

# Everything Muhammad: The Image of the Prophet in the Writings of 'Ayn al-Qudat

By Mohammed Rustom

So long as I live, I am the Quran's servant.  
I am dust upon the path of Muhammad the Chosen One.  
If someone relates other than this saying of mine,  
I shall disown him, and be disgusted with his words.

Rumi<sup>1</sup>

## Opening

It is well-known that Rumi (d. 1273) was a great lover of the Prophet Muhammad. This is best typified in such verses as the ones with which the present article begins. Given our knowledge of the devotion to the Prophet that we find in Rumi's writings and in the works of many other Sufi authors,<sup>2</sup> I would here like to discuss the views of another major devotee of the Prophet. His name was Abu'l Ma'ali 'Abd Allah al-Miyanji, and is most commonly known as 'Ayn al-Qudat Hamadani. He was born

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<sup>1</sup> For an explanation and alternative translation of this famous quatrain, one may consult the indispensable work by Ibrahim Gamard and Rawan Farhadi (trans. and ed.), *The Quatrains of Rumi* (San Rafael, CA: Sufi Dari Books, 2008), pp. 2-3.

<sup>2</sup> For the traditional Muslim veneration of the Prophet, see Claude Addas, *La Maison muhammadienne: Aperçus de la dévotion au Prophète en mystique musulmane* (Paris: Gallimard, 2015) and Annemarie Schimmel, *And Muhammad is His Messenger: The Veneration of the Prophet in Islamic Piety* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1985).

in 1097, having been put to death in 1131 at the tender age of thirty-four, ostensibly on charges of “heresy.”<sup>3</sup>

‘Ayn al-Qudat was the foremost disciple of Ahmad Ghazali (d. 1126),<sup>4</sup> and himself became a Sufi master in his late twenties. It can easily be argued that he was the first author in Islamic history to present Sufi doctrine in a highly developed and metaphysical form, thereby acting as a forerunner to the tradition of theoretical gnosis (*‘irfan-i nazari*) that is commonly associated with Ibn ‘Arabi (d. 1240) and his followers.<sup>5</sup> His writings are also replete with many of the ideas, themes, tropes, and images that we find in the Persian Sufi poets who came after him, such as Farid al-Din ‘Attar (d. ca. 1220) and Rumi. To be sure, one major aspect of ‘Ayn al-Qudat’s teachings is his emphasis on divine love and beauty, which explains why he is often referred to as the “sultan of lovers” (*sultan-i ‘ushshaq*).<sup>6</sup>

Another major theme which runs throughout ‘Ayn al-Qudat’s writings is that of the Muhammadan light (*nur-i Mubammadi*). This idea is developed by ‘Ayn al-Qudat in a doctrinal manner unlike any writer before him, and is closely linked to what we can call his wider “Muhammadology.” It would be outside the scope of the present article to offer a complete portrait of ‘Ayn al-Qudat’s understanding of the cosmic function of the Prophet Muhammad, as well as the important role he plays with respect to the notions of “belief” and “unbelief.”<sup>7</sup> What follows, therefore, are

<sup>3</sup> Omid Safi has astutely shown that the outward cause for ‘Ayn al-Qudat’s death was purely political. See his *The Politics of Knowledge in Premodern Islam* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006), chapter 6. ‘Ayn al-Qudat also identified an inward “cause” for his eventual demise, namely the “divine jealousy” (*ghayrat-i ilabi*). See Mohammed Rustom, “‘Ayn al-Qudat Between Divine Jealousy and Political Intrigue,” *Journal of Sufi Studies* 6, no. 2 (2017), forthcoming.

<sup>4</sup> A major study of the life and thought of Ahmad Ghazali is now available: Joseph Lumbard, *Abmad al-Ghazali, Remembrance, and the Metaphysics of Love* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2016).

<sup>5</sup> An introduction to the life and teachings of ‘Ayn al-Qudat can be found in Rustom, *Inrushes of the Spirit: The Mystical Theology of ‘Ayn al-Qudat* (Albany: SUNY Press, forthcoming). For a survey of the philosophical Sufi tradition from Ibn ‘Arabi onwards, see Rustom, “Philosophical Sufism,” in *The Routledge Companion to Islamic Philosophy*, ed. Richard Taylor and Luis Xavier López-Farjeat (New York: Routledge, 2016), pp. 399–411.

<sup>6</sup> Curiously, amongst Sufi authors who wrote in Arabic, the Arabic version of this title (i.e., *sultan al-‘ashiqin*) is reserved for ‘Umar Ibn al-Farid (d. 1235). See Th. Emil Homerin, *Passion Before Me, My Fate Behind: Ibn al-Farid and the Poetry of Recollection* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2011), p. ix.

<sup>7</sup> For which, see Rustom, *Inrushes of the Spirit*, chapter 9.

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