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Living Love:  
The Mystical Writings of ‘A’ishah al-Bā‘ūniyah (d. 922/1516)  

The summer of 922/1516 was a difficult time for Qānṣūh al-Ghawrī. The Mamluk sultan was in tense negotiations with Sultan Selim, his Ottoman rival, and fearing war, al-Ghawrī mustered an army at Aleppo. There, in the months of Jumādá II and Rajab/July and August, al-Ghawrī prepared his troops and ordered prayers recited on their behalf day and night. The sultan was reclusive and rarely appeared in public save for urgent military matters.¹ Yet, Qānṣūh al-Ghawrī took time to meet with an elderly woman. Accompanied by al-Badr al-Suyufī (ca. 850–925/1446–1519), an accomplished religious scholar, his student al-Shams al-Safirī (877–956/1472–1549), and several others, ‘A’ishah al-Bā‘ūniyah was granted an audience with the sultan. Shortly thereafter, ‘A’ishah returned home to Damascus, while al-Ghawrī left Aleppo for his fateful day at Marj Dābiq.²  

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‘A’ishah’s meeting with the Mamluk sultan was an extraordinary event befitting her exceptional life. She was born in Damascus near the middle of the ninth/fifteenth century into a family of respected religious scholars and litterateurs. Originating in the village of al-Bā‘ūn in southern Syria, the Bā‘ūnī family served the Mamluks for several generations, holding a number of important religious and legal positions throughout the empire.³ ‘A’ishah’s grandfather, Aḥmad ibn Naṣîr (751–816/1350–1413), was at various times the Friday preacher at the al-Aqṣā Mosque in Jerusalem, the Friday preacher at the Umayyad Mosque in Damascus, the Shafi’i judge of Damascus and, for two months, of Egypt, as well. During the reign of Sultan Barquq (r. 784–801/1382–99), Aḥmad was granted the eminent rank of shaykh al-shuyukh, but he fell from royal grace for refusing to lend the sultan funds from religious endowments. Aḥmad wrote a commentary on the Quran and a poem on proper religious belief, and was considered an excellent preacher. Likewise, his son Ibrāhīm (ca. 777–870/1375–1464) served as the Friday …
preacher at the Umayyad Mosque, the Friday preacher of the al-Aqṣā Mosque, and supervisor of the Muslim holy places of Jerusalem and Hebron (nāẓir al-haramayn). His fine literary abilities won him the title "Master of Literature in the Land of Syria." Āhmād’s second son, Muḥammad (780–871/1378–1466), was also the Friday preacher at the Umayyad Mosque, as well as a minor poet and historian.

Āhmād’s third son Yūsuf (805–80/1402–75) was Ā’ishah’s father. He received a religious and legal education similar to that of his brothers, and was appointed Shafi’i judge in Safad, Tripoli, Aleppo, and, finally, in Damascus, where he also oversaw the reorganization and expansion of the hospital of Nūr al-Dīn. Yūsuf wrote both prose and poetry, and was regarded as an honest and pious man, and among the best judges to have served in Damascus. Shortly before his death in 880/1475, he completed the pilgrimage to Mecca with his children and other family members, Ā’ishah presumably among them. In addition to his daughter Ā’ishah, Yūsuf had at least five sons, the most prominent of whom was probably Muḥammad (857–916/1453–1510), a poet, historian, and legal scholar who served for a time as the Shafi’i judge of Aleppo.

Nevertheless, surpassing them all in talent, erudition, and fame was their sister Ā’ishah. Several contemporaries left accounts of her, including the Damascene historian Muḥammad Ibn Ṭūlūn (884–935/1479–1529), and the necrologist of Aleppo, Muḥammad ibn Ibrāhīm Ibn al-Ḥanbalī al-Ḥalabī (908–71/1502–63).

Drawing extensively from both sources are later notices by Muḥammad al-Ghazzī (977–1061/1570–1651), and ‘Abd al-Ḥāyy Ibn al-‘Īmād (1032–89/1623–79).


Unfortunately, none of them mentions when ‘Ā’ishah was born, though Ibn Tūlūn, who knew her, quoted verses that ‘Ā’ishah recited to her uncle Ibrāhīm, who died in 870/1464. Perhaps ‘Ā’ishah was ten at that time, and so born around 860/1455. For she was a precocious child, and in one of her writings, ‘Ā’ishah stated that she had memorized the entire Quran by the age of eight. ‘Ā’ishah went on to study poetry, hadith, and jurisprudence, probably with her father and her uncle Ibrāhīm, among others.

‘Ā’ishah also specialized in the study and practice of Islamic mysticism, which was important to the entire family. Her great uncle Ibrahīm had been a Sufi ascetic; her uncle Muhammad composed a devotional poem of over a thousand verses on the prophet Muhammad, while her uncle Ibrāhīm had been the first director of the al-Bāsiṭiyah khānqāh in Damascus. Moreover, many members of the Bā‘ūnā family, including ‘Ā’ishah’s father, were buried in a family plot adjacent to the zāwiyah of the Sufi master Abū Bakr ibn Dāwūd (d. 806/1403). This strongly suggests their attachment to this Sufi and his descendents, who were affiliated with the Urmawī branch of the Qādiriyyah order.

‘Ā’ishah’s own affection for the Qādiriyyah is evident in many of her writings, which include praise for the order’s progenitor ‘Abd al-Qādir al-Jilānī (470–561/1078–1166). She was also influenced by ‘Abd Allāh al-Anṣārī (396–481/1005–89), composing a verse rendition of his popular Sufi guide, the Manāzil al-Sā‘īrīn. In addition, ‘Ā’ishah read and made copies of Muḥyī al-Dīn al-Nawawī’s (631–762/1233–77) book on prayer, the Kitaḥ al-Adhkar, and ‘Alī ibn Muhammad al-Jurjānī’s (740–816/1339–1413) Sufi lexicon, the Kitaḥ al-Ta’rīfāt. Further, she frequently praised her two spiritual masters, Jamāl al-Dīn Ismā‘īl al-Ḥawwārī (fl. late ninth/fifteenth century), and his khalīfah, or successor, Ismā‘īl al-Hāwwārī (fl. late ninth/fifteenth century), and his khalīfah, or successor.
Muḥyī al-Dīn Yahyā al-Urmawī (fl. ninth-tenth/fifteenth-sixteenth centuries).
‘Ā’ishah states:

My education and development, my spiritual effacement and purification, occurred by the helping hand of the sultan of the saints of his time, the crown of the pure friends of his age, the beauty of truth and religion, the venerable master, father of the spiritual axes, the axis of existence, Ismā‘īl al-Ḥawwārī—may God sanctify his heart’s secret and be satisfied with him—and, then, by the helping hand of his successor in spiritual states and stations, and in spiritual proximity and union, Muḥyī al-Dīn Yahyā al-Urmawī—may God continue to spread his ever-growing spiritual blessings throughout his lifetime, and join us every moment to his blessings and succor.

