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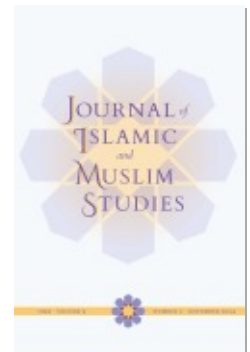
*The House of the Prophet: Devotion to Muhammad in Islamic
Mysticism* by Claude Addas (review)

Atif Khalil

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Book Reviews

The House of the Prophet: Devotion to Muhammad in Islamic Mysticism

Claude Addas (Translated by David Streight)
Louisville, KY: Fons Vitae, 2024. 151 Pages.

More than thirty-five years ago, with the publication of *Ibn 'Arabī ou La quête du Soufre Rouge*, a revised version of which was introduced to an English audience in 1993 as *Quest for the Red Sulphur: The Life of Ibn 'Arabī*, Claude Addas single-handedly transformed the landscape of Akbarian Studies. We now had before us a comprehensive, meticulously documented account of the life of one of the most fascinating, thought-provoking, and influential figures to emerge out of Muslim history. Relying on a broad range of primary and secondary sources, Addas produced what was, and continues to remain, the most thorough biography of the Andalusian thinker ever written. No one who engaged in any serious scholarship on him could thereafter afford to ignore such a valuable resource.

In the present volume, originally published in French in 2015,¹ Addas shifts her attention to the veneration of the Prophet in the mystical piety of Islam, or to be more specific, to the reasons behind it in view of his status among Muslims as *khayr al-anām* (the “best of humankind”) or *khayr al-makhluqīn* (the “best of created beings”). In essence, the work examines his meta-historical function in Islam’s economy of being with special attention to questions of soteriology and cosmogenesis, to theories of salvation and origins.

There are two previous studies whose findings, thematically speaking, *The House of the Prophet* most closely develops. The first, *And Muhammad is His Messenger* (1985) by Annemarie Schimmel (d. 2003), is an exhaustive survey of the various modes of devotion to the Prophet that have characterized Muslim spirituality from its inception, as embodied and articulated in almost all the major languages of the Islamic world (Schimmel, let it be recalled, was a polyglot). The final product, a sweeping survey of fourteen centuries of veneration, was, as Schimmel noted in the preface, “the fruit of an interest in the figure of the Prophet . . . that has developed over more than four decades.”² The German-American Islamicist’s inspiration curiously lay in books on the subject by the Indian modernist Syed Ameer Ali (d. 1928) and more importantly the Swedish clergyman Tor Andrae (d. 1947), to which she was exposed as a young student, not to mention Süleyman Çelebi’s (d. 1442) *Mevlūd-i sherif*, a poem recounting the miracles of the Prophet in a manner comparable to popular Christmas carols about Christ.³

Of more immediate relevance to *The House of the Prophet* is *Seal of the Saints: Prophethood and Sainthood in the Doctrine of Ibn ‘Arabī* (1993) by Michel Chodkiewicz (d. 2021), out of the soil of which it has in fact sprouted and blossomed, particularly chapter four on the Muhammadan Reality, a magisterial treatment of a central theme in Sufi metaphysics.⁴ The debt to the *Seal* is not surprising considering the thread running through Addas’s book is Ibn ‘Arabī. No less important is that it was through the influence of Chodkiewicz, her father and mentor, that, by her own confession, “I came to love him [Ibn ‘Arabī] while a teenager and understand him as an adult.”⁵

The short study is divided into eight chapters. The first looks at the humanity or “humanness” of the Prophet. In the second, we encounter the thesis not only of his primacy in the hierarchy of the cosmos, but his role as its very progenitor, as the principle through which God brought the world into existence. If it was out of Adam’s clay that the Prophet entered the temporal conditions of history, a particular epoch and socio-cultural climate, the Adam out of whose material body he was fashioned was created out of his light, which was itself drawn from the Light of God. To quote the early mystic Sahl al-Tustarī (d. 896), one of the first to develop this concept, albeit in rudimentary form, “when God decided to create Muhammad, he produced a light from His light, which when it reached the veil of Majesty (*hijāb al-‘azama*), prostrated itself . . . before God.” Only afterwards, continues Tustarī, was Adam “created from the light of Muhammad, while He created Muhammad’s body from Adam’s clay” (p. 31).⁶

