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Mysticism and Philosophy in al-Andalus

Ibn Masarra, Ibn al-ʿArabī and the Ismāʿīlī Tradition

By

Michael Ebstein

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Dedicated to my dear parents

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NOTE ON TRANSLITERATION, TRANSLATION AND DATES

The transliteration of Arabic in this book follows the system of transliteration employed in the *Encyclopaedia of the Qur'ān*.

Proper nouns in Arabic which are common in English are either not transliterated or appear in simplified transliteration (for instance: Sunni rather than Sunnī; Shi'i rather than Shī'ī; but Ismā'īlī, not Isma'ili).

All translations from the Arabic (including Quranic verses) are the author's, unless otherwise stated.

Dates are marked by the Hijri year followed by the Christian year (for example: 560/1165 = 560 Hijri, 1165 A.D.).

INTRODUCTION

Al-Andalus

Spain, or *al-Andalus* as it is known in the Islamic tradition, occupies a special place in the history of Islam. From the early stages of their presence in the Iberian Peninsula at the beginning of the 8th century, and especially during the centuries that followed, the Muslims of Spain succeeded in creating a unique culture that was naturally influenced by the Islamic world in the east, yet at the same time was significantly different from it. The distinctive character of al-Andalus was reflected in various spheres—in political, social, economic and military history, in architecture and literature, in religion and in philosophy. The gradual loss of Muslim territories to the Christian Reconquista and the eventual disappearance of Islamic society and culture from the Iberian Peninsula served to enhance the special, nostalgic image of al-Andalus in Islamic consciousness.[1]

The unique position of al-Andalus in the Islamic tradition is likewise evident in the field of mysticism. It was Muslim Spain that gave rise to two unusual figures in the history of Islamic mysticism—Ibn Masarra (269/883–319/931) and the well-known Ibn al-ʿArabī (560/1165–638/1240). The latter's influence on Muslim mystics in subsequent generations was profound; in many ways, Ibn al-ʿArabī—or "The Greatest Shaykh" (*al-shaykh al-akbar*) as he is known in Islamic sources—marked a turning point in the history of Islamic mysticism, in the Sunni as well as in the Shiʿi traditions.[2] Both Ibn Masarra and Ibn al-ʿArabī can be regarded as representing, respectively, the beginning and the pinnacle of Islamic mysticism in al-Andalus; and, as we shall see throughout this study, both embody a type of mysticism that is quite different from the one that evolved in the Islamic East during the 9th–12th/13th centuries. In fact, the unique character of Andalusī mysticism is not restricted to the Islamic world, and can

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[1] On Andalusī history and culture see Torres Balbás et al., Al-Andalus; Kennedy, *Muslim Spain*; Marín, Fierro and Samsó, *Formation*; Jayyusi, *Legacy*.

[2] See Chodkiewicz, *Seal of the saints* 10, 15, 49 n. 4. On the influence of Ibn al-ʿArabī on later generations see also Blochet, Études 49–111; Schaeder, Islamische Lehre 221, 237–9; Asín Palacios, *Mystical philosophy* 128–9; Corbin, Science; Sviri, Spiritual trends 78; and the references given below in n. 74. On the lives and works of Ibn Masarra and Ibn al-ʿArabī see below pp. 8–10.

also be observed in the history of Jewish mysticism. Spain—albeit in its northern, Christian side—witnessed the full emergence of the *Kabbalah* during the 12th and 13th centuries and the appearance of the *Zohar* ("The Book of Splendor"), the most influential Kabbalistic text in Judaism.[3] This sudden surge or eruption in the mystical thought of both Islam and Judaism, and especially the chronological and geographical context in which it occurred (the Iberian Peninsula of the 12th–13th centuries), merit a close examination: what was it about al-Andalus that caused such crucial developments in the history of Islamic and Jewish mysticism?

This study attempts to give a partial answer to this question, by pointing to one possible source among many which contributed to the formation of the unique mystical climate in al-Andalus: the Ismāʿīlī tradition. The Ismāʿīlīs, who emerged as a separate Shiʿi faction sometime during the second half of the 9th century A.D., were extremely creative in many areas such as philosophy, theology, science, mysticism, esotericism and the occult.[4] Moreover, in the year 297/909, the Ismāʿīlīs succeeded in establishing a state in North Africa ruled by Caliphs-*imām*s—members of a Shiʿi dynasty which traced its origins back to the family of Muḥammad b. Ismāʿīl, a descendant of ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib (cousin and son-in-law of the Prophet Muḥammad) and his wife Fāṭima (the Prophet's daughter).[5] In the following years, this state became a powerful and dominant empire, the Fāṭimī Empire, which extended its control over vast areas in the Islamic world, most notably Egypt (conquered in 358/969) and the holy cities of Mecca and Medina (359/969–970). It was only in the year 567/1171 that the Fāṭimī Empire was annihilated by the famous Sunni ruler Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn al-Ayyūbī, although the process of Fāṭimī decline had begun many years earlier. Despite the fact that much of the Ismāʿīlī and Fāṭimī literature is now lost, it is clear that the Ismāʿīlīs contributed greatly to the intellectual world of medieval Islam.[6]

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[3] On this unique feature of Andalusī mysticism in the Islamic and Jewish worlds, see Sviri, Spiritual trends; cf. Akasoy, Andalusi exceptionalism. On Jewish mystical-philosophical thought in al-Andalus see also the discussion below on pp. 15, 21.

[4] On the meaning of the term 'Esotericism' employed here see the discussion below on p. 27.

[5] According to the Shiʿi view, only the members of the Prophet's family (*ahl al-bayt*)—i.e., ʿAlī and his descendants—have the Divine right to rule the Islamic community, in both political and religious matters. See also the discussion below at the beginning of chapter 3.

[6] On the history of the Ismāʿīlīs (including the Fāṭimīs), see Daftary, *Ismāʿīlīs*. On their literary output and contribution to the intellectual tradition of Islam, see, for example,

It is my view that the Ismāʿīlī tradition should be regarded as one of the factors that were at play in the emergence of the distinct type of mysticism reflected in the works of Ibn Masarra and Ibn al-ʿArabī. As mentioned above, these works are rather different from the mainstream of mystical writing that developed in the central and eastern parts of the Islamic world prior to Ibn al-ʿArabī's time. Broadly speaking, most eastern works that were written by authors who belonged to the mystical tradition known as *taṣawwuf* (Sufism) focus mainly on man's inner psychological-spiritual dimension and ethical conduct. According to the Sufi perception, by reforming his moral behavior, combating his lower self or ego (*al-nafs*) and purifying his internal realm, the believer may gradually draw closer to God and perhaps even unite with Him.[7] In contradistinction, the mystical discourse of Ibn Masarra and Ibn al-ʿArabī can be described as theosophical: it is primarily concerned with divinity and its mode of action in the universe, and seeks to gain knowledge of the way in which the universe was created (cosmogony) and how it operates (cosmology).[8] Accordingly, this 'Andalusī' type of mysticism exhibits a unique blend of Neoplatonic mystical philosophy, cosmogonic-cosmological speculations, occult sciences such as the science of letters and astrology, and more—a blend that is typically lacking in the eastern Sufi works written prior to the rise of Ibn al-ʿArabī, but which is characteristic of Ismāʿīlī literature.[9]

It seems that many Sufi authors in the east during the 10th–12th/13th centuries sought to suppress and to exclude from their works these elements that characterize the writings of Ibn Masarra, Ibn al-ʿArabī and various Ismāʿīlī authors. A similar process occurred in the center of the Islamic world among scholars of the prominent Shiʿi faction known as *al-Ithnā ʿasharìyya* ("the Twelvers"): during the 10th century, and under the influence of a rational-theological trend, many Shiʿi traditions of an esoteric and mythic nature as well as those dealing with the science of letters

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Daftary, *Ismaili literature*; Daftary, *Mediaeval Isma'ili history*; Nasr, *Ismā'īlī contributions*; Halm, *Fatimids*.

7 On this perception, see, for example, Sviri, Self; Sviri, *Taste*, index, s.v. "*nafs*".

8 For a useful definition of 'theosophy' in this context, see Scholem, *Major trends* 206.

9 On cosmogony, cosmology and Neoplatonic philosophy, see chapter 1 of this study; on the science of letters, see chapter 2. On the epistle on letters attributed to Sahl al-Tustarī, the well-known Sufi master who lived in the 9th century, see Ebstein and Sviri, So-called *Risālat al-ḥurūf* and the discussion below on pp. 90–1 (chapter 2). Note that the writings of al-Ḥakīm al-Tirmidhī, a Sunni mystic who likewise lived in the 9th century (yet did not belong to the Sufi tradition), exhibit some of the unique traits found in the works of Ibn Masarra, Ibn al-ʿArabī and Ismāʿīlī authors; on him see below pp. 130–2 (chapter 3).

were suppressed and excluded from mainstream *Ithnā ʿAsharī* literature.[10] Ismāʿīlī authors, on the other hand, preserved precisely these kinds of traditions—many of which have their roots in the pre-Islamic heritage, namely, in Gnostic and Hermetic writings and in the Neoplatonic philosophy—elaborating on them and adapting them to their own Shiʿi-Ismāʿīlī worldview.[11] In my opinion, Ismāʿīlī conceptions—influenced, *inter alia*, by these traditions of the mystical, esoteric and occult kind, and originating in Fāṭimī circles or else in other Ismāʿīlī milieus—penetrated al-Andalus during the reign of the Fāṭimī Empire, which, as stressed above, ruled in the immediate vicinity of al-Andalus for nearly three centuries.[12]

Ismāʿīlīs, Fāṭimīs and Andalusīs

This study is dedicated to underscoring links and affinities between the writings of Ibn Masarra and Ibn al-ʿArabī, on the one hand, and classical Ismāʿīlī literature, on the other. It is therefore concerned primarily with the history of ideas—specifically, with analyzing various literary texts that reflect a certain type of mystical-philosophical thought in the Islamic tradition. However, a few words on the historical background and the geopolitical factors that facilitated religious contacts between the Ismāʿīlī and Andalusī worlds are in place.

The Fāṭimī-Ismāʿīlī impact on political-religious life in medieval al-Andalus was far greater than is commonly assumed. Following the establishment of the Fāṭimī Empire and throughout the 10th century, a military, political and religious struggle had ensued between the Shiʿi-Ismāʿīlī Fāṭimīs and the Sunni Umayyad regime in al-Andalus. The Fāṭimīs—especially during the reign of the fourth Fāṭimī Caliph-*imām*, al-Muʿizz li-Dīn Allāh (ruled in the years 341/953–365/975)—sought to overthrow the Umayyad regime, claiming that only the descendants of ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib and Fāṭima—in other words, members of the Prophet's family (*ahl al-bayt*)—had the Divine right to govern the Islamic community. Although

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[10] See below p. 122 n. 153.

[11] On Neoplatonism, see chapter 1 of this study. On the Shiʿi-Ismāʿīlī world and the Gnostic traditions, see Halm, *Islamische Gnosis*, especially pp. 7–26; Halm, *Kosmologie* 17 n. 75, pp. 115–27 and index, s.v. "Gnosis"; Corbin, From the Gnosis of antiquity 151–93; Corbin, *Creative imagination* 89; Corbin, *History* 21; Widengren, Gnostic technical language; Wasserstrom, Moving finger; and cf. Radtke, Iranian and Gnostic elements, especially pp. 528–9. On the Hermetic heritage and Ismāʿīlī literature, see below n. 94.

[12] See also Pines, Shīʿite terms 218 n. 289; Pines, La Longue récension 20.

the Fāṭimīs never gained any significant political control in the Iberian Peninsula, there is evidence that points to a Fāṭimī impact on al-Andalus in this context. The most well-known example occurred in 316/929, when ʿAbd al-Raḥmān III, ruler of Umayyad Spain (300/912–350/961), declared himself a *khalīfa* (Caliph), i.e., "God's vicegerent on earth" (*khalīfat allāh*) and "the Prophet's successor" as the ruler of the Islamic community (*khalīfat rasūl allāh*). This declaration was meant, *inter alia*, to challenge the Fāṭimī claim to power.[13]

It is conceivable that in the course of their political-religious struggle against the Fāṭimīs, the Andalusīs became exposed to Ismāʿīlī conceptions and perhaps even to Ismāʿilī writings. For instance, under the Caliph-*imām* al-Muʿizz, an exchange of letters took place between the Fāṭimī and Umayyad courts in which issues pertaining to political-religious legitimacy were fiercely debated.[14] Moreover, it is evident from the Arabic sources that during the 10th century, the Fāṭimīs attempted to instigate or support revolts in al-Andalus against the Umayyad regime.[15] Naturally, this Fāṭimī subversion entailed missionary activity (*daʿwa*) whereby Ismāʿīlī-Fāṭimī ideas were disseminated in al-Andalus and in other territories under Umayyad control.[16] The Fāṭimī attempts to influence the

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[13] On this declaration and on the Fāṭimī-Umayyad struggle, see Fierro, *ʿAbd al-Rahman III* 28, 53–60, 73–8, 114–5, 125–31; Halm, *Empire* 280–4. On the concept of *khalīfa* see the discussion below on pp. 175–9 and the references given there.

[14] See al-Qāḍī al-Nuʿmān, *al-Majālis* 164–96; see also Dachraoui, Al-Muʿizz; Krinis, *Idea* 28 n. 118 (in Hebrew). On the exchange of letters between the Fāṭimī Caliph-*imām* al-ʿAzīz (ruled between the years 365/975–386/996) and the Umayyad Caliph al-Ḥakam II (the successor of ʿAbd al-Raḥmān III, ruled 350/961–366/976), see Imamuddin, Commercial relations 13.

[15] Thus, ʿUmar b. Ḥafṣūn, who revolted against the Umayyads in al-Andalus during the years 267/880–303/916, announced his allegiance to ʿAbdallāh / ʿUbaydallāh al-Mahdī, the first Fāṭimī Caliph-*imām* (ruled 297/909–322/934). Al-Mahdī sent two Ismāʿīlī missionaries (*duʿāt*, singular: *dāʿī*) to Ibn Ḥafṣūn, one of the two being Abū ʿAbdallāh Jaʿfar b. Aḥmad b. al-Haytham from Qayrawān, author of *Kitāb al-munāẓarāt* ("The Book of Discussions"). See Ibn al-Haytham, *al-Munāẓarāt* 2 (the Arabic text), 32–3, 53, 63–4 and n. 2 (the introduction and translation into English); Tibi, ʿUmar b. Ḥafṣūn; Halm, *Empire* 280; Fierro, *ʿAbd al-Rahman III* 33, 45; Fierro, *La Heterodoxia* 121–3; Fierro, Plants 125–6 and the references given there. On Ibn al-Haytham see also Daftary, *Ismaili literature* 117. On the execution in Cordova of Abū l-Khayr at the beginning of al-Ḥakam II's reign, perhaps due to his pro-Shiʿi and pro-Fāṭimī sympathies, see Dachraoui, Tentative; Dachraoui, Al-Muʿizz 487a; cf. Fierro, *La Heterodoxia* 153–4.

[16] See, for example, Ibn al-Haytham, *al-Munāẓarāt* 2; Dachraoui, Tentative; see also Halm, *Fatimids* 57. On the presence of Ismāʿīlī *duʿāt* in al-Andalus during the 10th century and perhaps even earlier, towards the end of the 9th century, see Fierro, *ʿAbd al-Rahman III* 36, 75; see also Fierro, *La Heterodoxia* 93–4, 118–20; Fierro, Opposition 177–8; Asín Palacios, *Mystical philosophy* 21. For an attempt to chart the history of the Shiʿi presence in al-Andalus, see al-Makkī, al-Tashayyuʿ; and, concerning North-Africa, see also Madelung,

political-religious arena in al-Andalus continued into the 11th century, following the collapse of the Umayyad regime. During the first half of this century, relations were established between the Fāṭimīs and one of the independent local states in al-Andalus (known in Arabic as *mulūk al-ṭawāʾif*, "The Party Kings").[17] The Ismāʿīlī-Fāṭimī conception of political-religious authority as well as Shiʿi-Ismāʿīlī messianic notions seem to have influenced the Almohad Caliphate, which ruled in the western parts of North Africa and in al-Andalus during the 12th–13th centuries.[18]

The relationship between Fāṭimī Egypt and al-Andalus was not only hostile. There were commercial ties between the two (albeit not official ones), Egyptian merchants visiting al-Andalus and Andalusī merchants visiting Egypt.[19] It is plausible, therefore, that Andalusī scholars became exposed to Ismāʿīlī ideas and writings in various ways, not only in the context of the Fāṭimī-Umayyad struggle. A case in point is Neoplatonic philosophy and its profound influence on mystical-philosophical thought in al-Andalus.[20] Neoplatonic philosophy was widespread among the Ismāʿīlīs of North Africa from the 10th century onwards, and although many modern scholars stress that Neoplatonism was officially adopted by the Fāṭimī regime only in the reign of al-Muʿizz (in the third quarter of the 10th century), nevertheless, it seems that Neoplatonic writings had circulated among Ismāʿīlī *duʿāt* already in the early stages of Fāṭimī presence in North Africa—i.e., in the first decades of the 10th century.[21] These writings and the Ismāʿīlī elaborations on them must have attracted the intellectual attention of Andalusī scholars. Indeed, the latter may have become acquainted with Ismāʿīlī ideas and terminology, including those influenced by Neoplatonic thought, not only in al-Andalus and North Africa, but also in the Arabian peninsula and even in Iraq—in cities such as Mecca, Medina and Baṣra—in the course of their journeys to the east, whether for the sake of "acquiring knowledge" (*ṭalab al-ʿilm*), in order to perform the pilgrimage (*ḥajj*) or for the purpose of conducting trade.[22]

Some notes. On the role of the *daʿwa* in propagating Ismāʿīlī doctrines in North Africa in the course of the 10th century, see S. Hamdani, Dialectic. On the Ismāʿīlī *daʿwa* in general, see the references given below on p. 129 n. 21.