The relationship between ‘Ā’ishah and Ismā‘īl al-Ḥawwārī appears to have been particularly close, for in several of her works ‘Ā’ishah described herself as “related to Yūsuf ibn Ahmad al-Bā‘ūnī on earth, and in truth to the axis, the unique and universal helper, Jamāl al-Dīn Ismā‘īl al-Ḥawwārī.”

As a Qādirī Sufī and a woman, ‘Ā’ishah was expected to marry and have children. The Bā‘ūnīs were a prominent family of the al-Ṣāliḥiyah district of Damascus, and several Bā‘ūnī daughters, including ‘Ā’ishah, married members of another distinguished family from the area. Known as Ibn Naqīb al-Ḍarāfī, they were descendents of the prophet Muhammad through his grandson al-Ḥusayn. ‘Ā‘ishah married Ahmad ibn Muḥammad Ibn Naqīb al-Ḍarāfī (d. 909/1503), about whom we know little, while his more famous brother, the religious scholar and teacher ‘Alā‘ al-Dīn ‘Alī (852–910/1448–1504), married one of ‘Ā‘ishah’s

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older nieces.\textsuperscript{18} `Ä‘ishah had at least two children, including a daughter, Barakah (b. 899/1491), and a son, ‘Abd al-Wahhāb (b. 897/1489).\textsuperscript{19}

Together with ‘Abd al-Wahhāb, ‘Ä‘ishah set out for Cairo in 919/1513. By this time ‘Ä‘ishah’s husband and brothers were dead, and so she apparently took it upon herself to travel to Cairo in order to secure a job for her son in the Mamluk administration.\textsuperscript{20} Unfortunately, during their journey they were robbed near the Egyptian city of Bilbīs, and ‘Ä‘ishah lost all of her writings. When they finally arrived in Cairo, ‘Ä‘ishah requested the assistance of Mahmūd ibn Muḥammad ibn Ajā (854–925/1450–1519), the confidential secretary and foreign minister of the sultan al-Ghawrī. Ibn Ajā treated ‘Ä‘ishah like an old friend to the extent of lodging her in his own harem and eventually employing her son in the chancery.\textsuperscript{21} Why Ibn Ajā was so generous to ‘Ä‘ishah and her son is open to speculation, though Ibn Ajā had previous close relations with at least one member of the Ibn Naqīb al-Ashrāf family. In addition, Ibn Ajā, who was originally from Aleppo, may have known ‘Ä‘ishah’s brother Muḥammad, who had been a Shafi’i judge there, or her Sufi shaykh, Jāmāl al-Dīn Ismā’īl, who was also from the region. It may be, too, that ‘Ä‘ishah’s poetic reputation had preceded her to Cairo, attracting the attention of Ibn Ajā, to whom she would dedicate several glowing panegyrics.\textsuperscript{22}

Whatever the case, Ibn Ajā gave ‘Ä‘ishah an apartment next to his wife, Sitt al-Halab (d. 933/1526). Sitt al-Halab was the daughter of an important Mamluk amir and official of Aleppo, and after her father’s death, she became the overseer of the substantial religious endowments that he had created during his lifetime.\textsuperscript{23}

Sitt al-Halab then appears to have conspired with Ibn Ajā to divorce her first

19In comments at the end of one of her works, ‘Ä‘ishah names her husband, her two children, the dates of her children’s births, and makes a few comments on the difficulty of receiving the stipend owed to her son as a descendent of the Prophet Muḥammad; see her \textit{Al-Mawrid al-Ahnāf al-Mawlid al-Asnā}, Dār al-Kutub al-Misrīyah, Cairo, MS 639 (Shīr Taymūr), 355–56, quoted in Rabābī’ah, ‘Ä‘ishah al-Ba‘unyah: Shā‘irah, 46–47; and also see ‘Abd Allāh Mukhlīṣ, ‘‘Ä‘ishah al-Ba‘unyah,’’ \textit{Maḥjūlat al-Ma‘aju‘ al-‘Ilmī} (Damascus) 16 no. 2 (1941): 66–72, esp. 69. Ibn al-Imād (Shadharāt, 8:132) following al-Ghazzī (\textit{Al-Kawākıb}, 1:257) referred to ‘Abd al-Wahhāb’s mother as “Zaynab bint al-Ba‘unī.” But I believe, as does Rabābī’ah, that ‘Ä‘ishah is meant, due to the time and circumstances of ‘Abd al-Wahhāb’s stay in Cairo as discussed below.
20‘Ä‘ishah may also have been attempting to secure her son’s stipend; see n. 19; Rabābī’ah, ‘Ä‘ishah al-Ba‘unīyah: Shā‘irah, 47–52, and ‘Umar Farrūkh, \textit{Tārīkh al-Adab al-‘Arabī}, 5th ed. (Beirut, 1984), 3:926–27.
husband, after which she married Ibn Ajā. No doubt aided by Sitt al-Ḥalab’s vast wealth, Ibn Ajā became the Hanafi judge of Aleppo in 890/1485 and continued his rise to power until Qaṇṣūh al-Ghawrī appointed him confidential secretary and foreign minister in 906/1500. Though frequently in poor health, Ibn Ajā held these important positions until the end of the Mamluk dynasty, as he enjoyed the high esteem and friendship of al-Ghawrī. Ibn Ajā threw lavish banquets for his sultan, who reciprocated with expensive gifts, and Sitt al-Ḥalab, too, had elaborate meals prepared for al-Ghawrī and his entourage when the sultan came to Ibn Ajā’s residence to visit his ailing minister. Not surprisingly, Sitt al-Ḥalab was on friendly terms with al-Ghawrī’s wife, the Circassian princess Jān-i Sukkar, whom she met at monthly soirees.

Perhaps ‘Ā’ishah attended some of these sessions and met the princess, for she certainly circulated among Cairo’s elite. ‘Ā’ishah studied and shared views with a number of the finest scholars of the time, who authorized her to teach, and give legal opinions of her own. Ibn Ajā also introduced her to the noted litterateur and religious scholar ‘Abd al-Raḥmān al-‘Abbaṣ (867–963/1463–1557), with whom she exchanged a number of friendly and witty poems. ‘Ā’ishah stayed in Cairo for several years enjoying Ibn Ajā’s patronage, and she may not have left Cairo until 922/1516, when her son ‘Abd al-Wahhāb, then an assistant secretary, accompanied Ibn Ajā to Aleppo, where ‘Ā’ishah met the sultan. Perhaps Ibn Ajā suggested the royal audience to al-Ghawrī, whose love of poetry is well known. But the sultan may have met with ‘Ā’ishah to seek her blessings, as well. For in this time of crisis, al-Ghawrī was also gathering his spiritual forces for the days and battle ahead, and it is quite apparent from biographies of ‘Ā’ishah and from her own comments in her writings that she was highly regarded as a pious woman and Sufi master.