Chapter three explores the universal nature of Muhammadan prophecy, the belief that he was sent not only to his contemporaries and those who came afterwards, but *also to those before him*, through the primordial *haqīqa muhammadiyya* or Muhammadan Reality, of which each messenger and prophet

was a *nā'ib* or “substitute” (the doctrine of *niyāba* or substitution being key here). This was the meaning to be derived from the most literal interpretation of Q 34:28, *We have not sent you except . . . to all of humanity*. The *niyāba* of those who preceded him was, from this point of view, similar to what was exercised, for example, by the companion Mu'adh b. Jabal (d. 639) when the Prophet dispatched him to Yemen with instructions to teach on his behalf, in his absence. The implication is that the *ummah* or nation of the Prophet comprised not only the Muslim community born after the descent of the Qur'an in Mecca, but also followers of previous messengers and prophets. Yet Ibn 'Arabī, whose ideas on this subject Addas devotes most of her attention to, did not stop there. He went further to declare that the Muhammadan community includes *all of humanity*, both believers and disbelievers, an idea which he refers to as *shumūl al-umma* (p. 47). Thus, the special forgiveness and intercessory function of the Prophet reserved for his nation on the Final Judgement would extend to every soul ever created.

What Addas does not spell out, at least not explicitly, although it seems implicit in the very logic of her analysis, is that the intimate relationship with the Prophet experienced by each person is predicated not only on an outward relation forged with him through the transmitters of divine revelation, but also through a mysteriously indwelling “Muhammadan presence.” This presence is in turn mediated through the *haqīqa muhammadiyya*, which, as the principle through which the world, along with all its inhabitants, came into being, and which also animates existence, implies that he also lies within. As the Qur'an states, *Know that the Messenger of God is fī kum* (Q 49:7). While the Arabic is usually translated as “among you,” or “in your midst,” it can also mean, “within you.” Addas, to be fair, does offer some passing though cursory observations on this subject earlier on (p. 13).

In chapter four, our author addresses the theme of the universal mercy or *rahma* that God has in store for all people in the afterlife, not just the faithful, an idea that in Christian theology finds a close but not exact counterpart in apocatastasis. The idea was espoused by a minority of early thinkers such as Origen (d. 253), before the establishment of an Augustinianism that precluded salvation outside of the church. In its distinct Akbarian formulation, which involves the final, perpetual experience of happiness by the inhabitants of both the paradisaical and infernal realms, the belief is derived, according to Addas, from three overlapping lines of reasoning: (a) the infinity of God's mercy, (b) a *fitra* or “original nature” which makes it impossible to worship anyone but God alone (there being, in the final scheme, no “other”), and (c) the soteriological function of the Prophet as a vehicle of both specific and general mercy, a unique mercy for those who accept him (directly or indirectly through his *nā'ibs*), and an encompassing mercy for all. Addas shares a critical passage from Ibn 'Arabī's

Futūhāt which leaves no doubt about where he stands. "God," he writes, "said in reference to him, 'We have not sent you but as a mercy,' without specifying that the mercy concerns the believer rather than the unbeliever, the blessed rather than the damned; his mercy encompasses the entirety of existence, the lower and the higher" (p. 67). While the theme of the eternal felicity that would envelop even the inhabitants of hell had already been explored before Addas by William Chittick (in chapter seven, to be precise, of *Imaginal Worlds*),⁷ she introduces the motif of the soteriological function of the Prophet into the debate, who as the most encompassing and complete self-disclosure of God's *rahma*, will play an essential role in the final attainment of felicity reserved for all.

Ibn 'Arabī's doctrine of universal mercy and salvation is a complex one, easily misunderstood, especially by those who lack the patience to work it out in its subtle nuances and details. To be clear, Ibn 'Arabī denied neither that there is a punishment in store for certain classes of people in the afterlife, nor that we will be held accountable for our beliefs and actions after death. He was adamant, like the rest of the ulema, that human choices here on earth will have grave consequences, both in the *barzakh* immediately after the soul's extraction from the body by the angel of death, and beyond, following the day of judgement or "standing," the *qiyāma*. This is a standard, uncontested postulate of Muslim creed. Instead, Ibn 'Arabī's argument was that God's mercy will, after the passing of a certain duration of time, come to encompass everyone, even the inhabitants of hell destined to remain there forever. And this is not because the fire will become a garden, but because hell will be transformed from a locus of divine wrath into one of mercy and compassion. This does not mean that the bliss of the fire will be no different than the bliss of the garden, since there are degrees of felicity, just as there are levels of paradise. Moreover, the beatific vision, the supreme gift of the afterlife, will be deprived to those consigned to hell. Ibn 'Arabī's underlying view, expressed in the simplest of terms, was simply that hell was not created to be an eternal abode of wretchedness.