[17] See al-Makkī, Maẓhar; see also al-Makkī, al-Tashayyuʿ 126–45.

[18] See Fierro, Almohads.

[19] See Imamuddin, Commercial relations 13–4; see also Wasserstein, An unrecognized hoard.

[20] On this subject see chapter 1 of this study.

[21] See the references given below on p. 76 nn. 149–50.

[22] See also al-Makkī, al-Tashayyuʿ 103–11. On Andalusī scholars who visited and settled in Fāṭimī Egypt during the 12th century—albeit Mālikī ones, and mainly in Alexandria—see

For example, Ibn Masarra, on his way east to Mecca,[23] stayed in Qayrawān, where, until 308/921, the court of al-Mahdī, the first Fāṭimī Caliph-*imām*, was situated.[24] Qayrawān was also the town where Isaac Israeli resided. Israeli, an important Jewish Neoplatonic philosopher, served as al-Mahdī's personal physician; and, as we shall see in what follows,[25] both the Neoplatonism of Israeli and that of Ibn Masarra share a close affinity with Ismāʿīlī Neoplatonic thought. Thus, Qayrawān constituted for Ismāʿīlī *duʿāt*, Sunni Andalusī scholars and Jewish thinkers a convenient locale where they could exchange ideas and traditions in the fields of religion, philosophy and even the occult sciences such as the science of letters.[26]

The arrival in al-Andalus of *Rasā'il ikhwān al-ṣafā'* ("The Epistles of the Sincere Brethren") at a relatively early stage in the development of Andalusī mystical-philosophical thought, and the *Rasā'il*'s influence on both Muslim and Jewish authors, testify to the impact of the Shiʿi-Ismāʿīlī

Leiser, Muslims 137–49, 157–8. On the enormous size of the Fāṭimī library in Cairo, which must have attracted the attention of Andalusī scholars, see Halm, *Fatimids* 91–3; De Smet, Les Bibliothèques 491–2. According to a report quoted by Halm (*Fatimids* 92), this library also held works that dealt with astronomy and occult matters such as alchemy and *ruḥāniyyāt*, a term denoting "the spiritual powers [of the planets]", not "spiritual knowledge" (on this term, see the discussion below on p. 135 n. 42). For a report indicating the presence in Egypt of a work by Jābir b. Ḥayyān (on whom see below on pp. 30–2), see Ṣāʿid al-Andalusī, *Ṭabaqāt al-umam* 153. On Cairo as the center of Ismāʿīlī *daʿwa*, see Stern, Cairo. On the presence of Ismāʿīlī *duʿāt* in the *ḥajj* caravans, see Halm, *Fatimids* 15. As regards Baṣra, it was the city where Ikhwān al-Ṣafā' resided (on whom see below pp. 28–30); it is significant that Ibn Masarra's father visited there (see Stroumsa and Sviri, Beginnings 201).

[23] For Ibn Masarra's biography, see below pp. 8–9.

[24] See Stroumsa, Ibn Masarra 98, 101 n. 28, 110 n. 79; Stroumsa and Sviri, Beginnings 201–2. The exact dates of Ibn Masarra's voyage to the east remain unclear. According to the different reports in the Arabic sources, he may have travelled to the east anytime between 300/912 (or a little before that) and 317/929; see Lévi-Provençal, A Propos de l'ascète philosophe Ibn Masarra 81. On the Fāṭimī presence in Qayrawān see Daftary, *Ismāʿīlīs*, index, s.v. "Qayrawān". On Qayrawān as a center where discussions or debates (*munāẓarāt*) took place between Ismāʿīlī *duʿāt* and Mālikī scholars in the early days of the Fāṭimī Empire, see Hamdani, Dialectic. The Sunni-Mālikī school was predominant not only in Qayrawān (see ibid. 17) but in al-Andalus as well: it was officially adopted by the Umayyad Caliphs in Cordova and played a central role in their struggle against the Shiʿis-Ismāʿīlīs. See Fierro, *ʿAbd al-Rahman III* 127–31; Dachraoui, Tentative.

[25] See below pp. 73–4.

[26] For a report attesting to the existence of letter speculations among the Ismāʿīlīs in Qayrawān in the early days of the Fāṭimī Empire, see Ibn al-Haytham, *al-Munāẓarāt* 46 (the Arabic text). On the Jewish side, one may mention the name of Israeli's disciple, Dūnash b. Tamīm, who composed a commentary on the important Jewish mystical work entitled *Sefer yetsīrah* ("The Book of Creation"), famous for its speculations on letters; see Stroumsa, Ibn Masarra 101 n. 28, 108 n. 70, 110 nn. 78–9; Stroumsa and Sviri, Beginnings 214. On the centrality of letter speculations in the Ismāʿīlī tradition and in the writings of both Ibn Masarra and Ibn al-ʿArabī, see chapter 2 of this study.

tradition on intellectual life in medieval al-Andalus.[27] In addition, the appearance of the occult Andalusī work *Ghāyat al-ḥakīm* ("The Goal of the Sage")—a work influenced by the Shiʿi-Ismāʿīlī tradition and by the Epistles of Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ—bears further testimony to the Shiʿi-Ismāʿīlī influence on al-Andalus.[28]

To conclude this short discussion: there are various indications of the Fāṭimī or Shiʿi-Ismāʿīlī impact on the political and religious development of al-Andalus from the 10th century onwards. The entire western part of the Islamic world during this period—from al-Andalus to Egypt—as well as the Arabian Peninsula and southern Iraq were subject to Fāṭimī-Ismāʿīlī activity in various spheres. For many years and in various aspects, the Fāṭimīs-Ismāʿīlīs were the ones who determined the political-religious 'agenda' in these regions, posing a tremendous challenge for Sunni rulers and scholars. Awareness of this challenge is the key to understanding the true nature of the links and affinities between the writings of Ibn Masarra and Ibn al-ʿArabī and Ismāʿīlī literature. As this study will show, many concepts and terms which Ibn Masarra and Ibn al-ʿArabī employ in their works are found in Ismāʿīlī sources as well. This fact points to a common type of mystical-philosophical thought that evolved in North-Africa and al-Andalus during the 10th–12th centuries. Andalusī authors such as Ibn Masarra and Ibn al-ʿArabī and Ismāʿīlī scholars or *duʿāt* all contributed to the formation of this type of thought. However, this does not mean that Ibn Masarra and Ibn al-ʿArabī were Ismāʿīlīs; on the contrary: they creatively adapted various mystical-philosophical ideas, many of which were of a Shiʿi-Ismāʿīlī provenance, and successfully incorporated them into their own distinctive Sunni worldviews, thereby meeting the Shiʿi-Ismāʿīlī challenge referred to above.

From Ibn Masarra to Ibn al-ʿArabī

The similarities between the Shiʿi-Ismāʿīlī tradition and the thought of Ibn Masarra and Ibn al-ʿArabī did not escape the critical eyes of Sunni rulers and scholars. Muḥammad b. ʿAbdallāh Ibn Masarra al-Jabalī—the first Sunni mystic in al-Andalus known to us—was born in Cordova in the year 269/883. Little is known about his early life, except that he had

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[27] On these Epistles and their connection to the Shiʿi-Ismāʿīlī world, see the discussion below on pp. 28–30.

[28] See below pp. 31–2.

studied religious sciences under several Andalusī scholars, among them his father. After returning to al-Andalus from his travels to the east, where he had visited Qayrawān and Mecca, Ibn Masarra attracted a group of followers and retired with them to the mountainous area around Cordova (hence his nickname, *al-Jabalī*, "the mountain dweller").[29] Following his death in 319/931, during the 950s and 960s, the Umayyad authorities accused Ibn Masarra's followers of nonbelief and heresy and demanded their public repentance. There is at least one known case in which their books were publicly burnt. In addition, various scholars of the 10th–11th centuries, from the east as well as from al-Andalus, wrote refutations against Ibn Masarra, none of which, unfortunately, have survived.[30] It is reasonable that Ibn Masarra was suspected by his critics of being influenced by the Ismāʿīlī tradition, since he is branded in the Arabic sources as a *bāṭinī*, that is, as one who—like the Ismāʿīlīs—seeks to interpret the religious texts in an esoteric manner (*taʾwīl*), according to their inner, hidden meaning (*bāṭin*), rather than or in addition to their external, manifest aspect (*ẓāhir*).[31] Though it is clear that Ibn Masarra was by no means an Ismāʿīlī, a Fāṭimī or a Shiʿi sympathizer[32]—there is no mention in his writings of ʿAlī or his descendants, the *imāms*—there are definite similarities between his teachings and Ismāʿīlī thought. These similarities could not have gone unnoticed by the Umayyad rulers and conservative Mālikī scholars of al-Andalus, who sought to defend themselves in face of the Fāṭimī-Ismāʿīlī attack against their own political-religious legitimacy.[33] Such an atmosphere of political-religious tension and the ensuing censorship of works may account for the dearth of historical-literary evidence pointing to Ismāʿīlī writings in al-Andalus or to Andalusī works that were influenced by Shiʿi-Ismāʿīlī thought: various books might have been

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[29] On Ibn Masarra's life, see Asín Palacios, *Mystical philosophy* 30–42; Arnaldez, Ibn Masarra; Lévi-Provençal, A Propos de l'ascète philosophe Ibn Masarra; Addas, Andalusī mysticism 913–5; Stroumsa, Ibn Masarra 98; Stroumsa and Sviri, Beginnings 201–2; Fierro, *La Heterodoxia* 113–5; Ramón Guerrero and Garrido Clemente, Ibn Masarra, and the references given there; and see the wide-range of primary sources collected by Brown, *Muḥammad b. Masarra* 39–92. On the two works by Ibn Masarra that have survived, see below p. 14.

[30] See Asín Palacios, *Mystical philosophy* 98–101; Fierro, *La Heterodoxia* 132–40, 155–6, 166–8; Fierro, Bāṭinism in al-Andalus 98, 105 n. 104; Fierro, Opposition 178–84; Stroumsa and Sviri, Beginnings 202; and the references in the previous note.

[31] For a more detailed discussion of the term *bāṭinī* and the various opinions concerning Ibn Masarra's religious and intellectual affiliation, see below pp. 25–6.

[32] Contrary to Dozy's opinion; see the reference in Addas, Andalusī mysticism 912.

[33] On the anti-Shiʿi policy of the Umayyad regime in al-Andalus, see, for example, al-Makkī, al-Tashayyuʿ 116–26.

burnt while others hidden, or else the identity of their true authors was concealed.[34]

Muḥyī l-Dīn Abū ʿAbdallāh Muḥammad b. ʿAlī Ibn al-ʿArabī was likewise criticized, *inter alia*, of being influenced by the Shiʿi-Ismāʿīlī tradition. Born in Murcia in 560/1165, Ibn al-ʿArabī spent roughly the first half of his life in al-Andalus. Like Ibn Masarra, he too traveled to the east: he had visited several cities in North Africa before beginning his long journey to Cairo, Jerusalem, Mecca and to various other cities in Iraq, Anatolia and Syria. Unlike Ibn Masarra, however, Ibn al-ʿArabī never returned to his beloved homeland of al-Andalus, dying in Damascus in 638/1240. Both a prolific and a controversial writer, Ibn al-ʿArabī drew many followers as well as critics already during his own lifetime; his thought has been debated by Muslims from medieval times down to the present.[35]

As stated above, one reason for the negative attitude of various Sunni scholars towards Ibn al-ʿArabī were the correspondences that they perceived between his thought and Shiʿi-Ismāʿīlī doctrines. Ibn Khaldūn, the well-known North African historian of the 14th century, declares, for example, that Ibn al-ʿArabī should be counted among

> those Sufis of later generations who spoke of unveiling and of that which is beyond the senses. They have delved deeply into these matters, many of them believing in Divine incarnation (*ḥulūl*) and in unity (*waḥda*) as we have already indicated.

According to Ibn Khaldūn,

> their predecessors have mingled with the Ismāʿīlīs, the Shiʿis of later generations. These Ismāʿīlīs too have professed their belief in Divine incarnation and in the divinity of the *imām*s, a belief not known to their precursors. Each one of these two groups became imbued with the beliefs of the other group, their sayings became intermixed and their doctrines assimilated.

Ibn Khaldūn further states that the belief in a hierarchy of saints or "friends of God" (*awliyāʾ*)—a belief central to Islamic mysticism in both its

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[34] On this see Ebstein and Sviri, So-called *Risālat al-ḥurūf* 224–30 and n. 34; see also Ṣāʿid al-Andalusī, *Ṭabaqāt al-umam* 162–5; Asín Palacios, *Mystical philosophy* 100–1; Hamdani, Brethren of purity 75–6.

[35] On the life and works of Ibn al-ʿArabī, see Addas, *Quest*; Hirtenstein, *Unlimited mercifier*; Corbin, *Creative imagination* 38–77; Ateş, Ibn al-ʿArabī; on his works see also http://www.ibnarabisociety.org/works.html and http://www.ibnarabisociety.org/archive.html. For general introductions to his thought, see Chittick, *Sufi path*; Chittick, *Self-disclosure*; Corbin, *Creative imagination*; Affifi, *Mystical philosophy*. On the controversies surrounding his thought in past times and in the present, see Knysh, *Ibn ʿArabi*; Homerin, Ibn Arabi.

Sunni and Shiʿi branches, especially to the doctrine of Ibn al-ʿArabī[36]—is of a Shiʿi-Ismāʿīlī provenance. Ibn Khaldūn finally provides his own historical explanation of this phenomenon: it was after the emergence of the Ismāʿīliyya that the Sufis in Iraq began adopting various Shiʿi-Ismāʿīlī notions pertaining to the status of the *imām*s and to the hierarchy of the *awliyāʾ*.[37]

There is no doubt that this description by Ibn Khaldūn of the relationship between the Shiʿi-Ismāʿīlī tradition and Ibn al-ʿArabī's thought is inaccurate and distorted. With the exception of certain Shiʿi groups in the 8th and 9th centuries commonly referred to as *ghulāt* ("extremists"), and apart from the Druze religion, none of the central Shiʿi factions, including the Ismāʿīlīs, have ever professed the doctrine of *ḥulūl*.[38] Moreover, portraying such an original and profound thinker like Ibn al-ʿArabī as a plagiarist of Shiʿi-Ismāʿīlī ideas is clearly unfounded and biased.[39] Nevertheless, as this study will show, Ibn Khaldūn's basic intuition regarding the affinity between Shiʿi-Ismāʿīlī conceptions and Ibn al-ʿArabī's thought—particularly in such issues as the notion of hierarchy and the Divine roots of the *awliyāʾ*[40]—is indeed correct. Contrary to Ibn Khaldūn, it seems that the formative contacts between the Ismāʿīlī world and the mystical tradition to which Ibn al-ʿArabī belonged were not formed in Iraq among the Sufis but rather primarily in the western part of the Islamic world, in North Africa and al-Andalus.

The connection between Ibn Masarra, who lived in the 9th–10th century, and Ibn al-ʿArabī, who lived in the 12th–13th, is not obvious. Miguel Asín

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[36] See below pp. 125–43.