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Indeed, by any standard, ‘Ā’ishah’s religious writings were extensive, but for a premodern woman, they were simply extraordinary. While a number of women were respected scholars and teachers in Mamluk domains, they rarely composed works of their own.30 ‘Ā’ishah, however, was a prolific author of both religious prose and poetry, and she probably wrote more Arabic works than any other woman prior to the twentieth century. In addition to copying earlier religious works, including al-Nawawī’s Kitab al-Adhkār, and al-Jurjānī’s Kitāb al-Ta’rīfāt, ‘Ā’ishah composed verse abridgements of Muḥammad al-Sakhawatī (d. 902/1497) Al-Qawwāl al-Badī’ fī Ṣalāt ‘alā al-Ḥabīb al-Shafī’ī,31 and Al-Mu’jizāt wa-al-Khaṣā’īṣ al-Nabawiyyah by Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūtī (d. 911/1505).32 Both were devotional works in praise of the prophet Muḥammad, and she also composed a panegyric on Muḥammad entitled Fayd al-Wafāʾ fī Asmāʾ al-Muṣṭafā, and several similar works combining prose and poetry, including the Madad al-Wuddūd fī Mawlid al-Maḥmūd, Al-Fath al-Qarīb fī Mi’raj al-Ḥabīb, and Al-Mawrid al-Ahnā fī al-Mawlid al-Asnā.33 ‘Ā’ishah also wrote a number of works on Sufism, including her verse abridgement of al-Anṣārī’s Manāẓil al-Sa’īrīn,34 a spiritual guide entitled Al-Muntakhab fī Uṣūl al-Rutab,35 a work entitled Malāmih al-Sharīfah min Athār al-Latīfah, an ode on mystical recitation and prayer called Tashrīf al-Fikr fī Naẓm Fawaḍ al-Dhikr, and two volumes of mystical and devotional poetry, Al-Fath al-Haqqī min Fayḥ al-Talaqqī, and her Fayd al-Fadl wa-Jamʿ al-Shaml.36

Among ‘Ā’ishah’s favorite poets was Muḥammad al-Busīrī (d. 694/1295), and she incorporated his famous panegyric to Muḥammad, Al-Burda, into a takhlīṣ, which was among the dozen works stolen from her in 919/1513 on the road to

32‘Ā’ishah al-Ba’uniyyah, “Durar al-Ghā’īs fī Bahr al-Mu’jizāt wa-al-Khaṣā’īṣ;” she completed this work in 902/1497 (fol. 1b.).
33For a list of ‘Ā’ishah’s writings prior to 919/1513, see her “Fayḍ al-Fadl,” 218–20; also see Rabābi’ah, ‘Ā’ishah al-Ba’uniyyah: Shā’īrah, 59–65 and the partial list in al-Ghazzī, Al-Kawākib, 1:288. For her Al-Mawrid al-Ahnā, completed in 901/1495, see the recent edition in al-‘Alāwī, ‘Ā’ishah al-Ba’uniyyah, 44–47, 103–79.
35Dār al-Kutub al-Miṣrīyyah, Cairo, microfilm 13123 of MS 318 (Taṣawwuf Taṣmu‘), 1074/1663.
Cairo. Though devastated by this loss, ‘Ā’ishah set to work composing a second *takhāmis* on *Al-Burdaḥ*, and she collected it in a volume together with five additional odes in praise of the Prophet which she completed during her stay in Cairo. This collection includes her most famous poem, the *Fath al-Mubīn fī Madīḥ al-Amīn* (The clear inspiration in praise of the trusted prophet), which consists of 130 verses, each containing an elegant example of a rhetorical device (*badī‘*; e.g., paronomasia, antithesis, etc.), while lauding an attribute or action of Muḥammad. This work and ‘Ā’ishah’s commentary on it reveal her refined poetic skills and extensive knowledge of Arabic language and literature, and she referred to many of her literary predecessors including al-Buḥṭarī (d. 284/897), al-Mutanabbī (d. 354/965), al-Ma’arrī (d. 449/1057), and Ibn Abī Ḥaśl (d. 654/1256). Further, ‘Ā’ishah consciously patterned her *Fath al-Mubīn* on earlier *badī‘iyah* poems praising the Prophet by Ṣafī al-Dīn al-Hillī (d. 749/1349) and Abū Bakr Ibn Ḥijjah al-Ḥamawī (d. 838/1434); the poetic influences of al-Buṣrī and his literary forefather, ‘Umar Ibn al-Fārid (d. 632/1235), are evident as well.38

But ‘Ā’ishah’s praise of the prophet Muḥammad was more than a rhetorical undertaking, as she noted in her introduction to her second *takhāmis* on *Al-Burdaḥ*, entitled *Al-Qawl al-Ṣaḥḥ fī Takhāmis Burdaḥ al-Madīḥ*:

*Praising the noble Prophet is a distinguishing feature of the pious and a sign of those who are successful. Those who desire the best, desire to praise him, while the pure of heart praise him without end, for this is among the best ways to achieve success and a means for doubling rewards!*39

Further, in many poems, ‘Ā’ishah extolled the spiritual and physical benefits of such pious praise:

*Praise of God’s Prophet moves the soul; it drives away doubt, worries, and grief.*

Spirits find rest, eyes cry in delight,  
and bodies dance—you can’t hold them back!\(^{40}\)

In fact, ‘Ā’ishah’s own devotion to the Prophet was probably strengthened by her vision of him during her stay in Mecca. Though she does not relate the date of the event, it probably occurred around 880/1475 when ‘Ā’ishah went on pilgrimage with her father.