While such a conception about life after death seems to have no extensively developed precedent in Muslim tradition in the centuries before Ibn 'Arabī,⁸ it was, as far as he was concerned, a natural conclusion of the overwhelming *rahma* of both God and the Prophet that the Qur'ān repeatedly draws attention to. After all, what does it mean to believe, *My Mercy encompasses all things* (Q 7:156), or *We have not sent you (O Muhammad) except as a mercy to all the worlds* (Q 21:107)? For Ibn 'Arabī, the answer is self-evident: mercy will, in the final order of things, spread to include everything and everyone in existence. It should be clarified that his understanding of this matter was not based on a speculative theology crafted out of the labor of his own mental efforts. Instead, as far as he was concerned, and those who took his writings seriously, it was based on divinely inspired knowledge. This is why Ibn 'Arabī states that those

who have been privileged with “realization” or *tahqīq* on these questions cannot categorically deny the cessation of suffering in the afterlife. Even so, as Addas demonstrates, this did not prevent some later thinkers who identified with the school that traced itself back to him from contesting the doctrine. Bālī Efendi (d. 1553), who composed a commentary on the *Fusūs*, felt that the master’s actual teachings regarding the punishment of hell had been distorted by others, since he simply could not have held such a view. And a certain Bālī Zāde (d. 1658) modified the mystic’s position so that the damned would suffer not in spirit, but in body. Some other well-known Akbarian thinkers who acquiesced to such a point of view in principle remained, in Addas’s words, “ill at ease in justifying it” (p. 68). When the present reviewer brought up the theological position many years ago in a conversation with a prominent and respected shaikh of a Sufi Order in the Middle East who also happened to be a devotee and well-read authority of Ibn ‘Arabī, his response was one of perplexity and astonishment followed by disbelief and denial. Yet the textual evidence for it is clear to anyone who takes the time to go over the relevant passages in the *Futūhāt*.

In the fifth chapter, the shortest in the book, running no more than five pages, Addas takes a brief excursion into the theme of *ittibā’ al-nabī*, of adhering to and emulating the example or “wont” of the Prophet. This is followed by a chapter on the significance of “annihilation in the Prophet” (*fanā fi-l rasūl*), where she builds on the work of the American scholar Valerie Hoffman,⁹ among others. Such an annihilation, according to those Muslim authorities who believed in its possibility, could be obtained through the cultivation of a deep, sincere, and loving inner attachment to the Prophet, particularly through the concerted and perpetual invocation of the *tasliya* or prayers of benediction on him. For some Sufi saints, this was their only practice outside the obligatory rites of Islam. A certain Ahmad al-Zawwāwī (d. 1517), Addas tells us, took the exercise so seriously, his daily regimen comprised reciting the *tasliya* 40,000 times. Through it, he reached such intimacy with the Prophet, he would remain in communication with him for extended periods, while awake, through visionary encounters, becoming a companion (*sahāba*) of sorts through the intermediary of the imaginal realm. He declared that anyone who persisted in the *tasliya* could reach a similar state, one that would then allow him to verify directly from the Prophet the status of contested hadith and to question him about matters of religion. Ibn ‘Arabī had already written about this possibility in the *Futūhāt* (pp. 87–88) where he justified the use of traditions, verified through mystical unveiling, whose authenticity may not have been acknowledged by the hadith specialists, who relied on their own scholarly, historical methods of verification. Part of Addas’s aim in the chapter is to corroborate the findings of those Islamicists who demonstrated that the so-called neo-Sufism that emerged in the 18th and 19th centuries, through new *tariqas* or mystical orders, which

on the surface appeared to have developed a new “Prophetocentrism,” was not so novel after all. This line of argument was also proposed some years ago by Oludamini Ogunnaike in the pages of this very journal.¹⁰

In chapter seven, Addas examines the idea of the Prophet as the perfect theophany of God. The treatment closely follows the previous chapter, since the rationale behind *fanā’ fi-l rasūl* only holds when one considers that in Sufi metaphysics, he is the first being to be created out of the divine light. Annihilation in the Prophet is, at a fundamental level, inseparable from annihilation in God (either as its precursor, or more, provocatively, as its culmination¹¹). The work of ‘Abd al-Karīm al-Jīlī (d. 1409), who went even further than Ibn ‘Arabī in arguing for the Prophet’s status as the most perfect *tajallī*, through language that was both daring and shocking, serves as the focal point of this chapter. Interested readers are advised to go through this section of the book closely, to appreciate the originality of Jīlī’s mediations on the subject.