[37] See Ibn Khaldūn, *al-Muqaddima* iii, 1107–8 ("*Thumma anna hāʾulāʾi l-mutaʾakhkhirīna min al-mutaṣawwifa l-mutakallimīna fī l-kashf wa-fīmā warāʾ al-ḥiss tawaghghalū fī dhālika fa-dhahaba l-kathīr minhum ilā l-ḥulūl wa-l-waḥda kamā asharnā ilayhi* […] *wa-tabiʿahum ibn al-ʿarabī* […] *wa-kāna salafuhum mukhāliṭīna lil-ismāʿīlīyya l-mutaʾakhkhirīna min al-rāfiḍa l-dāʾinīna ayḍan bi-l-ḥulūl wa-ilāhiyyat al-aʾimma madhhaban lam yuʿraf li-awwalihim fa-ushriba kull wāḥid min al-farīqayni madhhab al-ākhar wa-khtalaṭa kalāmuhum wa-tashābahat ʿaqāʾiduhum*"), 1109; cf. the English translation and notes by Rosenthal, *Ibn Khaldûn* iii, 92–4. For a more detailed discussion of Ibn Khaldūn's views on Sufism in general and on Ibn al-ʿArabī's thought in particular, see Knysh, *Ibn ʿArabi* 184–97.

[38] See Daftary, *The Ismāʿīlīs*, index, s.v. "*ḥulūl*". On the *ghulāt* see Halm, *Kosmologie* 142–68; Halm, *Islamische Gnosis*; Moosa, *Extremist Shiites*; Modarressi, *Crisis* 19–51. On the problems related to the use of the term *ghulāt*, see Amir-Moezzi, *Divine guide* 129–30; Amir-Moezzi, Remarques 91.

[39] See especially Ibn Khaldūn, *al-Muqaddima* iii, 1108: "Observe the way in which these people have stolen this view from the Shiʿa and how they have professed it" ("*Fa-nẓur kayfa saraqat ṭibāʿ hāʾulāʾi l-qawm hādhā l-raʾy min al-rāfiḍa wa-dānū bihi*").

[40] See below pp. 143–56.

Palacios (1871–1944), the famous Spanish Orientalist, held that both Ibn Masarra and Ibn al-ʿArabī were influenced by the 'Pseudo-Empedoclean' tradition, that is, by Neoplatonic teachings attributed in various Arabic sources to Empedocles, the Greek philosopher who lived in the 5th century B.C. According to Asín Palacios's theory, Ibn Masarra was the first one to introduce the 'Pseudo-Empedoclean' tradition into Spain. This tradition was then passed on, via Ibn Masarra's disciples and followers in the 10th and 11th centuries, to 'the School of Almería' as Asín Palacios called it—i.e., the school comprised of the Andalusī mystics Abū l-ʿAbbās Aḥmad b. Muḥammad Ibn al-ʿArīf (died in 536/1141), Abū l-Ḥakam ʿAbd al-Salām b. ʿAbd al-Raḥmān Ibn Barrajān (died in 536/1141 as well), Abū Bakr Muḥammad b. al-Ḥusayn al-Mayūrqī (died 537/1142) and Abū l-Qāsim Aḥmad b. Ḥusayn Ibn Qasī (died 546/1151). The 'Pseudo-Empedoclean' teachings, according to Asín Palacios, finally reached Ibn al-ʿArabī.[41]

Over the years, Asín Palacios's theory—published in his 1914 *Abenmasarra y su escuela*, long before the works of Ibn Masarra were discovered—was severely criticized by different scholars. The latter doubted whether 'the School of Almería', linking Ibn Masarra to Ibn al-ʿArabī via such Andalusī mystics as Ibn al-ʿArīf, Ibn Barrajān and Ibn Qasī, had ever really existed. They further claimed that Ibn Masarra's writings contain no traces of any such 'Pseudo-Empedoclean' doctrines.[42] Indeed, it is by now clear that Asín Palacios was wrong in emphasizing the 'Pseudo-Empedoclean' element which does not appear at all in those works of Ibn Masarra that have survived. Nevertheless, and despite his various outdated—at times 'Orientalist' and racist—notions regarding Islam and Andalusī Arabic-Islamic history, Asín Palacios was correct in his basic understanding that Ibn Masarra had been influenced by Neoplatonic mystical-philosophy.[43] Ibn al-ʿArabī too was influenced by Neoplatonism. Furthermore, Ibn al-ʿArabī was familiar with various teachings attributed to Ibn Masarra, including ones dealing with cosmological issues and the science of letters,[44] although it is not clear whether he had access to Ibn Masarra's works, at least in the form in which they have come down

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[41] See Asín Palacios, *Mystical philosophy*. Concerning al-Mayūrqī, cf. Fierro, Opposition 184 n. 40.

[42] See Affifi, *Mystical philosophy* 174–83; Stern, Ibn Masarra; Addas, Andalusī mysticism; De Smet, *Empedocles Arabus*; Brown, *Muḥammad b. Masarra*; and cf. Tornero, A report 145–9.

[43] See also Stroumsa and Sviri, Beginnings 207–11.

[44] For the mention of Ibn Masarra in Ibn al-ʿArabī's writings, see the references to Affifi and Addas above in n. 42; see also Asín Palacios, *Mystical philosophy* 43 n. 1, 123

to us.[45] Ibn Masarra and Ibn al-ʿArabī can thus be viewed, respectively, as the starting point and the culmination of a distinct type of mystical-philosophical thought that evolved in al-Andalus during the 9th–12th/13th centuries. This thought was deeply influenced by Neoplatonism and has much in common with the Ismāʿīlī tradition, especially in its Neoplatonic form. To what degree, if at all, other Andalusī mystics such as Ibn Barrajān and Ibn Qasī belong to this type of mysticism demands further research, which, unfortunately, falls beyond the scope of this study. Such research would indeed enable us to re-chart the history of Islamic mysticism in al-Andalus.[46]

Religion, Politics, Science: Developments and Setbacks in Modern Scholarship

The contribution of the Ismāʿīlī tradition to the development of mystical-philosophical thought in medieval al-Andalus has been largely overlooked by scholars in the field of Islamic mysticism. This is rather surprising, since modern scholarship—especially during the second half of the 20th century—has witnessed important developments and significant progress in the study of both the Ismāʿīlī tradition and Andalusī Sunni mysticism. As regards Ismāʿīlī studies, for many years, Western scholars had learned about the Ismāʿīlī tradition primarily through the prism of Sunni sources, which were naturally biased and quite often anti-Ismāʿīlī. The exposure and publication of many Ismāʿīlī manuscripts as well as the pioneering work of several scholars (among them Ismāʿīlīs) have enabled researchers to reconstruct Ismāʿīlī history and thought in a more objective and well-balanced way.[47] The study of Andalusī Sunni mysticism has likewise

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n. 12. Concerning letter speculations, see, for example, Ibn al-ʿArabī, *Kitāb al-mīm* 7 (read ابن مسرة الجبلي instead of ابن مسرة الجبيلي); and see also Garrido, Science 57–61.

[45] See also Rosenthal, Ibn ʿArabī 19 n. 83. Note that in his writings, Ibn al-ʿArabī also refers to Ibn al-ʿArīf, Ibn Barrajān and Ibn Qasī; see the references to Asín Palacios, Affifi and Addas in the previous notes.

[46] This endeavor would require scholars to rethink prevalent conceptions regarding various typological issues. The common understanding of terms such as *taṣawwuf, zuhd* ("asceticism") and 'Islamic mysticism' as well as the relation between them will need to be reconsidered (see also the discussion below on pp. 21–7). For current surveys of the history of Islamic mysticism in al-Andalus, see Addas, Andalusī mysticism; Marín, Abū Saʿīd ibn al-Aʿrābī; Marín, Early development; Fierro, Bāṭinism in al-Andalus; Fierro, Polemic; Fierro, Opposition; González Costa and López Anguita, *Historia*.

[47] Much if not most of the progress in recent decades in the field of Ismāʿīlī studies is due to the activity of The Institute of Ismaili Studies. This Institute, which is situated in

seen great progress in the past few decades: the literature dedicated to the works and thought of Ibn al-ʿArabī—the greatest Muslim mystic of al-Andalus—is by now vast.[48] In addition, the discovery in the 1970s of a manuscript containing two of Ibn Masarra's works which had been presumed lost (*Risālat al-iʿtibār*, "The Epistle on Contemplation", and *Kitāb khawāṣṣ al-ḥurūf wa-ḥaqāʾiqihā wa-uṣūlihā*, "The Book on the Properties of Letters, their True Essences and Roots") and their publication have allowed scholars to analyze Ibn Masarra's thought and to chart the beginnings of Andalusī mysticism in a more careful and less speculative way than before.[49]

Despite these impressive developments, not one serious study has been devoted to the links and affinities between Ismāʿīlī thought and Sunni mysticism in al-Andalus. Though important references to this issue can be found in the works of authors like Henry Corbin, Abul Ela Affifi, Kāmil Muṣṭafā al-Shaybī and others, these references are mostly sporadic and often superficial.[50] This is quite odd, especially in view of the fact that

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London, was founded in 1977 by the fourth Āghā Khān (the current *imām* of the Nizārī Ismāʿīlīs); for its website, see http://www.iis.ac.uk/home.asp?l=en. On the history of Ismāʿīlī studies, see Daftary, *Ismāʿīlīs* 1–33; Daftary, *Ismaili literature* 84–103. For a bibliography of the relevant primary and secondary sources, see ibid. 104–439. For catalogues of Ismāʿīlī manuscripts see Poonawala, *Biobibliography*; Gacek, *Catalogue*; Cortese, *Arabic Ismaili manuscripts*; Cortese, *Ismaili and other Arabic manuscripts*.

48 Special mention should be made of The Muhyiddin Ibn ʿArabi Society (see http://www.ibnarabisociety.org/), whose activity contributes much to the study of Ibn al-ʿArabī's thought. For the history of modern research on Ibn al-ʿArabī, see the short surveys in Chodkiewicz, *Seal of the saints* 3–5; Chodkiewicz, Ibn ʿArabī 81–3; and see also the references above in n. 35.

49 The manuscript was discovered and published by the Egyptian scholar Muḥammad Kamāl Ibrāhīm Jaʿfar; see Jaʿfar, *Min qaḍāyā l-fikr al-islāmī* 310–44, 345–60; see also Tornero, A report 133–4. The numerous errors and misreadings in Jaʿfar's edition have been corrected by Garrido Clemente, Edición crítica de la *Risālat al-iʿtibār*; Garrido Clemente, Edición crítica del *K. Jawāṣṣ al-ḥurūf*.

50 The Egyptian scholar Affifi, who studied under the well-known Reynold A. Nicholson, calls attention in his 1939 *The Mystical Philosophy of Muhyid Din-Ibnul Arabi* to the similarities between Ibn al-ʿArabī's teachings and Ismāʿīlī doctrines, taking special notice of the influence of *Rasāʾil ikhwān al-ṣafāʾ* on Ibn al-ʿArabī; see Affifi, *Mystical philosophy*, index, s.v. "Ikhwānuṣ-Ṣafā" and "Ismāʿīlīs". Corbin, for his part, perceived the intellectual worlds of Ibn al-ʿArabī and the Ismāʿīlīs as being closely related from a phenomenological point of view. According to Corbin, links also existed between Ibn Masarra's thought and the Ismāʿīlī tradition; see, for example, Corbin, *Creative imagination* 9, 16, 24–6, 45, 48–9, 79, 112 and index, s.v. "ismailianism"; Corbin, *History* 3, 28, 76, 183, 224, 226 (these two works are based on studies published in the 1950s and 1960s); see also the references below in n. 53. The Iraqi author Al-Shaybī (Affifi's student), in his book written in the 1960s and entitled *al-Ṣila bayna l-taṣawwuf wa-l-tashayyuʿ* ("The Connection between Sufism and Shiʿism"), discussed the influence (as he saw it) of the Shiʿi-Ismāʿīlī tradition on Sufism in general and on Ibn al-ʿArabī's thought in particular; see al-Shaybī, *al-Ṣila* i,

already Ibn Khaldūn, centuries ago, had called attention to the correspondences between Ibn al-ʿArabī's thought and Shiʿi-Ismāʿīlī doctrines. Moreover, the Ismāʿīlī impact on Andalusī mystical-philosophical thought has been demonstrated, at least to a certain degree, in the field of Jewish studies. Various scholarly works on Jewish thought and *Kabbalah* have shown that Ismāʿīlī ideas and terminology influenced several medieval Jewish authors in Spain during the 11th–13th centuries, both those who were under direct influence of the Arabic culture (in the Muslim South) and those who lived in the Christian North. Ismāʿīlī traces can also be detected in Jewish mystical-philosophical works written in medieval Yemen, where the political-religious presence of a dominant Ismāʿīlī community continued for centuries.[51] One would expect scholars in the field of Islamic studies to have addressed this issue as well, namely, the relation between the Ismāʿīlī tradition and Sunni mysticism in al-Andalus, a region which for many years, as I have emphasized above, was so deeply preoccupied with the Fāṭimī-Ismāʿīlī challenge.

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especially pp. 220, 223, 225–9, 379–82, 405–8, 416–7, 448–50, 463, 478–506. Louis Massignon, basing himself on Asín Palacios's theory, likewise claimed an Ismāʿīlī influence on the Andalusī mystical school to which Ibn al-ʿArabī belonged; see Massignon, Sālimīya (where it is stated that Ibn Barrajān, Ibn Qasī and Ibn al-ʿArabī all belong to the same "semi-Ismāʿīlī school of Andalusian mystics of the sixth century". This sentence was omitted from the second edition of the *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, see Massignon [and Radtke], Sālimiyya). Note that Corbin too relied on Asín Palacios's theory; see Corbin, *Creative imagination* 25–6, 48–9; Corbin, *History* 221–6. However, it is important to emphasize that Asín Palacios himself did not relate directly to any Ismāʿīlī influence on Andalusī mysticism; see below n. 79. Several other scholars have also noted briefly the Ismāʿīlī, or else the Ikhwānian impact on Ibn al-ʿArabī; see al-Makkī, al-Tashayyuʿ 108–9, 132–3 (on Ibn Masarra); Hodgson, *Order of assassins* 181; Nyberg, *Kleinere Schriften* 145; Nasr, *An introduction* 36 n. 53; Addas, *Quest* 58–9. Finally, the article in Portuguese by De Macedo, Influência, published in a relatively unknown journal—though containing a few interesting observations—relies exclusively on secondary literature, including Asín Palacios's outdated study.

[51] See, for example, Pines, Shīʿite terms; Pines, La Longue récension 20; Pines, Nathanaël ben al-Fayyûmî; Pines, On the term Ruḥaniyot (in Hebrew); Krinis, *Idea* (in Hebrew); Krinis, Judeo-Arabic manuscripts (in Hebrew); Wilensky, 'First created being'; Ivry, Ismāʿīlī theology (and see also Ebstein, Secrecy 341–2); Idel, *Sefirot* 270–7 (in Hebrew); Idel, Ashkenazi esotericism 112 n. 135; Blumenthal, An example; Blumenthal, On the theories; Blumenthal, An illustration 297–9, 303–7; Kiener, Jewish Ismāʿīlism; Langermann, Cultural contacts 282–3; Hames, A seal 153–4, 157, 171–2; Vajda, Un Opuscle; Goldreich, Theology (in Hebrew). Goldreich (see pp. 148–9) stresses that the number of translations from Arabic into Hebrew among Spanish Jews was far greater than the number of Hebrew translations from the Latin, a fact that bears testimony to the Arabic influence on Jewish thought even in the Northern-Christian parts of Spain. On Jews and the Fāṭimī-Ismāʿīlī *daʿwa*, see Stern, Fāṭimid propaganda; Cohen and Somekh, In the court. On the influence of *Rasāʾil ikhwān al-ṣafāʾ* on Jewish authors in al-Andalus, see below n. 83.

It seems that many scholars nowadays who deal with Sunni mysticism in al-Andalus, and specifically with Ibn al-ʿArabī, are uninterested in or perhaps are unwilling to contemplate the question which I have posed at the beginning of this introduction: what were the historical factors behind the emergence in al-Andalus of the unique type of mysticism which is reflected in the writings of Ibn Masarra and Ibn al-ʿArabī? In order to fully understand why this setback has occurred in the study of Sunni Andalusī mysticism, one must appreciate the methodological difficulties and problems with which this field of research abounds. These can be divided into five main categories.

1. *The Ahistorical Approach*

This approach characterizes the work of Henry Corbin, one of the great scholars and pioneers in the field of Islamic mysticism and Shiʿi-Ismāʿīlī thought. Although Corbin seems to have been aware of the importance of the historical questions pertaining to the links between the Ismāʿīlī tradition and the writings of Ibn al-ʿArabī and Ibn Masarra,[52] he nevertheless deliberately refused to discuss this issue in a philological and historical manner. Corbin's method is phenomenological and anti-historical: he perceives the Ismāʿīlī tradition and Ibn al-ʿArabī's thought as intellectual phenomena that are detached from historical time and chronology. In Corbin's view, these phenomena coexist and interact in a purely intellectual dimension; the scholar should approach them directly, on their own premises, rather than impose on them external analytical categories such as 'history' and 'chronology'. Consequently, the Ismāʿīlī writings and the works of Ibn al-ʿArabī are not objects of scholarly research but are texts containing relevant messages for modern man. They serve Corbin as a platform for formulating his vision vis-à-vis Islam and the West—namely, that the esoteric tradition of Islam holds the salvific solution for the spiritual problems of modern western society—a secular, scientific and overly rationalistic society bereft of spirituality.