God, may He be praised, granted me a vision of the Messenger when I was residing in holy Mecca. An anxiety had overcome me by the will of God most high, and so I wanted to go to the holy sanctuary. It was Friday night, and I reclined on a couch on an enclosed veranda overlooking the holy Ka’bah and the sacred precinct. It so happened that one of the men there was reading a mawlid of God’s Messenger, and voices arose with blessings upon the Prophet. Then, I could not believe my eyes, for it was as if I was standing among a group of women. Someone said: “Kiss the Prophet!” and a dread came over me that made me swoon until the Prophet passed before me. Then I sought his intercession and, with a stammering tongue, I said to God’s Messenger, “O my master, I ask you for intercession!” Then I heard him say calmly and deliberately, “I am the intercessor on the Judgment Day!”\(^{41}\)

For ‘Ā’ishah, then, praising the Prophet was akin to a religious vocation, and her devotion to this task is seen clearly in her popular prose work \textit{Al-Mawrid al-Ahná fī al-Mawlid al-Asná} (The most wholesome source on the birth of the most brilliant prophet). In this reverential account of Muḥammad’s birth and call to prophecy, ‘Ā’ishah’s mystical tendencies are clear from the outset as she begins with a discussion of \textit{al-Nūr al-Muḥammadī}, or Muhammadan Light, a type of Muslim logos principle. God was a hidden treasure who loved to be known, and so the Light came forth from His knowledge as the first emanation. With the Light, God produced the Pen and Tablet as instruments to bring about creation, and He then made the Light shine in Adam and the other prophets, culminating in Muhhammad, the most beloved of God and humanity’s intercessor on the Judgment Day.\(^{42}\)


this introduction, ‘Ā’ishah recounts the noble lineage of the earthly Muḥammad from his ancestor Muḍar, the miracles surrounding his birth and early childhood, his travels and extraordinary encounters in Syria, and his marriage to the faithful Khadijah. ‘Ā’ishah then celebrates more of the Prophet’s miracles, praises his fine moral and physical attributes, and concludes with a brief account of his death.\footnote{43} 

*Al-Mawrid al-Ahná* closely follows the Arabic mawlid genre in that ‘Ā’ishah selected and summarized events detailed in the sīrah, or hagiographical literature on Muḥammad. Further, her condensed references to many events, hadith, and Quranic verses suggest that her audience was quite familiar with the material. Obviously, ‘Ā’ishah did not intend her *al-Mawrid al-Ahná* to be a study of Muḥammad’s life. Rather, it is a joyous hymn of praise for God’s greatest Prophet to be recited publicly on the anniversary of his birth, and this performative aspect is underscored by ‘Ā’ishah’s many poems placed within the rhymed prose of the text.\footnote{44}

Pray for him,  

blessed and saved by God,  

his creator in pre-eternity!  

Bless this cosmic splendor,  

more praised than heaven,  

named before Tablet and Pen.  

Pray for him,  

and God will bless you ten times more  

and hold you in favor and grace!  

Pray, for God’s blessings  

are His mercy from which  

all benefits flow.  

Bless him, for one who prays for him  

wins a share of favor  

and safety from misfortune.  

Pray for my master, bless my support,  

pray for my intercessor  

who grants my desire!  

Pray for the lord from Muḍar’s line,  

bless the chosen one,

\footnote{43}{‘Ā’ishah al-Baʿrūnīyāh, “Al-Mawrid al-Ahná,” 137–79; also see al-ʿAlāwī, ‘Ā’ishah al-Baʿrūnīyāh, 103–11.} \footnote{44}{In terms of Christian literature, this and similar works are comparable to Christmas hymns, more akin to Handel’s *Messiah* than to the Gospels. For more of ‘Ā’ishah’s poetry on Muhammad see Rabābīʿah, ‘Ā’ishah al-Baʿrūnīyāh: Shaʿīrah, 141–62; for the Prophet’s mawlid in general see Schimmel, *Muhammad*, 144–58.}
messenger to nations!
Pray for him
praising and praised from eternity;
bless the best to walk the earth!
God bless him always and forever,
and his family and companions,
knowing and wise,
As long as the hawk’s call at noon
moves the riders with joy
toward the House and Sacred Precinct,
As long as the breeze blows at night
from Kāzimah, lightning flashing
on the slopes of Dhū Salam.\footnote{45}

In the final verse, ‘Ā’ishah recalls Kāzimah and Dhū Salam, two sites on the pilgrim routes to Mecca. Here, she pays homage to Al-Burdah, which begins by invoking both places, and, perhaps, to a poem by Ibn al-Fārid that served as the model for al-Buṣīrī’s famous ode.\footnote{46} The strong influence of both poets is evident throughout ‘Ā’ishah’s verse, whether in poems praising the prophet Muḥammad, or in her many poems on mystical themes. Though much of ‘Ā’ishah’s Sufi verse is lost, several manuscripts of her Fayḍ al-Fadl wa-Jam’ al-Shaml (The emanation of grace and the gathering of union) have survived.\footnote{47} This collection contains over three hundred “inspired poems on divine, intimate conversations, mystical meanings and states of grace, spiritual efforts, matters of desire, and passionate ways.”\footnote{48} The poems in the volume appear to span much of ‘Ā’ishah’s life, from her “days as a novice and student to her mastery of the branches of mystical annihilation and the arts of effacement.”\footnote{49}

\footnote{47} Three manuscripts of her ‘Fayḍ al-Fadl’ may be found in Cairo’s Dār al-Kutub al-Miṣriyyah, and are listed as ‘Dīwān ‘Ā’ishah al-Bā‘ūniyāh.’ MS 431 (Shi‘r Taymūr), dated 1031/1622; MS 581 (Shi‘r Taymūr), dated 1031/1622; and MS 4384 (Adab), dated 1341/1922. All references in this article are to MS 431, unless otherwise noted. Rabābi‘ah (‘Ā’ishah al-Bā‘ūniyāh: Shā‘īrah, 60) found a fourth manuscript in Cairo’s Dār al-Kutub al-Miṣriyyah, presumably under its correct title. This is MS 112 (Shi‘r Taymūr), also dated 1031/1622 and by the same scribe as MS 431.
\footnote{49} Ibid., 218–19.
An odd feature of the *Fayḍ al-Fadḍl* is that the collection seems to end at several places:

‘Ā’ishah—related to Yūsuf ibn Aḥmad al-Bā‘ūnī on earth, and in truth to the axis, the unique and universal helper, Jamāl al-Dīn Ismā‘īl al-Ḥawwārī, known as the axis of existence, may God bless his heart secret—when she finished with this conclusion—and she never concludes without a new beginning—the Real inspired her with an awesome book which she received from Him, may He be praised, the Real. He entitled it *Al-Fath al-Ḥaqī min Fayḥ al-Talaqqī*, and it has sublime, inspired verse not contained in this present volume, so be aware of that. God is the protector and my success, and He is the most wonderful companion!⁵⁰