In the final chapter, Addas shifts her attention not only to the special significance and status of the “House of the Prophet” (the *ahl al-bayt*, *āl al-bayt*), but also, and no less important, to those who are to be subsumed under its rubric. The question had been raised in the formative period of Islam, particularly due to the political and sectarian rifts that had torn the early community of believers apart. Developing certain lines of thinking, especially as they appear in Tirmidhī (d. 907–912), Ibn ‘Arabī maintained that while the House included “the people of the cloak,” the *ahl al-kisā’* (The Prophet, Ali, Fatima, Hasan and Husayn), as well as the descendants of Fatima, the *shurafā’*, it could not be restricted to them. It also comprised the spiritual descendants of the Prophet, the friends of God or *awliyā’*. When the Qur’ān condemns the *āl al-fr’awn*, “the House of Pharaoh,” Ibn ‘Arabī noted that it was not simply referring to the members of his family, but all who formed his inner circle and were complicit in his crimes. Similarly, the *āl* of the prophets are those nearest to them in piety, sanctity, knowledge and holiness, “the pious-gnostic believers” (*al-ṣālīhūn al-‘arīfūn al-mu’minūn*, p. 119). This is why Ibn ‘Arabī would declare, “in the Arabic language *āl al-rajul* denotes an individual’s family and those close to him.” None of this is to suggest that Ibn ‘Arabī sought in any way to denigrate or diminish the unique status of the Prophet’s immediate household, or the respect and veneration that the faithful everywhere are to accord them. He simply expanded the category of the “House” so it would also encompass the saints, just as the Prophet counted his companion Salman, a Persian, to be from among his household. As for the delicate question of the *‘isma* or protection from sin of the *ahl al-bayt* (understood here in the conventional sense as members of his family), Ibn ‘Arabī’s position, according to Addas, was that while not sinless or incapable of error, they are forgiven whatever breaches of the Law they might inadvertently fall into, *in advance*, just as Ibn ‘Arabī insisted about some of the

awliyā' (and as a hadith alludes to about the participants of Badr, p. 124). It is worth quoting Addas's own summary here:

... for Ibn Arabī, the term *ahl al-bayt* refers to two different things. On the one hand, it goes without saying that it applies to the Prophet's family, in the way that word is usually understood ... The blood ties that join them to the Prophet rightfully guarantee them a certain degree of impeccability, since they will be brought back from death, *maghfūran lahum*, 'pardoned,' and thus exempt from any divine punishment. Their place in the Prophet's genealogical tree further implies the unfailing veneration of believers—and Ibn Arabī is insistent on this point—this means veneration for every single member of that tree. The Prophet's family comprises a unit unto itself; the love shown to its members, which is their due, cannot be partial.

However, beyond descendants linked by blood, there are also descendants linked in spirit. And let it be understood that an individual may, in this case, fit both categories. Like Tirmidhī, Ibn Arabī was of the opinion that Muhammad's spiritual children also belonged to the 'House of the Prophet.' He frequently used the generic term 'Muhammadans' in reference to them, each of whom was characterized by the fact that he had fully, and in every way, actualized the 'pure servitude' that characterized the Prophet's spiritual attitude and his relationship with God (p. 128).

The passage allows the reader to appreciate Addas's choice of title, since very little of her short book deals directly with the family of the Prophet. Once, however, we understand "House" as an umbrella term to encompass all who have been sanctified through his prophecy, either through the specific *baraka* of the Qur'an, or through the previous revelations which appeared through his substitutes or *nā'ibs* in the centuries before him, it becomes clear that all of the messengers, prophets and saints constitute his *āl*, as members of a panhistorical household, united by the Muhammadan Reality.

The House of the Prophet: Devotion to Muhammad in Islamic Mysticism is an impeccable work of scholarship, thoroughly researched and poetic in its style. While Addas could have integrated more of the relevant literature in English published before the 2015 French edition of the book into her analysis, the omission is not a major blemish. She is so thorough and exacting in her use of the pertinent primary sources, the secondary material may not have substantially enhanced the quality of her work. A larger study could have explored broader theoretical issues, such as how precisely mystical conceptions of the Prophet differ from standard Christian notions of the incarnation of Christ as the one and only God-man; or, for that matter, whether it might be possible to think of the *ḥaqīqah muhammadiyya* in more universal terms, in language that is not as confined by the symbolic universe of Islam. Many of the Muslim philosophers, such as Fārābī (d. 950), seemed to have gone in this direction, no doubt through a distinctly Neoplatonic influence, understanding in revealed religion an expression of truths that the enlightened philosophers gave voice to without