Corbin's approach is bluntly dichotomous: he draws a dividing line between the esoteric Muslim East (particularly as it developed in Iran)—heir to the pre-Islamic wisdom of Persia and to the Platonic and Neoplatonic mystical philosophy—and the exoteric Christian West, which is subordinate to the Aristotelian tradition and to its rationalistic-scientific

[52] See, for instance, Corbin, *Creative imagination* 25–6; Corbin, *History* 332; Corbin, *En Islam iranien* iii, 156 n. 5.

attitude. According to Corbin, the battle between those who are loyal to the esoteric truth and those who adhere solely to the exoteric aspect of reality and faith has always existed, in all three Abrahamic traditions. It is evident in the struggle that took place between the official Church in the first few centuries of the Christian era and the gnostic sects; between the Sunnis, who exclusively follow the *ẓāhir* (the exterior, manifest aspect of religion), and the Shiʿis, who acknowledge the *bāṭin* (its inner, hidden dimension); between "Sufi theosophists" such as Ibn al-ʿArabī and their rivals, the legal scholars and the dogmatic theologians; between modern, scientific secularism and the sublime, esoteric-mystical tendencies of man; and between modern scholars who adhere to a historicist and linear-horizontal view of reality and those few who, in contradistinction, are aware of the meta-historical and vertical aspect of human life. In most cases, the orthodox establishment suppresses those who are loyal to the esoteric truth, since the latter endanger the exoteric and dogmatic worldview of the former. Corbin thus perceives the various esoteric traditions in Islam and in other religions as partaking in the same ahistorical reality; mystics from different places and generations—be they Shiʿi-Ismāʿīlī authors or Sunni theosophists such as Ibn al-ʿArabī, Christian gnostics or Protestant mystics—all are members of the same esoteric family, of the same meta-historical community responsible for safeguarding the esoteric truth.

In the context of Islamic history, Corbin viewed the Shiʿi tradition as the source of Islamic esotericism, as its most perfect and truthful expression and as the vehicle by which it was preserved throughout the generations. In Corbin's own words, the Shiʿa is "the sanctuary of Islamic esotericism" (le sanctuaire de l'ésotérisme de l'Islam). From this perspective, Corbin had no doubt that the Sufis in general and Ibn al-ʿArabī in particular were deeply influenced by the Shiʿi tradition. The influence of Ibn al-ʿArabī on later Shiʿi theosophists was merely 'a return to the source' of Shiʿi esotericism, which initially had influenced Ibn al-ʿArabī.[53]

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[53] For these various conceptions see, for example, Corbin, *Creative imagination* 3–101; Corbin, L'Initiation ismaélienne; Corbin, *En Islam iranien* i, 61, 219–84 (see especially p. 250 n. 234), ii, 359, iii, 153–7, 197–9, iv, 14; Corbin, *History* xv–xvi, 1–14, 28–30; and the various articles in Amir-Moezzi, Jambet, and Lory, *Henry Corbin*. For the expression "le sanctuaire de l'ésotérisme de l'Islam" see Corbin, *En Islam iranien* i, xiv. See also Ruspoli, Ibn ʿArabî, where a similar pro-Shiʿi attitude as that of Corbin is expressed. For a balanced appraisal of Corbin's work, see Adams, Hermeneutics; Landolt, Henry Corbin; De Smet, Henry Corbin; and see also Amir-Moezzi, *Divine guide* 211 n. 527. For a more negative view, see Meyer, Tendenzen; Wasserstrom, *Religion*; Algar, Study; and, in relation to Ibn al-ʿArabī, see Chodkiewicz, Ibn ʿArabī; Brown, A counter-history. Note that Corbin's critics

A similar ahistorical view of the relations between Shiʿi thought and Sunni mysticism is held by Seyyed Hossein Nasr, who was a close associate of Corbin. Although Nasr does refer to the historical aspect of these relations, nevertheless, he perceives the Shiʿi tradition and Sunni mysticism as different expressions of the same esoteric-gnostic dimension of Islam, a dimension which is inseparable from the eternal truth and essence of this religion. In contradistinction to Corbin, Nasr does not view the Shiʿa as the exclusive source of Islamic esotericism; rather, the Shiʿi tradition and Sunni mysticism constitute two branches of the same tree, deriving from common roots—the Quran and the Prophetic tradition, the *sunna*.[54]

2. *Traditionalism*

A number of eminent scholars in the field of Islamic mysticism, including ones who specialize in Ibn al-ʿArabī's thought, are connected in one way or the other, directly or indirectly, to the modern spiritual movement known as 'traditionalism'. This movement was founded and developed by various 20th century European thinkers—many of whom converted to Islam—such as René Guénon (1886–1951), Frithjof Schuon (1907–1998), Michel Vâlsan (1907–1974) and others. Nasr (see above) likewise belongs to the traditionalist movement, and has contributed greatly to the propagation of its ideas in Iran and in other areas of both the Islamic and Western worlds.

The basic principles of traditionalism are reminiscent of Corbin's thought, although the latter did not belong to this movement: 1) The modern Western world—secular, materialistic and obsessed with science—has gone astray and is in the midst of a deep crisis, suffering from moral corruption and spiritual deterioration; 2) There is one spiritual-philosophical truth, universal and esoteric, that is shared by all religions and which derives from their common, primordial source ('Perennialism'); 3) Modern Western culture has lost this truth, whereas the eastern traditions, such as Sufism, have preserved it; hence, the salvation of the West depends upon its adoption of these traditions. Indeed, Sufism plays a central role in the history of traditionalism: Guénon himself became a devout

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also emphasize his pro-Iranian or 'Iranocentric' stance; see the discussion and references in ibid. 49–51.

[54] See Nasr, Shiʿism. On the relationship between Nasr and Corbin, see Corbin, *History* xvii–xviii; Algar, Study 90; Wasserstrom, *Religion* 150–1; Sedgwick, *Against the modern world* 156–7.

Sufi, and Schuon as well as Vâlsan founded Sufi "brotherhoods" or "paths" (*ṭarīqa*s) in Europe which attracted many believers. Furthermore, Vâlsan and several of his followers have dedicated much of their intellectual and spiritual energies to studying the works of Ibn al-ʿArabī.[55]

Like Corbin, traditionalist scholars do not view the historical-philological method of investigation—that is, focusing on the historical context from which a certain author (such as Ibn al-ʿArabī) emerged—as the best or even as the correct means of understanding Islamic mystical texts.[56] Unlike Corbin, though, the traditionalists' approach is basically a religious one. Certainly, there is no essential contradiction between a scholar's religious background and his research; the academic fields of Christian, Islamic and Jewish studies (to name just the Abrahamic traditions) abound with scholars of various religious persuasions, their religious experience often serving to enhance and deepen their scientific understanding. However, religiosity can affect the willingness of a scholar to acknowledge historical contexts and admit 'foreign' influences on his subject of research.[57]

3. *The Problematic Relations between the Shiʿa and the Sunna*

The religious-political struggle between the Shiʿi and the Sunni worlds is one of the most prominent features of Islamic history, in medieval as well as in modern times. This struggle, often erroneously described as being merely 'political' (see the next paragraph), is just as relevant today as it was in the past.[58] It seems that the academic world cannot escape its effects, and various scholars who have dealt with the issues discussed here exhibit either a pro-Shiʿi or a pro-Sunni bias. Both approaches are mutually antagonistic: whereas pro-Shiʿi scholars portray Sunni mysticism—at least

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[55] See Sedgwick, *Against the modern world*. For scholars in the field of Islamic mysticism who are connected to the traditionalist movement, particularly those who study Ibn al-ʿArabī's thought, see ibid. 134–5, 157, 250. For examples of traditionalist ideas in scholarly writings, see Chittick, *Imaginal worlds* 34, 43; Chittick, *Science*; and on these matters see also Brown, Andalusī mysticism 95–6.

[56] The pertinent words of Brown (A counter-history 62) are worth quoting here: "The uniqueness of any great thinker, the singular qualities of their contributions, are utterly opaque to us if the light of history is put out".

[57] See, for example, Chodkiewicz, *Seal of the saints* 64–5 and the references to this study given below in n. 59; see also Taji-Farouki, *Beshara*, especially pp. 177–83. On the danger of blurring the lines between religious faith and scientific inquiry, see also Radtke, Between projection and suppression.

[58] On the Shiʿi-Sunni struggle in recent years, see Bar, Sunnis; Hasson, Les Šīʿites; Hasson, Contemporary polemics; Elad-Altman, Sunni-Shi'a conversion controversy; Litvak, More harmful; Yegnes, *Sunna* (in Hebrew); Rabi, 'Shīʿī crescent' (in Hebrew).

in its formative period, up to Ibn al-ʿArabī's time—as being overwhelmingly influenced by the Shiʿi tradition and hence as essentially unoriginal, pro-Sunni scholars are unwilling to acknowledge the important contribution of the Shiʿi-Ismāʿīlī tradition to the development of Islamic esotericism and mysticism, in its formative as well as in later periods.[59] Pro-Shiʿi authors are at times reluctant to admit that in certain issues, both the Shiʿi tradition and Sunni mysticism derive from common roots—pre-Islamic religions, the Quran and *Ḥadīth*, etc.[60]

4. *The Political Interpretation of the Shiʿi Phenomenon*

Many scholars view the emergence and development of the Shiʿa as essentially a political phenomenon with various social, economic and religious implications. From this perspective, the distinctively Shiʿi doctrines formulated over the centuries are perceived as intellectual-literary attempts to legitimize the political claim of the *imām*s to power. This emphasis on the political aspect of the Shiʿa is perhaps mainly due to modern political events in the Shiʿi world—namely, the emergence of modern Shiʿi fundamentalism and the 1979 Iranian revolution. At any rate, the focus on the political dimension of Shiʿi history has led many to ignore the important contribution of the Shiʿi and Ismāʿīlī traditions to the development of Islamic esotericism and mysticism. In my view, the political, social, economic, esoteric and mystical aspects of the Shiʿa are not mutually exclusive but rather should all be understood as different expressions of the same phenomenon.[61]

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[59] Examples of a pro-Shiʿi bias: see the references to the works of Corbin and al-Shaybī above in nn. 50, 53. An example of the opposing attitude: see Chodkiewicz, *Seal of the saints* 5, 21–2, 41 n. 46, 49 n. 4, 98 n. 4, 137, 145 n. 47.

[60] See, for example, the discussion below concerning the hierarchy of the *awliyāʾ* on p. 132. For studies that deal with the early contacts between the Shiʿi tradition and Sunni mysticism in their formative periods (the 8th–9th centuries), see, in addition to the works by al-Shaybī (*al-Ṣila* i) and Nasr (Shiʿism), Sviri, Early mystical schools, especially pp. 457–62; Amir-Moezzi, *Divine guide* 130; and the references given below on p. 121 n. 151.

[61] For examples of scholars who emphasize the political, social and economic aspects of Shiʿi history, see Wellhausen, *Religio-political factions* 93–167; Modarressi, *Crisis*; Modarressi, Early debates; and more. For examples of scholars who emphasize the esoteric-mystical aspect of the Shiʿa, see the references to the works by Amir-Moezzi and Corbin in the bibliography to this study; and see especially Amir-Moezzi, *Divine guide* 3; see also Jafri, *Origins*, especially pp. 1–26.

5. *Lack of Communication between Scholars in the Fields of Jewish Mysticism and Islamic Mysticism*

As I have stated above, various studies by scholars in the areas of Jewish thought and *Kabbalah* have demonstrated the existence of Ismāʿīlī traces in medieval Jewish writings, in al-Andalus and elsewhere. Awareness of these studies would have perhaps triggered a similar interest among scholars in the field of Islamic thought in the relationship between the Ismāʿīlī tradition and Sunni Andalusī mysticism.[62] Moreover, a familiarity with Jewish North-African or Andalusī figures such as Isaac Israeli, Solomon Ibn Gabirol, Judah Ha-Levi and others would have caused scholars in the field of Islamic studies to realize that from the 10th century onwards, a unique type of mystical-philosophical thought evolved in al-Andalus that differs in a fundamental way from the Islamic mystical tradition known as 'Sufism'. This inevitably leads me to a discussion of typology.[63]

Terminology and Typology

Scholarship in the field of Islamic mysticism abounds with terminological and typological difficulties. Some of these are common to the study of other religions as well, for example, the difficulties arising from the very term 'mysticism'. Others are unique to the study of Islam—for instance, the difficulties related to the term 'Sufi' or to the relationship between the Shiʿi tradition and Sunni mysticism.

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[62] Unfortunately, many scholars in the field of Jewish studies are likewise unaware of the Ismāʿīlī impact on Jewish mystical-philosophical thought. In general, though many in this field acknowledge the Arabic-Islamic influence on medieval Jewish theology and philosophy, they fail to consider the possible influence of Arabic-Islamic thought on the development of medieval Jewish mysticism. See also Anidjar, Jewish mysticism; Anidjar, "*Our place in al-Andalus*"; and cf. Idel, Orienting. Nevertheless, special mention should be made of Fenton's studies which are indeed dedicated to the connections between Islamic and Jewish mysticism in medieval times; see the references to his works in the bibliography to this study. Note however that Fenton's work focuses mainly on Islamic and Jewish Sufism; on the difference between Sufism and other mystical trends in the world of medieval Islam see below pp. 23–6.

[63] On the need for an integrative and interdisciplinary approach to the study of Andalusī philosophy and mysticism, see Brown, Andalusī mysticism; Stroumsa, Al-Andalus; Sviri, Jewish-Muslim mystical encounters; and see also Liebes, Shlomo Pines 21–2 (in Hebrew). For studies that demonstrate the great potential of such an approach, see Wasserstrom, Sefer yeṣira (cf. Liebes, *Ars poetica* 232–7, in Hebrew); McGaha, Sefer ha-bahir (cf. Sviri, Jewish-Muslim mystical encounters); Hames, A seal; Ariel, Eastern dawn; Berman, Judaeo-Arabic thought. On possible links between Islamic and Christian mysticism in al-Andalus, see Asín Palacios, *Mystical philosophy* 131–45.

Let me begin with the term 'mysticism', which has been a target of much criticism in the last quarter of the 20th century. Various critics of this term have shown that as an analytical category in religious studies, 'mysticism' is a modern invention and a product of Western-Christian culture. According to these critics, 'mysticism' is too general a term, too universal and rigid, ignoring as it does differences between cultures and religions as well as historical, political, economic, social and gender-related contexts.[64] Consequently, several scholars point to the problems that arise when attempting to apply the term 'mysticism' to non-Christian and non-Western phenomena such as Jewish *Kabbalah* or Islamic Sufism.[65] A comprehensive discussion of this issue is obviously beyond the scope of this study; however, I wish to make it clear to the reader why and in what sense do I use the term 'mysticism' in this book.

Despite the obvious Western-Christian roots of this term, and notwithstanding many erroneous paradigms found in modern studies dedicated to Islamic mysticism, until now, and in my opinion, no serious alternative has been proposed for the term 'mysticism'. Renouncing this term does not seem to advance scholarship (at least in the field of Islamic studies) but rather often leads to theoretical, unproductive and at times political deliberations. 'Mysticism' is a useful, albeit fluid and relative category of research; it is best perceived as a kind of a coordinate that allows scholars to situate certain religious movements in the general 'map' of any given religion.[66] These movements, defined by the scholar as 'mystical', are unique in the nature of the religious experience advocated by them, in the intensity of this experience and in the practical-spiritual path leading to it. Often, this religious experience is described as an unusual or direct encounter with Divinity—as union with It, as an awareness of Its presence and so forth. However, there is no one definition of the mystical experience, and its character or nature may differ from one religious movement to the other. Be that as it may, this experience is perceived by the mystics themselves as the most important element in their religion, as the heart of the tradition to which they belong; hence, this experience becomes the main object of their hermeneutical activity and textual-literary creativity.[67]

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[64] For this criticism and for the history of the term 'mysticism', see, for example, Katz, *Mysticism*; Bouyer, Mysticism; McGinn, *Presence of God* 263–343 (appendix); Schmidt, Making.

[65] See, for instance, Safi, Bargaining, especially pp. 260–4, 280–1; Chittick, *Faith* 168–73; Huss, Formation, especially pp. 142–7; Huss, Mystification (in Hebrew).