Yet, after this apparent ending, the *Fayḍ al-Fadḍl* begins anew with a number of additional poems. One of them names, for the first time, ‘Ā’ishah’s second spiritual master and Ismā‘īl al-Ḥawwārī’s successor, Muḥyī al-Dīn Yahyā al-Urmawī, further suggesting that the *Fayḍ al-Fadḍl* was an on-going compilation.⁵¹ This may also explain why none of the manuscripts cite a completion date for the original work. Nevertheless, ‘Ā’ishah may not have added poems to this collection after her arrival in Egypt in 919/1513, since the poems that she composed in Cairo are not cited in the *Fayḍ al-Fadḍl*, as are her other works.⁵²

Whatever the case, the *Fayḍ al-Fadḍl* begins with a series of munājāt or intimate monologues with God. This particular literary form had been popularized by the Persian Sufi ‘Abd Allāh al-Anṣārī, whose work ‘Ā’ishah knew well. Each of ‘Ā’ishah’s munājāt usually consists of two or three verses, in which she assumes the position of the submissive believer before God. In one such poem from “her days as a novitiate,” ‘Ā’ishah says:⁵³

> Whenever the fates make your servant recall someone besides you, by God, it does no good. For memory of you is hidden deep in the heart, and you know what I reveal and conceal.

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⁵⁰Ibid., 296–97, and 218–20.
⁵¹Ibid., 314.
⁵²Ibid., 218–20, 296–97.
In a similar spirit of pious resignation, ‘Ā’ishah wrote:\textsuperscript{54}

I am content with what God wants for me;
I commit my whole affair to Him.
I turn to Him, seek refuge in Him, cling to Him
for I can trust no one save Him!

Preceding these verses and most of the other poems in the \textit{Fayd al-Faḍl} is the phrase \textit{wa min fathĪ Allāh ‘alayhā or, more often, wa min fathīhi ‘alayhā: "From God’s/His inspiration upon her,” declaring the deeply spiritual source and character of ‘Ā’ishah’s poetry. Further, in a number of instances, poems are introduced by a few additional words citing their occasion, theme, or ‘Ā’ishah’s mystical state when composing them, as in the following poem inspired when “rapture was intense”:\textsuperscript{55}

With noble invocation of the One, Creator,
refresh a heart melted by longing.
Singer, lift up His praise and repeat it;
Saqi, pass round His love’s ancient wine.
For life has passed in desire to drink it,
though I never won a taste, no, not a taste.
See how it revived impassioned souls
brought to ruin and destruction.
See how it made them disappear
from all the world since they fell for it.
See how it drove them love-mad and crazy,
shattered by rapture and craving.
See how it melted hearts now flowing down
from tear ducts of large round eyes.
See how it brought a dead lover back to life;
O, how many strong lovers have died!
It is a wine ever appearing

to man as the rising sun,
And when its bouquet spreads forth,

it covers all the world and existence.
When will I win its quenching draught
passing me away in that abiding beauty?

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\textsuperscript{54} ‘Ā’ishah al-Bā’ūnīyah, "Fayd al-Faḍl," 5.
\textsuperscript{55} Ibid., 5–6
Similar to Ibn al-Farīd and his famous wine ode, *Al-Khamrīyah*, ‘Ā’ishah here links the memory and recollection (*dhikr*) of God to His love, which is likened to an ancient, intoxicating wine (vv. 1–3). The quest for it has destroyed many true lovers, yet a taste of this wine could resurrect the dead. Again like Ibn al-Farīd, ‘Ā’ishah draws attention syntactically to the wine’s miraculous effects, in this case by beginning five consecutive verses with the phrase *wa-lakum bi-hā* (“Consider how it . . .” vv. 4–8). She further suggests the spiritual properties of this splendid, fragrant vintage in her final verses (vv. 9–11). There, in verse 11, ‘Ā’ishah plays on the well-known Sufi terms for mystical union, *fana*’ (“annihilation,” “passing away”) and *baqā*’ (“abiding”), while, at the same time, alluding to the Quranic declaration (55:26–27): “All things on the earth are passing away, while the majestic and beneficent countenance of your Lord abides.”

This poem is representative of many others in the *Fayḍ al-Fadl* with their devotional tone and uncomplicated diction and style. In these poems, ‘Ā’ishah explored a full range of Arabic rhymes, meters, and poetic forms, whether to praise the Prophet and seek God’s forgiveness, to instruct the Sufi novice, or to speak of longing and mystical union. Further, inspired by earlier Sufi poets, ‘Ā’ishah composed a *takhmīs* on an ode ascribed to ‘Abd al-Qādir al-Jīlānī proclaiming his high saintly status, and, in one of her longest poems, she dedicated over 250 verses to a variety of mystical themes, using as her model Ibn al-Farīd’s Sufi classic the *Naẓm al-Suluḵ* (The poem of the Sufi way), also known as *Al-Ta’īyah al-Kubrá* (Ode in T - major). Toward the end of her own *ta’īyah*, “‘Ā’ishah begins forty-three verses with the phrase *a-lā yā rasūla Allāh* (”O messenger of God”), establishing a reverent rhythm and mood as she prays to and praises the Prophet. Such syntactical and phonemic patterning is common in many of her poems, suggesting that she may have intended them to be recited or chanted in Sufi gatherings and *sama’* sessions. This is particularly the case with ‘Ā’ishah’s many *muwashshahah*, or strophic poems, which often feature refrains.

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I see no one but my love
when I’m here or when I’m gone.
I see him always with me,
for he’s my destiny.

O my joy and happiness
faithful love has graced me
With passing away in abiding
and abiding in passing away,
For I have met my fate,
and fate is my reunion.

So my heart savor
union with my love.
I see him always with me,
for he’s my destiny.

He’s my attributes, my essence;
I see him and nothing else;
He’s my effacement, my endurance
when I pass and then return.
He’s my union and dissolution
in my aim and way of life;

He’s my substance and my meaning
far away or near.
I see him always with me,
for he’s my destiny.

Here, by God, and in my heart
God made my bliss complete.
I loved my lover and my lord,
spring of my soul and being.
So life was good, I was always near,
and God made my vision last.

So his brilliant flash, no other,
appeared to me unbroken.
I see him always with me,
for he’s my destiny.

My life was all delight, my separation sweet
in love with beauty’s lord.
My union came, division left,
my wide expansion stayed.

My illusions gone, my truth proved true
and unadorned appeared.

A handsome moon beguiled me;
he held all wondrous things.
I see him always with me,
for he’s my destiny.

By my life,
he is my highest goal!
My art is passing away in him,
passion, my food and drink.
He’s my reason, my religion,
my doctrine and devotion.

Wherever I turn my face,
I see him alone with no one watching.
I see him always with me,
for he’s my destiny!