the use of mythopoetic imagery. In this light, the *haqīqa muhammadiyya* might find its equivalent in a logos found in other sacred traditions that links absolute being with the world of contingency, or the Absolute with the relative, both in the domains of the macrocosm and microcosm, “outside” and “within.” In a Buddhist context, one cannot help but think of “the womb of the Buddha” (*tathagatagarbha*) within the self, or the “cosmic Buddha,” as bridges between the world of *samsara* and *nirvana*, or form and formlessness.

In the world of both commercial and academic publishing, the spread of digital media has brought with it a steady deterioration in the physical quality of books. This is not, however, the case with Fons Vitae, which has maintained standards that everywhere else seem to be dwindling. *The House of the Prophet* is securely bound, printed on premium paper with an ornate cover and backflap, and affordable (\$26.95 US on the Fons Vitae website). While it is marred by a few minor typos, these will likely only stand out to those who fastidiously search for them. Addas’s superb monograph adds to a growing body of scholarship in the field of Ibn ‘Arabi Studies by a younger generation of academics. Among them, we may note the latest contributions of Faris Abdel-hadi,¹² Mukhtar Ali,¹³ Caner Dagli,¹⁴ Hany T. Ibrahim,¹⁵ Ismail Lala,¹⁶ and Dunja Rašić,¹⁷ to name a few.¹⁸ It also adds to Brill’s recently released three-volume collection of essays on representations of the Prophet in early modern and contemporary Islam.¹⁹

ATIF KHALIL

Associate professor in the Department of History and Religion at the University of Lethbridge (Alberta, Canada) where he has been teaching for more than fifteen years. He is also the administrative director of the institution’s Catherine and Mushtaq Khan Endowment for the Study of Islam, created after 9/11 to advance the scholarly analysis of the faith in southern Alberta and promote better relations between the local largely immigrant Muslim population and the surrounding regional communities. His research interests lie primarily in the fields of Islamic mysticism and virtue ethics and secondarily in Islamic theology and philosophy, Orientalism and Islamophobia, comparative mysticism, and the medieval Judeo-Islamic tradition. He is the author of Repentance and the Return to God: Tawba in Early Sufism (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2018) and more than sixty academic articles and reviews. He is also co-editor of In Search of the Lost Heart (Albany: SUNY, 2012), Mysticism and Ethics in Islam (Beirut: American University of Beirut Press, 2022), and I of the Heart (Leiden: Brill, forthcoming). At present, he is writing a monograph on the theory and practice of dhikr (meditation, invocation, remembrance) in Islam and an introductory book on Sufism (Routledge, under contract).