[66] See also Sviri, Sufism.

[67] See also McGinn, *Presence of God* xiii–xx.

As to the term 'Sufi', it is crucial to understand that the medieval world of Islam comprised of diverse mystical movements that cannot all be subsumed under the title of *taṣawwuf* or "Sufism". In medieval Arabic sources, the term *ṣufī* may denote two different types, depending on the context in which it appears: it may refer to a member of the mystical movement that had begun crystallizing towards the end of the 9th century, mainly under the guidance and leadership of the famous Baghdadi mystic al-Junayd (died 298/910); or else it may simply signify 'ascetic'. The latter derives from what seems to be the original etymological meaning of the word *ṣūfī*—someone who wears wool (*ṣūf*) as a sign of his asceticism, but not necessarily as an expression of any mystical inclination.[68] In other words, not every individual who is called a *ṣūfī* in medieval Arabic texts was indeed a mystic, nor did every mystic belong necessarily to the mystical movement which had been termed, from the 9th century onwards, *taṣawwuf*.[69]

Thanks to the studies of Henry Corbin, Mohammad Ali Amir-Moezzi[70] and others, it has become clear (for those who are willing to admit it) that the Shi'a—especially in its Twelver and Ismā'īlī forms—should be considered as an esoteric and mystical tradition in Islam. For the purposes of

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[68] See Sviri, Sufism; Sviri, Reconsidering (in Hebrew). Cf. Chittick, *Faith* 165, 175–6: the author, who does not approve of the use of the term 'mysticism', defines *a priori* all mystical phenomena in Islam, including philosophical mysticism and Shi'i mysticism, as 'Sufi'.

[69] Note that according to various scholars, Ikhwān al-Ṣafā' (on whom see below pp. 28–30) were influenced by the Sufi mystical movement. Some scholars also claim that Jābir b. Ḥayyān (see below pp. 30–2) belonged to this movement. See, for example, Nasr, *An introduction* 25 n. 1, 31 n. 32, 33, 36; Netton, *Muslim Neoplatonists* 49–50, 52; Lory, *Alchimie* 53, 125 n. 240; see also Corbin, *En Islam iranien* i, 92; Chittick, *Faith* 175. These scholars rely mainly on sporadic occurrences of the terms *taṣawwuf* and *ṣūfī*/*ṣūfiyya* in the Epistles of the Ikhwān, and on the fact that Jābir is referred to in Arabic biographical and bibliographical sources as *al-ṣūfī* (see Kraus, *Jābir ibn Ḥayyān* i, xl–xli, xliii, lx n. 3). However, the terms *taṣawwuf* and *ṣūfī*/*ṣūfiyya* in these contexts should be translated as "asceticism" and "ascetic/s" (respectively) rather than "mysticism" and "mystic/s". See, for example, Ikhwān al-ṣafā', *Rasā'il* iii, 8: "[…] asceticism, austerity and abstinence according to the Christian way […] (*wa-l-taṣawwuf wa-l-tazahhud wa-l-tarahhub 'alā l-minhaj al-masīḥī*)"; see also Ikhwān al-ṣafā', *Rasā'il* i, 21, 267, ii, 376, iii, 15; cf. the translations in Baffioni, "Friends of God" 18 n. 5, 7; De Callataÿ, Classification 63; Nasr, *An introduction* 31; and see also El-Bizri, *Epistles* 6–7; Poonawala, Why do we need 47. Though the Ikhwān seem to have been familiar with the mystical movement known as Sufism (see their *Rasā'il* i, 240: *ahl al-wajd min al-mutaṣawwifa*), they did not belong to it. As this study will demonstrate, their mystical conceptions are clearly Neoplatonic, not Sufi. Regarding Jābir, to the best of my knowledge, Ṣā'id al-Andalusī (5th/11th century) was the first author to link him to the Sufi mystical movement; see his *Ṭabaqāt al-umam* 152–3. However, Ṣā'id's statement in this passage is both historically and typologically erroneous; on this see Ebstein and Sviri, So-called *Risālat al-ḥurūf* 228–30.

[70] See the references to their works in the bibliography to this study.

this study, I will present the following five mystical types that, in my view, played a central role in the development of medieval Islamic mysticism:

1. Sufism. As mentioned above, this mystical movement emphasizes the internal psychological-spiritual dimension of man and his ethical conduct. Man's goal, according to the Sufi perception, is to gain proximity to God and perhaps even unite with Him.
2. Shiʿi-Ismāʿīlī mysticism, whose focal point is 'the friend of God', the *imām*. The latter is perceived as an indispensable mediator connecting the believer to God and leading him to a personal-mystical encounter with Divinity.
3. Philosophical mysticism or mystical philosophy, in which philosophy—especially in its Neoplatonic form—plays a central role.[71] In this type of mysticism, the philosophical-intellectual activity does not function merely as an *ex post facto* rationalistic understanding of the 'pure' mystical experience, but rather forms in itself an integral and central element in this experience: it designates and dictates in advance the nature of the mystical experience, its content, the path leading to it and the interpretation of it once it has occurred.
4. Ismāʿīlī Neoplatonism, which combines Shiʿi-Ismāʿīlī mysticism with Neoplatonic mystical philosophy. This Ismāʿīlī type of mysticism is further characterized by a theosophical discourse and by a predilection for the occult sciences, such as the science of letters.[72]
5. Sunni Andalusī mysticism, as reflected in the writings of Ibn Masarra and Ibn al-ʿArabī. This type is similar to Ismāʿīlī Neoplatonism of the mystical-philosophical kind, albeit without its Shiʿi doctrines pertaining to the *imām*s, descendants of ʿAlī and Fāṭima. Ibn al-ʿArabī (but not

[71] This type of mysticism is likewise referred to in scholarship as 'intellectual/intellectualist mysticism'. For a discussion of this type, particularly in its Andalusī context, see Sviri, Jewish-Muslim mystical encounters; Lobel, *A Sufi-Jewish dialogue* 21–34; Blumenthal, An illustration; Blumenthal, Philosophic mysticism (and cf. Kasher, Mysticism, in Hebrew); Blumenthal, An example 171–3; Freudenthal, Philosophical mysticism (in Hebrew); cf. Berman, Judaeo-Arabic thought 34, 42; Fakhry, Three varieties; and see the discussion of the term 'Philosophical Sufism' in Akasoy, What is Philosophical Sufism; Akasoy, Andalusi exceptionalism. Note also the title of Affifi's monograph on Ibn al-ʿArabī, *The Mystical Philosophy of Muhyid Din-Ibnul Arabi*; cf. Rosenthal, Ibn ʿArabī 5–6. On the Neoplatonic mystical experience, see Armstrong, *Architecture* 44–7; Bussanich, Plotinus's metaphysics 55–7 and the references given there; and see also below p. 222 n. 125.

[72] On theosophy, see above n. 8.

Ibn Masarra) combined this type of mysticism with his Sufi heritage,[73] thus creating an original synthesis which, in turn, influenced later mystics in both the Sunni and Shiʿi worlds.[74]

Naturally, this short list does not cover the full range of mystical authors and movements in the medieval world of Islam. In addition, the mystical types which I have enumerated above contain within them numerous 'sub-types' or divisions.[75] Finally, the dividing lines between these different types are by no means dichotomous: as the case of Ibn al-ʿArabī shows, in various periods in Islamic history and in different regions of the Islamic world, contacts and overlappings were formed between these movements, often creating new mystical types and variations. The typology presented here demands further elaboration, yet it suffices to show the complexity and wealth of medieval Islamic mysticism.

The mistaken assumption that 'Islamic mysticism' equals 'Sufism' and vice versa, in addition to the disregard for the role of philosophy in general and Neoplatonism in particular in the development of Andalusī mysticism, are the main factors behind the great confusion surrounding the figure of Ibn Masarra. Both medieval Arabic authors and modern scholars have portrayed Ibn Masarra in diverging ways: he has been described as a *bāṭinī* (i.e., one who adheres to the inner, hidden dimension of the Quran and *sharīʿa* rather than or in addition to their exterior, manifest aspect), as a Muʿtazilī, as a philosopher influenced by the 'Pseudo-Empedoclean' tradition and more.[76] Various scholars still view Ibn Masarra as a 'Sufi', though his works, displaying clear traits of Neoplatonic mystical philosophy, have long been published.[77] The terms *ṣūfī* or *taṣawwuf* do not appear

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[73] The influence of the Sufi tradition on Ibn al-ʿArabī as well as his indebtedness to various Sufi teachers has been referred to in many studies; see, for example, Addas, Andalusī mysticism 909–11, 927–9; see also Rosenthal, Ibn ʿArabī 1–3; and the works of Chittick and Chodkiewicz cited in the bibliography.

[74] On this influence and on the relationship in later generations between Sunni mysticism, Ibn al-ʿArabī's thought and the Shiʿi-Ismāʿīlī tradition, see al-Shaybī, *al-Ṣila* ii; Corbin, *En Islam iranien* iii–iv; Corbin, *History* 283–366, and note especially pp. 332–5; Nasr, Shiʿism 114–9; Daftary, *Ismāʿīlīs* 410–442; Daftary, Ismaili-Sufi relations; and the references given below on p. 122 n. 153.

[75] See, for instance, Lobel, *A Sufi-Jewish dialogue* 21–34.

[76] See the discussions and references in Affifi, *Mystical philosophy* 179; Addas, Andalusī mysticism 912, 915–6; Stroumsa, Ibn Masarra 99–100; Stroumsa and Sviri, Beginnings 202–3. On 'Pseudo-Empedocles' see above, pp. 11–13.

[77] See, for instance, Stern, Ibn Masarra 325, 327 (Stern, however, did not have the writings of Ibn Masarra at his disposal); Gril, Science 140, 146; Addas, Andalusī mysticism 911, 917–8; Garrido, Science 56; Fierro, Opposition 178.

in Ibn Masarra's works and there is nothing distinctly Sufi in them; rather, the mystical conceptions in Ibn Masarra's thought and the terminology he employs point to a type of Neoplatonic mystical philosophy that is found in Ismāʿīlī literature as well, especially (but not only) in *Rasāʾil ikhwān al-ṣafāʾ*.[78] This correspondence between Ibn Masarra's teachings and the Ismāʿīlī tradition seems to be the reason why Ibn Masarra was branded a *bāṭinī*.[79]

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[78] This will be demonstrated throughout this study; see also Stroumsa and Sviri, Beginnings 207–11, 214–5; Tornero, A report 134–5, 148–9. On the 9th century Sufi master Sahl al-Tustarī, who is mentioned in Ibn Masarra's writings, see below pp. 90–1.

[79] See above pp. 8–10; and see also Stroumsa, Ibn Masarra 101; Stroumsa and Sviri, Beginnings 209 n. 35, 210; Fierro, *ʿAbd al-Rahman III* 126–9, 131. On *bāṭinī*/*bāṭiniyya* as a derogatory term designating "Ismāʿīlī/Ismāʿīliyya", see Daftary, *Ismāʿīlīs*, index, s.v. "Bāṭinīs"; Hodgson, Bāṭiniyya; Pines, Shīʿite terms 240; Saleh, Use of Bāṭinī; Stern, Ismāʿīlīs 289–90. Several scholars hold that the term *bāṭinī* means "Sufi" or "philosopher" as well; see, for example, Fierro, Bāṭinism in al-Andalus 106; Fierro, Plants 135; and cf. De Smet, Au delà de l'apparent 200, 202. It seems that the source of this confusion is Asín Palacios's theory: he employed the term *bāṭinī* in the sense of "Sufi", "Shiʿi", "Ismāʿīlī", "Fāṭimī", "philosopher" or a Neoplatonic/Pseudo-Empedoclean thinker—in short, to designate any "independent" or "free thinker", contrary to the dogmatic Muslim orthodoxy, which was (in Asín Palacios's view), by nature, anti-mystical and anti-philosophical. See, for example, Asín Palacios, *Mystical philosophy* 5–6, 20, 22, 23 n. 20, 35, 46, 74, 91, 98, 113–4. However, although the pair *bāṭin-ẓāhir* plays an important role in the Sufi tradition (see below n. 81), to the best of my knowledge, no Sufi has ever been called a *bāṭinī*, at least not in the periods relevant to the discussion here. The title of the anti-Ismāʿīlī treatise by the great Sufi author al-Ghazālī (died in 505/1111)—*Faḍāʾiḥ al-bāṭiniyya* ("The Disgraces of the *bāṭinīs*")—bears testimony to this fact (on this treatise, see Daftary, *Ismaili literature* 177; Mitha, *Al-Ghazālī*). Note also the titles of the following anti-Ismāʿīlī works written by Zaydī authors: *Min kashf asrār al-bāṭiniyya* ("Revealing the Secrets of the *bāṭinīs*"), by Abū l-Qāsim Ismāʿīl b. Aḥmad al-Bustī (died in 420/1029; see Daftary, *Ismaili literature* 175); and *Qawāʿid ʿaqāʾid āl Muḥammad fī l-radd ʿalā l-bāṭiniyya* ("The Principles of Faith of Muḥammad's Family in Refuting the *bāṭinīs*"), by Muḥammad b. al-Ḥasan al-Daylamī (died after 707/1308; see Daftary, *Ismaili literature* 176). Furthermore, the Andalusī scholar Abū ʿUmar al-Ṭalamankī (died in 428/1036 or in 429/1037) is said to have written a refutation of Ibn Masarra's thought, entitled (according to Fierro, Bāṭinism in al-Andalus 103; Fierro, Polemic 247 n. 103; Fierro, Opposition 179–80) *al-Radd ʿalā l-bāṭiniyya* ("Refutation of the *bāṭinīs*"). Finally, one should note that whereas the term *ʿilm al-bāṭin* designates in Sufi parlance "the knowledge of [man's] inner realm"—i.e., knowledge of his psychological-spiritual dimension—in the Shiʿi-Ismāʿīlī tradition, this term signifies "the knowledge of the hidden realm", i.e., knowledge of esoteric and occult matters; see Ṣāʿid al-Andalusī, *Ṭabaqāt al-umam* 152–3 (and cf. Ebstein and Sviri, So-called *Risālat al-ḥurūf* 227 n. 38, 228–30); Goldreich, An unknown treatise 176–7 (in Hebrew); Radtke, Between projection and suppression 72. The esoteric-occult meaning of the term *ʿilm al-bāṭin* is exactly the one found in Ibn Masarra's works; the expressions he employs *ahl al-ʿilm bi-l-kalām al-bāṭinī* and *ahl al-ʿilm bi-l-bāṭin* ("those who possess knowledge of the hidden realm", a positive epithet, contrary to *bāṭinī*s) appear in a clearly Neoplatonic context and bear resemblance to similar passages from Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ's Epistles. On this see below pp. 86, 103.

Finally, a few words on the term 'esotericism' are in place. In the context employed in this book, this term has three main aspects:

1. The Ontological Aspect: According to the authors dealt with in this study, reality is divided into a hidden realm (*bāṭin*) and a manifest realm (*ẓāhir*). The former pertains to the Divine and upper, spiritual worlds, whereas the latter pertains to the lower, corporeal worlds.
2. The Epistemological-Hermeneutical Aspect: In correspondence with the dual division of reality, religion too is perceived as divided into a hidden, inner and a manifest, external aspect. The knowledge of the hidden meaning of the Quran and the *sharīʿa* and the esoteric interpretation (*taʾwīl*) meant to uncover it are possessed solely by the religious elite—by 'the friends of God', i.e., the prophets and the *imām*s in the Ismāʿīlī tradition, and the mystics in the writings of Ibn Masarra and Ibn al-ʿArabī. This elite is described as "the unique ones" (*al-khāṣṣa, al-khawāṣṣ*), as opposed to "the common people" (*al-ʿāmma, al-ʿawāmm*) who are only exposed to the exoteric aspect of religion. The elite are obliged to keep their Divine, esoteric knowledge secret: it is strictly forbidden for them to disclose it to the common Muslims.[80]
3. The Occult Aspect: The hidden knowledge, possessed exclusively by the religious elite, includes, *inter alia*, knowledge of the occult sciences such as the science of letters.

Several of these elements—mainly those related to the epistemological-hermeneutical aspect—are also shared by the Twelver Shiʿa and by the Sufi tradition as it evolved prior to Ibn al-ʿArabī's time.[81] However, the combination of all three aspects enumerated above, in the framework of a theosophical, Neoplatonic-inspired system of thought, is unique to the Ismāʿīlī tradition and to the teachings of Ibn Masarra and Ibn al-ʿArabī.

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[80] See Ebstein, Secrecy.