Ostensibly, this poem tells of a lover’s consuming passion for her beloved. Destiny has fated that she love him, and so, faithfully, she gives up all thought or care for herself. Yet this does not cause her ruin but, rather, her happiness and joy, as she finds blissful union with her handsome love. Enhancing this love theme are the underlying devotional and mystical elements of the poem, which contains several possible allusions to the prophet Muhammad. ‘A’ishah refers to her beloved as habīb (v. 1), a lover who is like the full moon (badr, v. 41), and both terms are standard poetic references to Muḥammad, the “beloved of God.” Strengthening this reading is the first portion of ‘A’ishah’s refrain: kayfa lā asshaduhu (“How can I not see him,” v. 3 f.), which may also be translated as “How can I not bear witness to him,” echoing the Muslim profession of faith: asshadu an lā ilāha illā Allāh wa asshadu anna Muḥammadan rasūlu Allāh, “I bear witness that there is no deity but God and that Muḥammad is the messenger of God.”61 However, this could equally imply that God is ‘A’ishah’s love, a reading supported by her use of the term rabb for her beloved, and her direct references to God (vv. 25–30).

In addition, the poem contains over a dozen well-known Sufi technical terms regarding mystical states and stations. Central to this poem is union, and ‘A’ishah frequently underscores the dialectic relation between passing away and abiding in union (fāna’-baqā’, vv. 7–8, 18, 47; māḥw-thībāt, v. 17; jamʿ-ṣḥīḥāt, v. 19; jamʿ-fārq,

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vv. 35, 37). Likewise, she makes distinctions between substance and meaning, and illusion and truth (ma’ñá-ayn, v. 21; wahr-haqq, vv. 39–40) as spiritual contemplation and vision (shuhúd, v. 30) produce an expansive state of exhilaration (bast, v. 38).\(^{62}\) Graced with illumination, the lover rests at ease with her beloved, whom she encounters within herself and everywhere she turns:

Wherever I turn my face,
   I see him alone with no one watching.
   I see him always with me,
   for he’s my destiny!

‘Ā’ishah drew from both Arabic love poetry and the Quran for this final, climactic verse. In the classical poetic tradition, theraqib, or “spy,” stands guard to protect the beloved against the lover’s advances. However, the spy may be avoided in a secret rendezvous or, of course, in the bridal chamber, where lovers meet alone. The sacred all-embracing nature of this union, as well as the divine identity of the beloved, is further suggested by ‘Ā’ishah’s phrase kayfa mañá wajhí arañhu ("Wherever I turn my face, I see him"), a clear reference to the Quranic declaration, often quoted by Sufis (2:115): "Wherever you turn, there is the face (wajh) of God."\(^{63}\) Here again, ‘Ā’ishah, unlike Ibn al-Faríd, is explicit regarding the divine status of the beloved. This may be the result of her overtly devotional aims. Yet, as one of a very few medieval women publicly composing Arabic love poetry, ‘Ā’ishah may have wanted to avoid any ambiguity regarding the spiritual character of her love, so as to avoid controversy or scandal.

III

This poem and many others by ‘Ā’ishah al-Ba’ününyah show clearly that her mystical quest revolved around love for God and his prophet Muḥammad. Her verses are replete with Sufi technical terms, and she often expresses her veneration for ‘Abd al-Qādir al-Jilānī and her Sufi masters.\(^{64}\) Following their Qādirīyah way, ‘Ā’ishah strove to keep God’s commandments and accept His decrees, while seeking God’s forgiveness and the Prophet’s intercession on the Day of Judgment. Moreover, her spiritual discipline and mystical practice appear to have illumined her faith with moments of mystical union, ecstasy, and joy. Significantly, she alludes to these

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\(^{62}\)Regarding many of these Sufi terms see ‘Alī ibn Muḥammad al-Jurjānī, Kitāb al-Ta’rīfāt (Beirut, 1983), 77, 89, 129, 169, 171, 255. For further examples of their frequent use in other poems by ‘Ā’ishah, see Rabābi’ah, ‘Ā’ishah al-Ba’ününyah: Shā’irah, 284–86.


\(^{64}\)For further examples, see Rabābi’ah, ‘Ā’ishah al-Ba’ününyah: Shā’irah, 187–202.
powerful experiences in her comments preceding individual poems, and these autobiographical remarks, together with those found elsewhere in her writings, suggest ‘Ä’ishah’s sense of confidence and accomplishment in both her life and work.

‘Ä’ishah is also exceptional in that she attempted to articulate and clarify some of her mystical beliefs and practices in a separate Sufi compendium, Al-Muntakhab fī Uṣūl al-Rutab (Selections on the fundamentals of stations). ‘Ä’ishah notes at the outset that the stages of the mystical folk are innumerable, yet all of them are based on four fundamental principles: tawbah (repentance), ikhlāṣ (sincerity), dhikr (recollection), and muḥabbah (love). She then addresses these principles in four separate sections. ‘Ä’ishah begins each section with relevant quotations from the Quran, and she usually cites Arabic synonyms for each term, along with their extrinsic (zāhir) and intrinsic (bātin) meanings. ‘Ä’ishah quotes relevant traditions of Muḥammad and sayings from the early Muslim forefathers (ṣalaf), followed by extensive quotations from Sufi masters. To conclude, she sometimes adds an illustrative story or two, together with a few of her own observations and inspired verses on the subject.

Thus, tawbah, or “repentance,” explicitly means turning away from sinful acts toward praiseworthy ones, and away from evil speech toward good words. Inwardly for the Sufis, repentance also signifies turning away from all things save God. Repentance is effective on three conditions: (1) remorse for past misdeeds, (2) desisting immediately from current offenses, and (3) never returning to sin. ‘Ä’ishah further notes that each member of the body has a share in repentance. The heart must resolve to leave sin and be remorseful, while the eyes should be down cast; the hands should cease to grasp; the feet should stop hurrying, and the ears should stop trying to listen in. This is repentance for the common people. The repentance of the elect goes further by opposing the lust of concupiscence (nafs), and by averting the gaze of the heart away from pleasure and prosperity, while abstaining from all transient things. Such repentance is required for the love for God, who said (2:222): “Verily, God loves those who turn in repentance. . . .” Higher still is