Endnotes

1. *La Maison Muhammadienne: Aperçus de la dévotion au Prophète en mystique musulmane* (Paris: Éditions Gallimard, 2015).
2. Annemarie Schimmel, *And Muhammad is His Messenger: The Veneration of the Prophet in Islamic Piety* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1985), preface.
3. *Ibid.*
4. Michel Chodkiewicz, *Seal of the Saints: Prophethood and Sainthood in the Doctrine of Ibn 'Arabī*, translated by Liadain Sherrard (Cambridge: Islamic Texts Society, 1993), 60–73 (chapter four). The work was originally published in French seven years earlier as *Le Sceau des Saints* (Paris: Éditions Gallimard, 1986).
5. Claude Addas, *Quest for the Red Sulphur: The Life of Ibn 'Arabī*, translated by Peter Kingsley (Cambridge: Islamic Texts Society, 1993), xiii.
6. As Mohammed Rustom has recently shown, 'Ayn al-Qudāt (d. 1131) was the first to comprehensively explicate this doctrine. *Inrushes of the Heart: The Sufi Philosophy of 'Ayn al-Qudāt* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2023), 32–35, 194–198. For more on the light nature of the Prophet, see Khalil Andani, “Metaphysics of Muhammad: The Nur Muhammad from Imam Ja'far al-Sadiq (d. 148/765) to Nasir al-Din al-Tusi (672/1274),” *Journal of Sufi Studies* 8 (2019): 99–175.
7. William Chittick, *Imaginal Worlds: Ibn al-'Arabī and the Problem of Religious Diversity* (Albany: State University of New York, 1994), see in particular 113–119 (“The Cooling of the Fire”). An earlier version of chapter seven appeared in *The Muslim World*, “Death and the World of Imagination: Ibn al-'Arabī Eschatology” 78 (1988): 51–72. See also William Chittick, *Ibn 'Arabī: Heir to the Prophets* (Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 2005), 123–144 (“The Hermeneutics of Mercy”).
8. Addas notes that a precedent for such a view may be found in Tirmidhī (d. 907–912) (p. 70). On the attribution of a similar view to the *adīb* Jāhiz (d. 868) by Shahrastānī (d. 1153), regarding the cessation of suffering for the inhabitants of hell, see Mohammed Rustom, *The Triumph of Mercy* (Albany: State University of New York, 2012), 86.
9. Valerie Hoffman, “Annihilation in the Messenger of God: The Development of a Sufi Practice,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 31 (1999): 351–369.
10. Oludamini Ogunnaike, “Annihilation in the Messenger Revisited: Clarifications on a Contemporary Sufi Practice and its Precedents,” *Journal of Islamic and Muslim Studies* 1 (2016): 13–34.
11. On the “annihilation in the Messenger” that comes after “annihilation in God,” as *baqā'* follows *fanā'*, see Ogunnaike, *ibid.*
12. Feras Abdel-hadi, *Ibn 'Arabī's Religious Pluralism: Levels of Inclusivity* (London: Routledge, 2025).
13. Mukhtar Ali, *Philosophical Sufism: An Introduction to the School of Ibn 'Arabī* (London: Routledge, 2022).
14. Caner Dagli, *Ibn 'Arabī and Islamic Intellectual Culture: From Mysticism to Philosophy* (London: Routledge, 2016).
15. Hany T. Ibrahim, *Love in the Teachings of Ibn 'Arabī* (Sheffield, UK: Equinox, 2023).
16. Ismail Lala, *Knowing God: Ibn 'Arabī and 'Abd al-Razzāq al-Qāshānī's Metaphysics of the Divine* (Leiden: Brill, 2020).
17. Dunja Rašić, *Bedeveled: Jinn Doppelgangers in Islam and Sufism* (Albany: State University of New York, 2024).

18. Forthcoming works at the time of writing include, Mukhtar Ali, *Inscriptions of Wisdom: The Sufism of Ibn al-‘Arabī in the Mirror of Jāmī* (Albany: State University of New York Press); Dunja Rašić, *The Nightfolk: Ibn ‘Arabi Behind the Veil of Night* (Oakland: University of California Press); and Anthony F. Shaker, *The Limits of Discursive Interpretation: A Translation of Kitāb I‘jāz al-bayān fī tafsīr Umm al-Kitāb by Sadr al-Dīn Qūnawī* (Sheffield, UK: Equinox).

19. Rachida Chich and Stefan Reichmuth et al., eds., *The Presence of the Prophet in Early Modern and Contemporary Islam*, 3 vols. (Leiden: Brill, 2021–2023).

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Gendering the Ḥadīth Tradition: Recentering the Authority of Aisha, Mother of the Believers

Sofia Rehman

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Islamic feminist literature has primarily focused on the Qur’an and, with few exceptions, has failed to address the hadith, a major secondary source of Islamic ethics and law. *Gendering the Ḥadīth Tradition: Recentering the Authority of Aisha, Mother of the Believers* by Sofia Rehman, seeks to rectify this omission. Her work includes a partial translation and analysis of *al-Ijaba li-Irādī ma Istadraktahu ‘Aisha ‘Ala al-Sahabah* (*The Corrective: Aisha’s Rectification of the Companions*) by Imam Badr al-Din al-Zarkashi. Her detailed and extensive work also provides an overview of previous literature on Aisha and the hadith, a biography of al-Zarkashi, an introduction to *al-Ijaba*, an explanation of hadith verification and canonization, a review of Western scholarship on the canonization process, and a discussion of her translation methodology, along with an introduction to Islamic law.

Chapter 1 looks at the lives of Aisha and Imam al-Zarkashi and introduces *al-Ijaba*. This biography of Aisha is structured around three major controversies in her life: her age at marriage, the incident of *ifk*, and the Battle of the Camel. Rehman re-examines Aisha’s life to recover her agency, presenting her as an opinionated, determined, pious, and empowered woman. She argues that male biographers have falsely molded Aisha into the ideal Muslim woman, but her life subverts expectations of what Rehman calls “Muslimah piety,” the gendered behavioral expectations placed on Muslim women. Ultimately, Rehman portrays Aisha as a subversive model for modern Muslim women, arguing that Aisha’s life