[81] On *ẓāhir-bāṭin* and *taʾwīl* in the Shiʿi-Ismāʿīlī and Sufi traditions, see De Smet, Au delà de l'apparent; Amir-Moezzi, Du Droit à la théologie. The assumption of several scholars (see al-Shaybī, *al-Ṣila* i, 410–1, 436–54; Corbin, *Creative imagination*, index, s.v. "*taʾwīl*"; and De Smet, Au delà de l'apparent 200–1, 213) that the distinction between *ẓāhir* and *bāṭin* is originally a Shiʿi one and that it later influenced Sufism, while plausible, demands further investigation.

Some Notes on the Sources

The current study deals mainly with medieval texts written in Arabic, the language in which Ibn Masarra and Ibn al-ʿArabī wrote and in which the bulk of classical Ismāʿīlī literature (i.e., the literature produced from the beginning of the 10th century to the end of the Fāṭimī period) was composed. The Ismāʿīlī corpus as well as the oeuvre of Ibn al-ʿArabī are vast; moreover, numerous Ismāʿīlī works and various treatises written by *al-Shaykh al-akbar* are still in manuscript form. Naturally, this study can only focus on but a few of these writings. However, since these four writings do reflect basic conceptions and terminology that are characteristic of Ismāʿīlī doctrines and of Ibn al-ʿArabī's thought in general, they will suffice to demonstrate the links and affinities between these diverse intellectual worlds.

I have previously mentioned the name Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ, "The Sincere Brethren" (or, in their full name, *Ikhwān al-ṣafāʾ wa-khullān al-wafāʾ*, "The Sincere Brethren and the Loyal Friends"), and their Epistles, *Rasāʾil ikhwān al-ṣafāʾ*. As we shall see throughout this study, these Epistles are essential for understanding important aspects of both Ibn Masarra's and Ibn al-ʿArabī's thought.[82] In fact, the Brethren's Epistles exercised much influence on Andalusī mystical-philosophical thought in general, in the Muslim as well as in the Jewish milieus.[83]

There is no consensus in modern scholarship regarding the exact date of the Epistles' composition, the precise identity of their authors and their religious affiliation. Paul Casanova, for example, who was one of the first scholars to notice the Ismāʿīlī 'coloring' of the Epistles, held that they were written between 418/1027 and 427/1035. However, most scholars

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[82] I will refer in the concluding chapter of this study to the chronological problems related to the connection between the Ikhwān and Ibn Masarra.

[83] For the Ikhwānian influence on Abū Muḥammad ʿAbdallāh b. Muḥammad Ibn al-Sīd al-Baṭalyawsī (444/1052–521/1127), see Eliyahu, *Ibn al-Sīd al-Baṭalyawsī* 66, 67–9 (in Hebrew). Ibn al-ʿArabī mentions al-Baṭalyawsī in his writings (see Addas, *Quest* 108; Eliyahu, *Ibn al-Sīd al-Baṭalyawsī* 163–5), but, as will become evident throughout this study, he seems to have read the Epistles of the Ikhwān himself (cf. Rosenthal, Ibn ʿArabī 19 n. 83). For a possible Ikhwānian influence on Abū Bakr Muḥammad b. ʿAbd al-Malik Ibn Ṭufayl (died in 581/1185), see Kruk, Neoplatonists 77. For the Ikhwānian influence on various Jewish Andalusī authors of the 11th century and later, see Zonta, Influence; Ali-de-Unzaga, *Use* 49–54; Krinis, *Idea* 30–1; Krinis, Judeo-Arabic manuscripts (in Hebrew); Sviri, Jewish-Muslim mystical encounters; Schlanger, *La Philosophie* 94–7; Lobel, *A Sufi-Jewish dialogue* 2–3; Fenton, Arabic and Hebrew versions 257.

assume that the Epistles were composed during the second half of the 10th century, and some point to an even earlier date, sometime in the first half of the 10th century. For instance, Abbas Hamdani is of the opinion that the Epistles were produced sometime between 260/873 and 297/909 by Ismāʿīlī 'propagandists' who sought to prepare the ground ideologically for the rise of the Fāṭimī Empire. Maribel Fierro offers the year 325/936 as a *terminus ante quem*; while Yves Marquet, who presumes that various sections of the *Rasāʾil* were written from a pro-Fāṭimī standpoint, views the writing and editing of the Epistles as a long process which continued from the beginning of the 10th century until approximately the third quarter of that century. In contrast, Samuel Stern and Wilferd Madelung believe that the Epistles were composed around the middle of the 10th century and that their authors belonged to an Ismāʿīlī faction that did not support the Fāṭimīs, such as the Qarāmiṭa.[84] There are other opinions in scholarship as well, including those which deny the Ismāʿīlī identity of the Ikhwān.[85] However, it seems that nowadays, most scholars agree that Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ were indeed affiliated, in one way or the other, with the Ismāʿīlī milieu, and that they composed their Epistles in the city of Baṣra in southern Iraq sometime during the 10th century.[86]

An important issue that has much to bear on the dating of the Ikhwān's Epistles is the question of their arrival in al-Andalus. The prevalent view among scholars is that *Rasāʾil ikhwān al-ṣafāʾ* were introduced into al-Andalus during the first half of the 11th century by the Andalusī astronomer and mathematician Abū l-Qāsim Maslama b. Aḥmad al-Majrīṭī (died around 398/1007) or by his disciple, Abū l-Ḥakam ʿUmar b. ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Kirmānī (died circa 468/1075). However, Fierro

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[84] On them see Daftary, *Ismāʿīlīs*, index, s.v. "Qarmaṭīs"; Stern, Ismāʿīlīs and Qarmaṭians; Stern, *Studies*, index, s.v. "Qarmaṭians"; Madelung, Fatimids.

[85] See, for example, Netton, *Muslim Neoplatonists* 95–104, 107; Netton, Brotherhood; and my discussion of Netton's view in chapter 4 of this study, p. 180.

[86] For the studies of the scholars mentioned above see the references throughout Daftary, *Ismaili literature*; for introductions to the thought of the Ikhwān and surveys of the various opinions in modern scholarship concerning their identity and the dating of their Epistles, see the discussions and references in Daftary, Forward; Daftary, *Ismāʿīlīs* 234–7; El-Bizri, *Epistles* 1–10; Hamdani, Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ, especially pp. 189–90; Stern, Authorship; Stern, New information; Nasr, *An introduction* 25–37, 275; Marquet, Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ; Netton, *Muslim Neoplatonists* 1–4, 96–7; Kraemer, *Humanism* 175–8; Fierro, Bāṭinism in al-Andalus 106–9; Carusi, Le Traité alchimique 500–2 and n. 46; and see also Halm, *Kosmologie* 37, 138. On the famous report by Abū Ḥayyān al-Tawḥīdī concerning the identity of the Ikhwān, see below p. 238 n. 25. For a bibliography of Ikhwān-related studies, see also the references in Daftary, *Ismaili literature* 166; and the list at the end of El-Bizri, *Epistles*.

argues—quite convincingly, in my opinion—that Abū l-Qāsim Maslama b. Qāsim al-Qurṭubī, who died in the year 353/964, should be credited with the introduction of the Epistles in al-Andalus. This would imply that the Epistles arrived in the Andalusī scene, and for that matter had been composed, much earlier than most scholars suppose.[87]

An earlier date for the composition of *Rasā'il ikhwān al-ṣafā'*, or at least of certain parts of them, would also bring this work closer in time to the period in which the corpus attributed to Jābir b. Ḥayyān, the alleged disciple of the well-known Shiʿi *imām* Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq (died in 148/765), had been compiled. This corpus, comprising numerous works by various authors, deals mainly with alchemy and other occult matters, and was most likely produced during the second half of the 9th century and the first half of the 10th. It contains both Neoplatonic and Shiʿi elements—some of which are Ismāʿīlī or, otherwise, are common also to the Ismāʿīlī tradition.[88] Contrary to the renowned scholar Paul Kraus, who held that the Jābirian works had been composed by Ismāʿīlī authors, Pierre Lory is of the opinion that the Jābirian corpus cannot be defined as 'Ismāʿīlī' *per se*, but rather should be viewed as originating in *ghulāt* circles, i.e., among 'extreme' Shiʿi groups of the 8th and 9th centuries from whom, in many respects, the Ismāʿīlī tradition also derived.[89] Whatever the case may be, it is clear that the Jābirian corpus is ultimately a product of the Shiʿi-Ismāʿīlī milieu. Furthermore, there are many similarities between this corpus and the Epistles of Ikhwān al-Ṣafā': both the Ikhwān and various Jābirian authors adopted Neoplatonic philosophy and sought to combine it with Shiʿi-Ismāʿīlī doctrines; both the Ikhwān and the Jābirian

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[87] See Fierro, Bāṭinism in al-Andalus 106–8; see also Hamdani, Brethren of purity 78; Hamdani, Ikhwān al-Ṣafā'; Ebstein and Sviri, So-called *Risālat al-ḥurūf* 224–30. On al-Qurṭubī see below pp. 31–2. For scholars who claim that the Epistles arrived in al-Andalus during the first half of the 11th century, see, in addition to the references by Fierro and Hamdani, the discussions and references in Stern, New information 173 n. 42; Poonawala, Why do we need 34–5; Hamdani, Abū Ḥayyān al-Tawḥīdī 351 n. 32; Carusi, Le Traité alchimique 495 n. 15.

[88] On the Jābirian corpus in general and its dating, see Kraus, *Jābir ibn Ḥayyān* i, xvii–lxv; Kraus, Dschābir ibn Ḥajjān; Kraus, Djābir b. Ḥayyān; and see also Daftary, *Ismāʿīlīs* 84–5 and the references given there. On the Neoplatonic philosophy in this corpus, see Kraus, *Jābir ibn Ḥayyān* ii, 135–85. For other, more conservative and traditional views concerning the dating of this corpus and the figure of Jābir see Lory, *Alchimie* 12–22 and especially the references there in n. 15.

[89] See Lory, *Alchimie* 47–125, 199 n. 2; and cf. Marquet, *La Philosophie* 96–129, 132–4. On the term *ghulāt* see above n. 38. On the links between the Ismāʿīlī world and the *ghulāt*, cf. Halm, *Kosmologie* 142, 149, 165–8.

authors were deeply influenced by the Hermetic tradition and dealt with occult matters such as astrology, magic and alchemy, adapting these also to Shiʿi-Ismāʿīlī notions; and both interpreted these notions in a humanistic, universalist and ecumenical way.[90] The combination of these various traits is unique to the Epistles of the Ikhwān and to the Jābirian corpus, and is found neither in the Shiʿi-Twelver tradition nor in the Sunni mystical tradition as they evolved in the 9th and 10th centuries. It is plausible, therefore, that these two corpora—despite the many, essential differences between them—are the product of the same Shiʿi-Ismāʿīlī milieu which was active at the end of the 9th and beginning of the 10th centuries.

Moreover, the Jābirian corpus likewise exercised considerable influence on the mystical-philosophical thought in al-Andalus. Its influence is evident, for example, in the writings of Ibn al-ʿArabī and perhaps to a certain extent in the thought of Ibn Masarra.[91] The Jābirian impact is also reflected in the occult treatises *Ghāyat al-ḥakīm* ("The Goal of the Sage", known in the Latin West as *Picatrix*) and *Rutbat al-ḥakīm* ("The Degree of the Sage"), composed, according to Fierro, by Abū l-Qāsim Maslama b. Qāsim al-Qurṭubī, an Andalusī scholar who specialized, *inter alia*, in magic.[92] The author of the *Ghāya* and the *Rutba*, which deal with magic, astrology and alchemy, derived from both the Ikhwān's Epistles and the

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[90] On the many similarities between the Epistles of the Ikhwān and the Jābirian corpus, see especially Marquet, *La Philosophie*; see also Kraus, *Jābir ibn Ḥayyān* i, lxiv; Nasr, *An introduction* 37–8. For astrological, magical and alchemical motifs in the Ikhwān's Epistles, see mainly their last Epistle (*Rasāʾil* iv, 283–463); and see also Marquet, *La Philosophie* 15–66. On the humanistic, universalist and ecumenical attitude of the Ikhwān, see below pp. 179–88.

[91] See the discussion below on pp. 90–101.

[92] See Fierro, Bāṭinism in al-Andalus; Fierro, Plants 127–31; and see also Hamdani, Brethren of purity, especially pp. 75–6. On *Ghāyat al-ḥakīm* and *Rutbat al-ḥakīm*, see Ritter and Plessner, *Picatrix* xx–lxxv; Pingree, Some of the sources; Carusi, Le Traité alchimique. The identity of the author of the *Ghāya* and *Rutba* is a vexed question in modern research, and has been discussed by many scholars; it is closely related to the issue of the date at which the Ikhwān's Epistles arrived in al-Andalus (see above pp. 29–30). Most scholars reject the traditional attribution of the *Ghāya* and *Rutba* to Abū l-Qāsim Maslama b. Aḥmad al-Majrīṭī (on whom see above p. 29), yet nonetheless date their composition to the first half of the 11th century. However, it seems to me that the literary-philological evidence adduced by Fierro in her article (quoted at the beginning of this note) as well as her historical arguments prove beyond reasonable doubt that Abū l-Qāsim Maslama b. Qāsim al-Qurṭubī—who, contrary to al-Majrīṭī, is known to have dealt with the occult sciences—is the true author of the *Ghāya* and *Rutba*, and, in addition, is probably the one who introduced the Epistles of the Ikhwān into al-Andalus. See also Carusi, Le Traité alchimique.

Jābirian corpus.[93] Hence, the last two corpora can be viewed as a literary bridge connecting medieval al-Andalus with the Hellenistic heritage—more specifically, with Neoplatonic mystical philosophy, Hermetic literature and the Pythagorean/Neopythagorean tradition.[94]

[93] See Kraus, *Jābir ibn Ḥayyān* i, xli n. 7; Kraus, *Jābir ibn Ḥayyān* ii, 63 n. 6, 104 n. 12, 106 n. 8, 173 n. 1, 193 n. 11; Ritter and Plessner, *Picatrix* xx–lxxv; Plessner, Hermes 57–8; Pingree, Some of the sources 2–3; Fierro, Bāṭinism in al-Andalus 94, 96, 106; Hamdani, Brethren of purity 73, 75; Poonawala, Why do we need 35. For the *Ghāya*'s influence on al-Baṭalyawsī, see Eliyahu, *Ibn al-Sīd al-Baṭalyawsī* 75–6; and for its influence on Jewish authors, see the references in Ebstein and Sviri, So-called *Risālat al-ḥurūf* 225 n. 29.

[94] On the Pythagorean/Neopythagorean tradition, Hermetic literature and the Jābirian corpus, see Kraus, *Jābir ibn Ḥayyān* ii, 270–303, and index, s.v. "hermétisme", "néopythagorisme", "pythagoricien" and "pythagorisme". On Hermetic literature and the Ismāʿīlī tradition, including the Ikhwān's Epistles, see Marquet, Sabéens; Corbin, Sabian temple; Van Bladel, *Arabic Hermes* 168–71, 179–81, 183, 222, 227, 237; Green, *City of the moon God* 139–41, 171, 181–90, 207–14; Peters, Hermes 196–8; Netton, *Muslim Neoplatonists* 50–2; Nasr, *An introduction* 33–40; El-Bizri, *Epistles* 10; Joosse, An example 289–93; Widengren, Gnostic technical language, especially pp. 182, 193–4, 200–3. On the Ikhwān and the Pythagorean/Neopythagorean tradition, see below p. 194 n. 26. On Hermetic literature and Islam in general, see also Affifi, Influence; Plessner, Hermes; Pingree, Ṣābians.

CHAPTER ONE

THE WORD OF GOD AND THE DIVINE WILL

One of the most important issues dealt with in both Ismāʿīlī literature and the works of Ibn Masarra and Ibn al-ʿArabī is the word of God and the Divine will. Recurring in their writings on this issue are a number of Arabic terms which are all interrelated: *kalima* ("word"), *kun* (the Divine fiat: "be!"), *amr* ("command" or "affair") and *irāda* ("will"). In order to understand the various meanings of these terms, I will first review their Biblical and Hellenistic roots and then analyze the Quranic context in which they appear. I will then examine the role these terms played in the Arabic Neoplatonic tradition and conclude by elaborating on their Ismāʿīlī and Andalusī usage.