65. ‘Ä’ishah al-Bā’ūnīyah, “Al-Muntakhab fī Uṣūl al-Rutab,” Dār al-Kutub al-Miṣrīyah, Cairo, microfilm 13123 of MS 318 (Taṣawwuf Taŷmūr), 1074/1663, 1–5. Rabābi’ah did not consult this work, believing it to be lost, though he had access to a short work entitled ‘Majmū’ fī Kalām ‘Ä’ishah al-Bā’ūnīyah fī Taṣawwuf,” Dār al-Kutub al-Miṣrīyah, Cairo, microfilm 4059 of MS 319 (Taṣawwuf Taŷmūr); ‘Ä’ishah al-Bā’ūnīyah: Shā’irah, 62, 64. Based on Rabābi’ah’s citations of this work, I believe this “Majmū” consists of selections from ‘Ä’ishah’s “Al-Muntakhab.” Unfortunately, because he did not know this, Rabābi’ah ascribes to ‘Ä’ishah statements made by earlier Sufis; see Rabābi’ah, ‘Ä’ishah al-Bā’ūnīyah: Shā’irah, 211, 257; ‘Ä’ishah al-Bā’ūnīyah, “Al-Muntakhab,” 151–57; and Ibn ‘Aṭā Allāh al-Iskandari, Latâ’if al-Minan (Cairo, 1979), 52–55.

the repentance of the elect of the elect. They turn away from considering anything but God, including spiritual states and blessings, until God reveals His beauty to them, eradicating everything but Himself.67

In her discussion of repentance, ‘Ā’ishah relies heavily on the opinions of the respected Sufi master and scholar Abū al-Qāsim al-Qushayrī (465/1072), and this is also the case regarding her second fundamental principle, ikhlaṣ, or “sincerity” in word and deed. ‘Ā’ishah quotes al-Qushayrī to the effect that sincere obedience to God should be motivated only by the desire to draw closer to Him. The believer should have no thought of attaining praise or glory among people, for sincerity requires the utmost humility. Therefore, concupiscence (nafs) is to be disciplined, while the heart must be blind to the opinions of others, as the spirit guards against pride.68 To underscore the importance of sincerity, ‘Ā’ishah cites numerous prophetic traditions, and stories regarding proper intentions and the grievous sin of hypocrisy. Sincerity, she says, is like water helping the tiny seeds of good works to grow, while hypocrisy is a cyclone that will sweep away the fields of one’s labor.69

Essential to both repentance and sincerity is the third principle, dhikr, or “recollection” of God. ‘Ā’ishah begins her section on this pivotal topic with God’s promise in the Quran (2:152): ‘Remember Me, and I will remember you,” and al-Qushayrī’s commentary on it. He notes that, for those who understand the Quran literally, this verse means: ‘Remember Me at the appropriate times, and I will remember you with acts of grace.” However, those with insight also grasp the mystical import of this divine message: “Remember Me by leaving behind all thought of reward or punishment, and I will remember you by establishing you in My truth after your passing away from yourselves.”70 Following al-Qushayrī, ‘Ā’ishah elaborates on this reciprocal relationship of recollection between God and His faithful worshippers in a series of mystical interpretations: “Remember Me with sincerity, and I will remember you among the spiritual elect; remember Me in your striving, and I will remember You with witnessing; . . . remember Me in your passing away, and I will remember you in your abiding; . . . remember Me in your hearts, and I will remember you in nearness to Me; remember Me in your spirits, and I will remember you in moments of enlightenment; remember Me in your heart secrets, and I will remember you in illuminations!”71

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67 Ibid., 22–25; 45–46.
In context of the classical Sufi tradition, ‘Ā’ishah regards dhikr as both a process and a mystical state. As a process, recollection of God is the means to purify oneself of selfishness and hypocrisy, and to ward off Satan. Though one will never be able to remember God constantly with one’s lips, the sincere believer should strive always to recall God within the heart. As with repentance, recollection may differ in its effects depending on the believer’s spiritual level; common people are soothed and receive blessings by praising God; religious scholars gain insight into God’s names and attributes, while the spiritual elect who recollect God are purified and rest in Him. The ultimate goal of recollection, then, is a paradoxical state of forgetting everything while remembering God. This results in absorption in Him, and ‘Ā’ishah states that the most effective means to achieve this mystical state is to recollect the phrase: “There is no deity but God.” Finally, Muḥammad is reported to have said: “One who loves something, remembers it often,” and, so, ‘Ā’ishah includes recollection among the signs of love.

This leads naturally to mahabbah, or “love,” the subject of the final and longest section of Al-Muntakhab. As in the preceding section on dhikr, ‘Ā’ishah opens with verses from the Quran followed by al-Qushayrī’s commentary. God commands Muḥammad (3:31): “Say: ‘If you love God, then follow me and God will love you.’” True love of God, al-Qushayrī observes, requires lovers to efface themselves completely as their beloved wears them out. This love relationship is possible because God created human beings in the best of forms and, so, He has a special affection for them. Further, God has said (5:54): “O you who believe, any of you who turns away from his religion, God will replace with a people whom He will love as they love Him.” For al-Qushayrī and ‘Ā’ishah, this verse declares to believers the wonderful news that if they keep the faith and love God, He most certainly will love them.

‘Ā’ishah then reinforces this point with several divine sayings (al-hadīth al-qudsī) on love, particularly the famous “Tradition of Willing Devotions,” a standard Sufi text in support of mystical union: “God said: ‘Whoever treats a friend of mine as an enemy, on him I declare war! My servant draws near to Me by nothing more loved by Me than the religious obligations that I have imposed upon him, and My servant continues to draw near to Me by acts of willing devotion such that I love him. Then, when I love him, I become his ear, his eye, and his tongue, his heart and reason, his hand and support.”

‘Ā’ishah next cites a number of statements on love by Sufi masters, including: “love is the hearts’ delight in the beloved’s being,” and “love is intoxication without...
sobriety, an indescribable astonishment in meeting the beloved.” Like a spell, God’s love overwhelms the hearts of His loving worshippers, and reveals to them the light of His beauty and the sacred power of His majesty. Love’s effects, however, will vary depending on the believers’ spiritual capacities, and ‘Ā’ishah quotes the North African Sufi Ibn al-‘Arif (d. 536/1141) on the levels of love. For the common believer, the seeds of love are planted by reading the Quran and following the custom of Muhammad, and then nourished by complying with divine law. This love will thwart the temptations of Satan, provide solace in times of adversity, and make service to God delightful. By contrast, love among the spiritual elite strikes like a bolt of lightning, leaving the lovers dumbfounded and confused. This overwhelming love causes the spiritual elite to pass away in God’s love for them, which is beyond any description or allusion.76

