar from the al-Azhar teaching establishment.\textsuperscript{40}

Ironically, an indication of the \textit{Shihāb}’s fame comes from the mouth of a detractor, al-Ḥasan ibn Muḥammad al-Ṣāghānī (d. 650/1252), a native of Lahore (in present-day Pakistan), who traveled across the Islamic world, and studied and taught in Ghazna, Mecca, Baghdad, and Delhi. In the introduction to his hadith compilation \textit{Mashāriq al-anwār} (\textit{Rising-places of Celestial Lights}), in which he combined the “sound” hadith collections of al-Bukhārī and Muslim, he lamented that people of his age studied hadith only from al-Uqlīshī’s \textit{Al-Najm} (\textit{The Star}), al-Nawawī’s \textit{Forty Hadiths}, and from the “books of al-Quḍāʾī,” all collections that, according to him, mixed sound hadiths with weak ones.\textsuperscript{41} This, he said, is what led him to compile his own, more rigorous work. But he does not reject the \textit{Shihāb} outright; in fact, he writes that he has included its sound sayings in his compilation.\textsuperscript{42}
It is fitting to conclude with the views of one medieval scholar and one modern savant, one a Sunni and one Shi‘i. The celebrated literary theorist Ḍiyāʾ al-Dīn Ibn al-Athīr (d. 636/1239), in his work titled The Popular Aphorism (Al-Mathal al-sāʾir), advised aspiring chancery scribes to begin their study of hadith with al-Quḍāʾī’s Light in the Heavens. Ibn al-Athīr was born in Turkey, and he lived in Damascus, where he served as vizier for Saladin and al-Malik al-Afḍal, and then in Mosul, where he was head of the chancery for the last Zangid ruler. He says:

The first [book] you should memorize of [prophetic] reports is Light in the Heavens. It is a short book, and all that is in it may be used, for it contains words of wisdom and manners. Once you have memorized it and are familiar with using it, as I have shown you here, you will have the capacity to deal with, and know, what [kinds of hadith] may be used and what may not. At that time, you can go on to study the Ṣaḥīḥ works of al-Bukhārī and Muslim, [Mālik’s] Muwaṭṭa’, [the work of] al-Tirmidhī, the Sunan of al-Nasāʾī, and other works of hadith.43

More recently, Sayyidnā Ṭāhir Sayf al-Dīn (d. 1385/1965)—fifty-first dāʾī of the Ṭayyibī Fatimid-Ismā’īlīs, and a learned scholar and prolific author and poet from Surat in India—cites a large number of Shihāb hadith in his Treasures of the Imam of the Pious (Khazā’in imām al-muttaqīn). In his preface to the selection, he echoes the language of al-Quḍāʾī’s introduction describing Muḥammad’s sayings, and entreats his readers to study them as follows:

Let us profit from this selection [of sayings] come to us from a prophet fortified with profound words and marvelous sayings. They shine in the sky of that [divine] knowledge which gives benefit in this world and the hereafter—as shining stars lighting up black darkness. For they derive from God’s command, written in the Tablet by the Pen.44