The Hellenistic Heritage and the Quranic Background

The discussions of *kalima, kun, amr* and *irāda* in Ismāʿīlī literature and in the writings of Ibn Masarra and Ibn al-ʿArabī focus mainly on the cosmogonic and cosmological aspects of these terms, on the one hand, and on their religious significance for man and society, on the other. Similar discussions of the Divine parole may be found in the pre-Islamic religious and philosophical heritage. In the Old Testament, the term *davar*—close in meaning to the Arabic *kalima*—signifies God's creative power; His revelation to the prophets; the Divine law; and God's commands and decrees as they are reflected in nature and in human history. In the Hellenistic period, the biblical *davar* was linked with the Greek term *logos*, which signifies, *inter alia*, "word", "speech", "reason" and "thought". Thus, in the Septuagint, *davar* was translated as *logos*, while in the Aramaic translations of the Bible it was rendered *memra*.[1] In Greek philosophy, the term *logos* was granted a cosmic dimension: according to Heraclitus (6th–5th centuries B.C.), *logos* is a universal and rational principle governing the world and unifying its many contradictory phenomena; it is also the human

[1] See O'Shaughnessy, *Koranic concept* 7–11 (= revised edition, 1–4); Procksch, Word of God. On *memra* see also the discussion and references in Boyarin, Gospel of the *Memra*, especially pp. 252–61.

thought and its expression in words. Similarly, the Stoics viewed *logos* as an all-pervading, universal and rational principle. According to the Stoic conception, the *logoi* (plural of *logos*) exist in nature as physical, forming principles. Man's *logos*, i.e., human rationality and its expression in words, is part of the universal *logos*, and from an ethical point of view, man is required to live according to the *logos*.[2] A most important writer in this respect is Philo of Alexandria (1st century B.C.–1st century A.D.), whose writings reflect the Hellenistic merging of Biblical-Judaic concepts with Greek notions and philosophy. In Philo's thought, the *logos* functions as an intermediary entity between the transcendental God and the created world. The ontological status of this entity is complex: on the one hand, it functions as God's eternal mind, whose object of thought is the world of ideas on which the physical universe is modeled; on the other hand, in the act of creation, the *logos* stands apart from God, as a hypostasis containing these ideas. Unlike man, the *logos* is not created; unlike God, it is not uncreated. In addition to its capacity as a creative Divine force, the *logos* is identified by Philo with the Divine wisdom and the Mosaic religious law. Similarly to the Stoic conception, Philo too views the *logos* as an immanent principle active within nature: the powers of the *logos* reside in nature in a nonphysical mode, preserving the forms of things and guaranteeing the continuation of their species. Like the philosophy of Heraclitus and the Stoics, Philo too stresses the unifying power of the *logos*.[3] All these different conceptions have contributed to the formation of the Christian *logos*. This term, which plays a central role in Christianity, appears already in the New Testament, where it signifies, among other things, a primordial Divine entity responsible for the creation of the world. This entity was manifested in human history as a human being, i.e., Jesus.[4] Much thought and discussion within the Christian tradition has been devoted to this concept of *logos*.[5]

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[2] See Scolnicov, *A short history* 77–85 (in Hebrew); Long, Heraclitus and Stoicism 44–53; and the references below in n. 5.

[3] See Wolfson, *Philo* i, 200–94, 325–47; see also the discussions and references in Winston, *Logos*; Boyarin, Gospel of the *Memra* 249–52.

[4] See *John*, 1:1–18; for scholarly discussions of this passage see the references in Boyarin, Gospel of the *Memra*, especially pp. 262–84.

[5] See O'Shaughnessy, *Koranic concept* 11–5 (= 4–6 in the revised edition); Pépin, Logos. On the *logos* in Greek philosophy, Hellenistic thought and Christianity, see also the discussion and references in *Theological dictionary of the New Testament*, s.v. "λέγω" / paragraphs A, B, D, iv 69–91, 100–36 (various authors); Kerferd, Logos; Stead, Logos; and see also Amir-Moezzi, *Le Coran silencieux* 215–6.

The various religious and philosophical contexts discussed above are all important for the understanding of the Quranic *kalima* ("word"), the Arabic equivalent of the terms *davar, memra* and *logos*. In the Quran, the term *kalima* designates (among other meanings) God's revelation to the prophets; His commands and decrees; and Jesus, who is considered to be Allāh's *kalima*.[6] To the same semantic field as *kalima* belongs *kun* ("be!"), the Divine creative fiat, which appears in several Quranic verses, for instance in Q 16:40: "If We will something, all We say to it is 'be!' and it is" (*innamā qawlunā li-shay' idhā aradnāhu an naqūla lahu kun fa-yakūnu*). *Kun* is thus linked to the Divine will (*irāda*) or to God's decree, as is evident from this verse.[7] The term *kun*, like *kalima*, is associated with the figure of Jesus, who is described as having been created from the Divine *kun*.[8]

The Divine will, which is revealed in God's word and creative fiat, is also reflected in the term *amr* ("command" or "affair"): "If He wills something, His command is nothing other than saying to it 'be!' and it is" (Q 36:82, *innamā amruhu idhā ārāda shay'an an yaqūla lahu kun fa-yakūnu*).[9] It seems that in several Quranic verses, *amr* stands for a kind of an intermediary entity between God and creation which, like the angels, carries out God's will and executes His decrees.[10] The Divine *amr* is responsible for directing and preserving creation; it ensures the spiritual-religious guidance of mankind in the hands of the prophets. *Amr* or *amr allāh* ("Allāh's *amr*") functions as a tool for bestowing Divine favors on the righteous and for punishing evildoers.[11]

Another Quranic term related to *kalima, kun* and *amr* is *rūḥ* ("spirit"), also rooted in the pre-Islamic religious heritage.[12] Contrary to the Islamic tradition that evolved after the Quran, in the Quran itself, the term *rūḥ* does not relate to the psychological or spiritual aspects of man, but rather to his vitality which derives ultimately from the Divine creative spirit blown into Adam.[13] In addition to this meaning and in parallel to *amr,*

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[6] See O'Shaughnessy, *Koranic concept* 16–22 (= 6–12 in the revised edition).

[7] See also Q 40:68.

[8] See Q 2:116–7; 3:47, 59; 19:35; see also O'Shaughnessy, *Koranic concept* 23–59 (= 12–46 in the revised edition).

[9] On *amr* as a Divine command, see also Q 18:50 and more.

[10] See Q 19:64; 32:5; 41:12; 65:12; 97:1–5.

[11] See Q 8:42, 44; 9:48; 10:3; 11:43, 73; 21:73; 30:25; 45:17–8; 54:50; 65:3–4. On the various meanings of *amr*, see also al-Rāzī, *al-Zīna* ii, 129; al-Kirmānī, *al-Muḍī'a* 44–5, 58; Baljon, 'Amr of God'; O'Shaughnessy, *Development* 33–42; Makārim, 'Al-amr al-ilāhī' 3–7; Peña, El término 202–4, 211–5.

[12] See O'Shaughnessy, *Development*.

[13] See, for example, Q 15:29; 32:9.

rūḥ is conceived by the Quran as a sort of an angelic being mediating between God and creation, and it is, at times, described as emanating from the Divine *amr*. *Rūḥ, rūḥ al-qudus* ("the holy spirit") or *al-rūḥ al-amīn* ("the faithful spirit") functions as either the source or means of prophetic revelation, and it seems that in this sense it is identical with the angel Gabriel.[14] Like *kalima* and *kun*, the term *rūḥ al-qudus* is also associated with Jesus: it designates the means by which Jesus received the Divine support (*taʾyīd*), or the outcome of this support.[15] Jesus is described not only as God's *kalima* but also as His spirit: he was born as a result of God blowing His Spirit into Mary.[16]

To summarize: the Quranic terms *kalima, kun, amr* and *rūḥ* belong to the same semantic field pertaining to God's word and His Divine will. The Quran employs these terms in both a cosmogonic-cosmological context (creation and the management of the universe) and a human-religious context (prophetic revelation; Divine guidance of mankind; supporting and rewarding the righteous and punishing evildoers). The Biblical and the Hellenistic heritage, especially Christian conceptions of Jesus and the *logos*, have all helped to shape the Quranic terms relating to God's word and Divine will. The Quran, in turn, influenced the discussions of these terms in Ismāʿīlī literature and in the writings of Ibn Masarra and Ibn al-ʿArabī. However, unlike the Quran and various post-Quranic Islamic traditions, the Ismāʿīlī authors, as well as Ibn Masarra and Ibn al-ʿArabī, gave the Quranic terms *kalima, kun, amr* and *rūḥ* an unusual interpretation in the framework of Neoplatonic philosophy.

The Arabic Neoplatonic Tradition

The Arabic Neoplatonic tradition is by and large based on the famous work entitled *Uthūlūjiyā arisṭāṭālīs*, the *Theology of Aristotle*. This work, erroneously ascribed to Aristotle, is actually a 9th century Arabic translation and adaptation of parts of the *Enneads* by Plotinus, the famous Greek Neoplatonic philosopher of the 3rd century A.D.[17] Since the 16th

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[14] See Q 16:102 (cf. 2:97); 26:192–5; 42:52; 70:4; 97:4.

[15] See Q 2:87, 253; 5:110. On *rūḥ* and Jesus, see also Q 19:17; and O'Shaughnessy, *Development* 51–68. For *taʾyīd* in the Quran as designating the Divine support granted to Muḥammad and his followers, see Q 3:13; 8:26, 62; 9:40; 58:22.

[16] See Q 4:171; 21:91.

[17] The *Theology of Aristotle* includes translations and adaptations of parts of Enneads 4, 5 and 6; on the *Theology*, see Adamson, *Arabic Plotinus*.

century, the *Theology of Aristotle* was known in the Western Christian world only in its longer version, following its translation from Arabic to Latin during that century. There are significant discrepancies between the shorter and longer versions of the *Theology*, both in form (for example, the number of chapters) and in content; the most important difference concerns the doctrine of the *kalima* (see below). Over the years, these discrepancies were attributed to European Christian scholars who, according to the prevailing assumption, modified the shorter version of the *Theology* in accordance with Christian doctrines. However, in 1929, the Russian scholar Andrei Borisov discovered the Arabic original of the longer version, containing the very same elements that were included in the Latin translation but which were missing in the shorter version.[18] Borisov reached the correct conclusion that the Arabic original antecedes the Latin translation and that the differences in content between the shorter and longer versions originated not in the Latin translation but in the Arabic original. Borisov also concluded that the doctrine of the *kalima* in the longer version indicates that the latter had been originally composed by Eastern Christians, prior to the shorter version; he further contended that this doctrine had later been removed by the Muslim editor of the shorter version for theological reasons. Borisov's latter conclusion is no longer accepted by modern scholarship: the longer version is not considered to be a Christian work and is believed to be posterior to the shorter version.[19]

What are the differences between the shorter and longer versions of the *Theology of Aristotle*? As is well known, the common Neoplatonic scheme, which is clearly reflected in the shorter version, stipulates the following series of cosmic emanations: The One → universal intellect → universal soul → nature. In contradistinction, in the longer version of the *Theology*, the series of emanations proceeds as follows: The One → the *kalima* → universal intellect → universal soul → nature. In order to understand this discrepancy, it is necessary to clarify the function of the *logos* in Plotinus's

[18] The fragments discovered by Borisov (as well as other manuscripts available to us today) were written in Hebrew characters (i.e., in Judeo-Arabic), although there is no doubt that the original longer version was written in Arabic script; see Fenton, Arabic and Hebrew versions 255–6; Stern, Ibn Ḥasdāy's Neoplatonist 82.

[19] It should be noted that Borisov himself changed his mind regarding the Christian origin of the longer version; on these matters, see Pines, La Longue récension 7–12, 17–8; Stern, Ibn Ḥasdāy's Neoplatonist 79–80, 93; Zimmermann, Origins 112; Fenton, Arabic and Hebrew versions 241–50; Walker, *Early philosophical Shiism* 42–4; Adamson, *Arabic Plotinus* 23–26; Aouad, La Théologie d'Aristote 541–90; on Borisov see also Treiger, Andrei Iakovkevic Borisov (I thank Dr. Ehud Krinis for this reference).

Enneads. According to Plotinus, *logos* is the principle deriving from the universal intellect and soul which is responsible for order and unity in the physical world. The *logos* is a forming principle within nature which yields numerous other forming principles (*logoi*); the latter give form and unity to the objects within which they reside, thereby guaranteeing their physical existence. Contrary to the Stoics and in line with Philo's conception (see the discussion above), Plotinus's *logoi* are not physical elements, though they do reside within physical things.[20] In the shorter version of the *Theology of Aristotle*, Plotinus's *logos* was translated as *kalima* or *kalima fāʿila*/*faʿāla* ("an active word"). Like the *logoi* in the *Enneads*, the *kalimāt* (plural of *kalima*) of the shorter version are nonphysical elements responsible for order and unity in the physical world. The *kalimāt* are inserted by the universal soul into the physical things, thereby causing them to evolve and develop according to the spiritual forms in the universal intellect.[21] It is clear, then, that according to both Plotinus and the shorter version of the *Theology*, the *logoi* or *kalimāt* are found not above but below the universal intellect, in the worlds emanating from it.

A radically different position is taken by the longer version of the *Theology of Aristotle*. In the longer version, the *kalima* is placed between God and the universal intellect and is identified with the Divine command (*amr*), the Divine will (*irāda*), God's power (*qudra*) and God's knowledge (*ʿilm*). According to the longer version, God created the universal intellect by means of His will and command; the *kalima* is therefore the cause (*ʿilla*) of the intellect and is thus called "the cause of causes" (*ʿillat al-ʿilal*), though God Himself is also worthy of this name by virtue of being the ultimate Creator. The longer version further states that the *kalima* is in a state of neither movement nor repose and is therefore *laysa*, "not". The universal intellect is united (*muttaḥid*) with the *kalima* and there is no intermediary (*wāsiṭa*) separating between the two; in this way, the perfect state of the intellect and its high spiritual status are assured.[22]

The longer version of the *Theology of Aristotle* thus places the Quranic concepts pertaining to God's word and Divine will (*kalima, amr* and *irāda*)

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[20] See Corrigan, Essence and existence 110–3; Wagner, Plotinus on the nature 136–7, 156–60; cf. Armstrong, *Architecture* 98–108; Graeser, *Plotinus and the Stoics* 35, 41–3.

[21] See, for example, Badawī (ed.), *Theology of Aristotle (the shorter version)*, 46, 74, 86, 88, 92, 113, 124, 127, 153–4; cf. Zimmermann, Origins 200–2; Adamson, *Arabic Plotinus* 35.

[22] The longer version is available only in manuscript form, in Judeo-Arabic; see *Theology of Aristotle (the longer version)*, fols. 4b–6b, 8a–8b, 11a–12a, 15b; see also Pines, La Longue récension 8–11; Stern, Ibn Ḥasdāy's Neoplatonist 82–91; Fenton, Arabic and Hebrew versions 250–4, 263 n. 77; De Smet, Le Verbe-impératif 406–7.

in the realm that lies between God and the universal intellect. To be sure, the notion of intermediaries standing between the One and the universal intellect is not entirely alien to the Neoplatonic tradition of Late Antiquity; thus, Iamblichus (3rd–4th centuries A.D.) and Proclus (5th century A.D.) added, for various reasons, other entities or hypostases between the One and the intellect.[23] However, the longer version is unique in combining the Quranic concepts pertaining to God's word and Divine will with the Neoplatonic scheme and in placing these terms between God and the universal intellect. It seems that this doctrine was motivated by two main theological considerations: first, placing the Divine word and will between God and the intellect was meant to solve the contradiction between the concept of Divine creation *ex nihilo* shared by Judaism, Christianity and Islam, on the one hand, and the original Neoplatonic notion of emanation, on the other. According to the latter, the emanation of the universal intellect from the One is, for all intents and purposes, an involuntary or unintentional act, while the *ex nihilo* conception views creation as a direct consequence of God's will. Secondly, the creative intermediary between God and the intellect bridges the gap between the transcendental God and the created world, and at the same time maintains the proper distance between the two. Hence, according to the longer version, although the ultimate cause of the intellect is God, the *kalima* functions as its immediate cause. This doctrine obviously created additional problems concerning the ontological status of the *kalima*: on the one hand, it is described as being separate from God; on the other hand, once created, the universal intellect is completely united with the *kalima*. This paradox brings to mind the complex ontological status of the *logos* in Philo's thought (see the discussion above).

The incongruity between the Jewish, Christian and Islamic concept of creation and the Neoplatonic notion of emanation, as well as the attempt to resolve it, are also evident in the shorter version of the *Theology*.[24] In addition, Plotinus himself was ambivalent on the issue of Divine will: he describes the One as standing beyond any will, and at the same time views the One as being all will—though this is an 'inward' will, identical to the One's own being, unlike the Divine will in Judaism, Christianity and Islam, which is directed towards creation and human beings.[25]

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[23] See Dillon, Solomon Ibn Gabirol's doctrine 43–8, 52; De Smet, *Empedocles Arabus* 106–9; see also Altmann and Stern, *Isaac Israeli* 162–4.

[24] See Adamson, *Arabic Plotinus* 137–55.