‘Ā’ishah then turns to the signs of love, which include intimacy with God and estrangement from the world, awe before God and contentment with His will, performing pious deeds, loving others who love God, and passing away in the beloved from all things.77 ‘Ā’ishah adds that these are only a few of the many signs, as she moves on to traditions and stories about love. She observes that many people and religious communities have been touched by the irresistible love of God in the past, but that Muslims can bear more of it thanks to the enduring legacy of the most perfect and noble prophet Muhammad. Still, God’s love is all-consuming, as even Hell discovered. The great Sufi al-Junayd (d. 298/911) once said: ‘Hell fire asked, ‘O Lord, if I don’t obey You, will You punish me with something stronger than me?‘ God said, ‘Yes, I will inflict on you My greater fire.’ Hell asked, ‘What fire is more intense and awesome than me?’ God answered, ‘The fire of My love that I have placed in the hearts of My friends (awliya’)!’78

Perhaps on a more personal note, ‘Ā’ishah ends her section on love with two stories of pious women whose unwavering devotion and love for God are rewarded by His blessings.79 She then concludes Al-Muntakhab with her own mystical truths (ḥaqā’iq laduniyyah) on love inspired by God. Love is the greatest secret of God; it is an endless sea. Those blessed with God’s love are His saintly friends (awliya’) whose existence is eradicated in a state beyond description. They pass away and abide in Him, so that their hearts become a place of vision where the truth of the divine essence (dhāt) is revealed. God then assumes His worshippers’ senses as attested in the “Tradition of Willing Devotions.” Though the worshippers’ love draws them ever closer to the divine beloved, God bestows His love as an act of unearned grace. Ultimately, the lovers lose all sense of self (anānīyah) when the

78Ibid., 180.
79Ibid., 185–90.
truth of oneness (al-haqliq al-ahadiyyah) appears, but their mystical death leads them to eternal life, as ‘A’ishah declares in verses from her closing poem.\textsuperscript{80}

\begin{quote}
God looked with favor on a folk,
   and they stayed away
   from worldly fortunes.
In love and devotion, they worshipped Him;
   they surrendered themselves,
   their aim was true.
In love with Him, they gave themselves up
   and passed away from existence,
   nothing left behind.
So He took pity
   and revealed to them
   His He-ness,
And they lived again
   gazing at that living face
   when His eternal life appeared.
They saw Him alone
   in the garden of union
   and drank from contemplation’s cups,
Filled lovingly with pure wine
   from the vision
   of true oneness.
\end{quote}

Throughout Al-Muntakhab, ‘A’ishah consistently cites the Quran and carefully notes the sources of her hadith. Further, she relies on several major Sufi works, which she cites and accurately quotes. These works include Muhammad al-Kalabadih’s (d. 385/995) Al-Ta’arruf li-Madhhab Ahl al-Ta’sawwuf,\textsuperscript{81} al-Qushayri’s Al-Risalah and his Quranic commentary Laqt’if al-Isharat fi Tafsir al-Qur’an, and writings by Muhammad al-Sulami (d. 412/1021), author of the Tabaqat al-Sufiyah.\textsuperscript{82} In addition to these classical sources, ‘A’ishah occasionally draws selections from a few later works, in particular the ‘Awariif al-Ma’arif by ‘Umar

\textsuperscript{80}Ibid., 190–211.
al-Suhrawardi (d. 632/1234), and the *Laṭā’if al-Minan* by Ibn ‘Aṭā Allāh al-Iskandari (d. 709/1309), and she quotes a poem by Ibn al-‘Arīf, and one by Muḥammad Ibn Abī al-Wafā’ (d. 891/1486). Among these Sufi authorities, however, al-Qushayrī is clearly the most cited and easily the most influential.

As indicated in its title, *Al-Muntakhab fī Usūl al-Rutab* is a “selection” ‘Ā’ishah made from earlier works on Sufism. As such, it testifies to ‘Ā’ishah’s extensive reading on the subject, and records some of the mystical writings circulating in Sufi circles of her day. Notable by its absence is any reference to the popular works of Ibn al-‘Arabī (d. 637/1240) or those of his students. Perhaps ‘Ā’ishah consciously avoided these controversial authors, as well as difficult matters of mystical theology, which are rarely discussed in *Al-Muntakhab*. Further, ‘Ā’ishah does not refer explicitly to her own teachers, nor does she mention the Light of Muḥammad, which figures prominently in her other works. These omissions, however, may reflect her particular focus in *Al-Muntakhab* on classical sources that are not primarily concerned with mystical prophetology. While ‘Ā’ishah intended her *Al-Muntakhab* to be useful for fellow travelers on the mystic path, this work appears to be less of a formal guide-book than a collection of insightful and inspirational passages organized around the four basic principles of repentance, sincerity, recollection, and love. As in her poetry, ‘Ā’ishah’s tone throughout the work is consistently positive and often up-lifting. She stresses repeatedly that divine mercy and grace are limited only by human heedlessness and recalcitrance, but that God will love and help all believers who sincerely try to reach Him:

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I see love,
an ocean without a shore.
If you are love’s chosen ones,
plunge in! \(^{89}\)

IV

During the difficult summer of 922/1516, Qaⁿṣūh al-Ghawrī met with ‘Ā’ishah al-Bā‘ūnîyâh. Later, the Mamluk sultan rode out with his army to meet the Ottoman sultan Selim at Marj Dâbiq. There, surrounded by his religious officials and spiritual advisors, al-Ghawrī suffered a stroke and died in the heat of battle. \(^{90}\) His decimated forces fled the field, and some survivors eventually returned to Cairo, Ibn Ajâ among them. Ibn Ajâ was then retained as confidential secretary and foreign minister by the new Mamluk sultan Tûmânbây, who was defeated and killed a few months later when Selim took Cairo. Selim, however, treated the elderly Ibn Ajâ with respect and permitted him and his family to return to their native Aleppo, where Ibn Ajâ died in 925/1519. \(^{91}\) Ibn Ajâ’s widow, Sitt al-Halab (d. 933/1525), mourned her husband for a year and then remarried, taking delight in a considerably younger man. \(^{92}\)

After Marj Dâbiq, ‘Ā’ishah’s son, Abd al-Wahhāb, did not follow his employer Ibn Ajâ to Cairo. Instead, ‘Abd al-Wahhāb returned to the al-Šâliḥiyâh district of Damascus, where he studied jurisprudence and Sufism until his death, around the age of thirty, in 925/1519. \(^{93}\) As for ‘Ā’ishah, she too died in Damascus, on the sixteenth of Dhû al-Qa‘dah, 923/December, 1517, the same year that the Mamluk dynasty passed away. \(^{94}\) However, her prose and poetry lived on to be admired and copied for centuries, thereby preserving her extraordinary legacy. ‘Ā’ishah al-Bā‘ūnîyâh remains of one of the greatest woman poets and writers in Islamic history, and she serves as a fitting testimony to the vibrant literary and religious culture of the Mamluk period.

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