[25] See Plotinus, *Enneads* v, 113–7 (= Ennead v, 3, 12), vii, 221–97 (= Ennead vi, 8).

Nonetheless, neither Plotinus nor the shorter version adopted the solution to the problem of Divine will formulated in the longer version of the *Theology of Aristotle*.

The Ismāʿīlī Tradition

Shlomo Pines was the first scholar to point out the strong similarity between the longer version of the *Theology of Aristotle* and the Neoplatonic Ismāʿīlī tradition with respect to the doctrine of God's word and Divine will. Pines showed that, like the longer version, the Ismāʿīlī Neoplatonic writers too placed the *kalima* between God and the universal intellect. According to Pines, these writers identified the *kalima* with God's *amr*, the Divine will and at times with God's knowledge and the *ibdāʿ*, i.e., the Divine creation *ex nihilo*. Pines also showed that the Ismāʿīlī Neoplatonic writers stress the unity between the *kalima* and the universal intellect and characterize the *kalima* as the cause of the intellect and as "the cause of causes". Based on these facts, Pines hypothesized that the shorter version of the *Theology* had originally been modified in accordance with the Ismāʿīlī concept of the *kalima* or possibly with a pre-Ismāʿīlī *kalima* doctrine, thus giving rise to the longer version. In other words: the longer version must have been created either in an Ismāʿīlī or proto-Ismāʿīlī milieu.[26]

Pines's theory positing the Ismāʿīlī origin of the longer version of the *Theology*, published in 1954, has been called into question. F. W. Zimmermann tried to prove that the longer version was composed before the consolidation of Ismāʿīlī Neoplatonism (i.e., no later than the beginning of the 10th century A.D.), and that therefore the longer version was the source for Ismāʿīlī Neoplatonism, not vice versa.[27] Whether this is true or not is of no consequence to the present discussion; what is important to emphasize is that modern scholarship has acknowledged the strong link that connects the longer version of the *Theology* to the Neoplatonic Ismāʿīlī tradition.[28] Two other points need to be stressed here. The first is that the Ismāʿīlī doctrine of the *kalima* was perceived from a fairly early stage as a distinctive feature of Ismāʿīlī thought.[29] Though the important

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[26] See Pines, La Longue récension 12–20.

[27] See Zimmermann, Origins 128–9, 134, 195, 196–208; Walker, *Early philosophical Shiism* 42; De Smet, *Empedocles Arabus* 94–5.

[28] See Walker, *Early philosophical Shiism* 42–3; De Smet, Le Verbe-impératif 406–8.

[29] See, for example, Walker, *Early philosophical Shiism* 86, referring to the Zaydī author Abū l-Qāsim al-Bustī (d. 420/1029), regarding whom see Daftary, *Ismaili literature* 175–6.

Ismāʿīlī philosopher Ḥamīd al-Dīn al-Kirmānī (d. after 411/1020) objected to the *kalima* doctrine of his predecessors,[30] there is no doubt as to its centrality in the Ismāʿīlī tradition. In addition, the terms *kalima, kun, amr* and *irāda* and the notions pertaining to God's word and Divine will play a central role not only in the Ismāʿīlī Neoplatonic tradition but also in cosmogonic and cosmological speculations prevalent in Ismāʿīlī writings that are of a more mythical and less philosophical character.[31] Secondly, in his 1954 study, Pines appealed mainly to the writings of the Ismāʿīlī author Nāṣir-i Khusraw (d. after 462/1070). However, earlier Ismāʿīlī Neoplatonic authors as well adhered to a doctrine of the *kalima* similar to the one found in the longer version of the *Theology*, and it seems that it is from them that Nāṣir-i Khusraw derived his notions on the subject.[32]

Ismāʿīlī Mythical Writings

The Ismāʿīlī myth of *Kūnī-Qadar* is known to us from a short text by Abū ʿĪsā l-Murshid, a Fāṭimī *dāʿī* (missionary) who was active during the reign of the Fāṭimī Caliph-*imām* al-Muʿizz (ruled 341/953–365/975). Various motifs in this text are corroborated by the writings of the Ismāʿīlī Neoplatonists who lived during the 10th century and by the anti-Ismāʿīlī polemical works of certain Yemenite Zaydī authors. From these sources, one may infer that the myth of *Kūnī-Qadar* was prevalent (at least to a certain extent) among the Qarāmiṭa and other Ismāʿīlī factions, towards the end of the 9th and in the first half of the 10th century.[33]

According to the cosmogonic description in Abū ʿĪsā l-Murshid's text,

> When He [the Creator] willed and desired,[34] He created (*fa-khalaqa*) a light. From this light He created a being. The light remained for a certain period

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[30] See al-Kirmānī, *al-Muḍīʾa* 43–60; al-Kirmānī, *al-Riyāḍ* 56, 126, 221–9; al-Kirmānī, *Rāḥat al-ʿaql* 59–94; Walker, *Ḥamīd al-Dīn al-Kirmānī* 85; cf. al-Ḥāmidī, *Kanz al-walad* 45, 61–2. On al-Kirmānī and his philosophy, see Daftary, *Ismāʿīlīs* 233–4; Walker, *Ḥamīd al-Dīn al-Kirmānī*; De Smet, *La Quiétude*.

[31] See below pp. 41–3.

[32] See below pp. 44–51. On the influence of al-Sijistānī (on whom see below) on Nāṣir-i Khusraw's writings, see De Smet, Was Nāṣir-e Ḫusraw a great poet.

[33] See Stern, Earliest cosmological doctrines 3–6, 17; see also Halm, *Kosmologie* 75–80; Daftary, *Ismāʿīlīs* 133–6; Kraus, *Jābir ibn Ḥayyān* i, xlix. For other versions of this myth and for the Neoplatonic adaptations of it which were produced during the 4th/10th century, see Halm, *Kosmologie* 53–66, 133–5. On the Gnostic roots of this myth, see ibid. 89–90, 98–9, 115–27 and the reference to Daftary in this note.

[34] *Fa-lammā arāda irāda wa-shāʾa mashīʾa*. The difference between *irāda* and *mashīʾa* merits a close examination which, unfortunately, falls beyond the scope of this chapter. For the purpose of the current discussion, I will refer to both concepts as equally relating

> of its time not knowing whether it is a creator or a created being. Then, [the Creator] blew into it a spirit and cast a voice at it: 'be!', and so it was, by the will of Allāh (*bi-idhni llāh lahu*). Allāh brought all things into being by creating them (*mubdaʿa*) from the [letters] *kāf* and *nūn*. [Thus there is] coming into being, He who brings into being and that which comes into being; then Allāh; and then, through [the letters] *wāw* and *yāʾ*, it became a name for that which is above it,[35] and thus, [the Creator] gave it the name '*Kūnī*'. Then the command from its Creator, the Creator of all created beings (*bāriʾ al-barāyā*), rushed towards it [*Kūnī*]: 'create from your light a being which will aid and assist you and will execute Our command'. So [*Kūnī*] created from its light a being, gave it a name and called it '*Qadar*'. Thus, by means of *Kūnī*, Allāh brought all things into being, and by means of *Qadar*, He apportioned to them their lots (*qadarahā*).

The text goes on to interpret various Quranic verses—including those which mention the Divine *kun*—as referring to *Kūnī* and *Qadar*.[36]

In this myth, God's will functions as the most crucial element in the process of Divine creation: it is manifested in the spirit of life which is blown into the first created being; in the creative saying 'be!' (*kun*); in the hypostatic entity *Kūnī* which is created through this saying; and in the Divine command (*amr*) which brings about the creation of *Qadar* and the remaining existents, spiritual and corporeal alike. In addition, according to Abū ʿĪsā l-Murshid's text, the last two Cherubs among the seven Cherubs which are created by *Kūnī* (the *karūbiyya*) are called *amr* ("command") and *muʾtamir* ("he who obeys the command").[37] Hence, the

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to the realm of the Divine will. See, however, Stroumsa and Sviri, Beginnings 237–8. On the Gnostic roots of this Ismāʿīlī use of the pair *irāda* and *mashīʾa* in a cosmogonic-cosmological context, see Halm, *Kosmologie* 78–9.

[35] Perhaps the meaning is: "that which is above *Qadar*", *Qadar* being the cosmic entity below *Kūnī*; cf. Halm, *Kosmologie* 75 n. 5. Concerning the phrase "then Allāh", this may be a reference to *Kūnī*, who, in this myth, is also designated by the Divine name *Allāh*; see below p. 87; and concerning the letters *wāw* and *yāʾ*, see below p. 80 n. 15.

[36] Stern, Earliest cosmological doctrines 7–8 ("*Fa-lammā arāda irāda wa-shāʾa mashīʾa fa-khalaqa nūran wa-khalaqa min dhālika l-nūr khalqan fa-makatha dhālika l-nūr burha min dahrihi lā yadrī khāliq huwa am makhlūq thumma nafakha fihi rūḥan wa-awqaʿa minhu ṣawtan bi-an kun fa-kāna bi-idhni llāh lahu wa-kawwana llāh jamīʿ al-ashyāʾ mubdaʿa min al-kāf wa-l-nūn wa-takawwun wa-mukawwin wa-kāʾin thumma llāh thumma bi-l-wāw wa-l-yāʾ fa-ṣāra sman li-man fawqahu fa-sammāhu kūnī thumma jarā ilayhi l-amr min bāriʾihi bāriʾ al-barāyā an ukhluq min nūrika khalqan yakūnu laka wazīran wa-muʿīnan wa-li-amrinā muʾaddiyan fa-khalaqa min nūrihi khalqan wa-alqā ʿalayhi sman fa-sammāhu qadar fa-bi-kūnī kawwana llāh jamīʿ al-ashyāʾ wa-bi-qadar qadarahā llāh*"); cf. Stern's translation, ibid. 18. On the term *qadar* (which also signifies, *inter alia*, God's decree), see Halm, *Kosmologie* 57, 65; al-Sijistānī, *Tuḥfat al-mustajībīn* 149.

[37] Cf. Stern, Earliest cosmological doctrines 20; Halm, *Kosmologie* 76. On *muʾtamir* as "obeying", see Jaʿfar b. Manṣūr al-Yaman, *al-Kashf* 100; al-Ḥāmidī, *Kanz al-walad* 199; al-Kirmānī, *Rāḥat al-ʿaql* 355; Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ, *al-Jāmiʿa* i, 243.

Divine command plays a central role in both the creation of the world (cosmogony) and its governance (cosmology). The spiritual aspect of this governance is evident in the twelve "boundaries" (*ḥudūd*)[38] or "spiritual beings" (*rūḥāniyya*) which *Qadar* creates from its own light, in accordance with God's command. These twelve celestial beings function as mediating entities (*wasā'iṭ*) between the Divine world and the prophets, ensuring the spiritual wellbeing of humanity.[39] Finally, the importance of the Divine will is also reflected in the creation of six additional "boundaries", three above *Kūnī* and three below it. The first three boundaries, i.e., those which are situated above *Kūnī*, are termed *tawahhum* ("imagination"), *irāda* and *mashī'a*.[40]

God's will and speech and the Arabic terms pertaining to them likewise figure prominently in the mythic cosmogony of *al-ʿĀlim wa-l-ghulām* ("The Learned One and the Young Man"), a work probably written by the Ismāʿīlī *dāʿī* Jaʿfar b. Manṣūr al-Yaman, who was active in North Africa and died *circa* 346/957. In this work it is said that the first being which God created was light. From this light, three words emanated (*tafarraʿa*, literally: "branched off"):

> The first word was *irāda*; from *irāda, al-amr* emanated; and from *al-amr* emanated the saying 'be!' to whatever He desired, and so it was. Thus, the beginning of creation was the will of a command by means of a saying (*irādat amr bi-qawl*).

From these cosmogonic, Divine 'building blocks'—the light, the three primordial words and the seven letters of *kun* (كن) and *fa-yakūnu* (فيكون, "and it is"; see, for example, Q 16:40)—the remaining existents were all created.[41] As in the myth of *Kūnī-Qadar*, here too, God's light, will, command and *kun* are key elements in the process of Divine creation.

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[38] Or "borders", see below p. 136.

[39] See Stern, Earliest cosmological doctrines 9. On the twelve *rūḥāniyya* and seven *karūbiyya*, see also al-Qāḍī l-Nuʿmān, *al-Mudhhiba* 54, 61, 78; Stern, Earliest cosmological doctrines 26–9; Halm, *Kosmologie* 91–100; De Smet, *Risāla al-mudhhiba* 319–26. On the names of these angelic entities and their possible relation to Jewish *Kabbalah*, see Liebes, Shlomo Pines 21–2 (in Hebrew).

[40] See Stern, Earliest cosmological doctrines 12–3, 14–5. See also below p. 83 n. 26.

[41] Jaʿfar b. Manṣūr al-Yaman, *al-ʿĀlim wa-l-ghulām* 14 ("*Fa-btadaʾa khalq mā khalaqa min nūr tafarraʿa minhu thalāth kalimāt awwaluhā irāda wa-tafarraʿa min al-irāda l-amr wa-tafarraʿa min al-amr al-qawl li-mā yashāʾu kun fa-yakūnu fa-kāna awwal al-khalq irādat amr bi-qawl*"); see also ibid. 25, and Morris's translation, ibid. (the English section) 79. On Jaʿfar b. Manṣūr al-Yaman, see below n. 93. On the mythic conception of letters reflected here, see chapter 2 of this study.

The Eastern Neoplatonists

The doctrine regarding God's word and Divine will was developed within the Ismāʿīlī Neoplatonic context by Muḥammad b. Aḥmad al-Nasafī (executed circa 331/942), Abū Ḥātim Aḥmad b. Ḥamdān al-Rāzī (d. 322/934) and Abū Yaʿqūb Isḥāq b. Aḥmad al-Sijistānī (d. after 361/971). These Ismāʿīlī Neoplatonic authors were active in the eastern parts of the Islamic world (Iran and Transoxiana) during the 10th century. It seems that, in this eastern Ismāʿīlī school of thought, al-Nasafī was the first scholar who not only systematically combined Neoplatonism with Ismāʿīlī beliefs and conceptions but also developed the *kalima* doctrine within the Ismāʿīlī context.[42] While differing on a number of points, al-Nasafī, al-Rāzī and al-Sijistānī all agree that the *kalima*, which is identical with God's *amr*, is situated above the universal intellect. The *kalima* is also identical (at least according to al-Rāzī and al-Sijistānī) with the Divine fiat *kun* ("be!") and the *ibdāʿ*, the Divine creation *ex nihilo*. According to al-Nasafī and al-Sijistānī, it is also identical with the Divine unity (*waḥda*). The *kalima*—rather than God—is the cause of the intellect and the worlds that emanate from it; as al-Rāzī and al-Sijistānī put it, the *kalima* is "the first cause" (*al-ʿilla l-ūlā*). Al-Nasafī and al-Sijistānī view the *kalima* as an intermediary (*wāsiṭa*) by means of which God created the universal intellect. Akin to the longer version of the *Theology of Aristotle*, these eastern Ismāʿīlī Neoplatonists consider the *kalima* to be united with the intellect.[43] Al-Rāzī goes so far as to state that the *ibdāʿ* (which is identical with the *kalima* and *amr*) is "imaginary" (*wahmī*), not in the sense that it does not exist, but that its essence (*dhāt*) is manifested only through its union with the universal intellect. The *kalima* and the intellect are therefore "one being" (*ays wāḥid*).[44] In a simi-

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[42] Al-Nasafī's main work, *al-Maḥṣūl*, was written around 300/912 but has not survived. Parts of it do, however, appear in other works, such as Abū Ḥātim al-Rāzī's *al-Iṣlāḥ* and al-Kirmānī's *al-Riyāḍ*. The latter book discusses the theological disputes between al-Nasafī, al-Rāzī and al-Sijistānī; see Walker, *Early philosophical Shiism* 55–7; Daftary, *Ismāʿīlīs* 223–34; Daftary, *Ismaili literature* 13, 29, 125.

[43] Al-Nasafī: see al-Kirmānī, *al-Riyāḍ* 221–30; Halm, *Kosmologie* 128–31, 224. Al-Rāzī: al-Rāzī, *al-Iṣlāḥ* 24–7, 32, 35–6, 38–9, 48–9, 130; al-Kirmānī, *al-Riyāḍ* 58, 101–2, 119, 139; al-Rāzī, *al-Zīna* i, 129–32. Al-Sijistānī: al-Sijistānī, *al-Yanābīʿ* 3, 16–9, 24–6, 38–9, 70–1, 77–8, 90–4; al-Sijistānī, *Tuḥfat al-mustajībīn* 147–8; al-Sijistānī, *al-Iftikhār* 100–7, 182, 187; al-Kirmānī, *al-Riyāḍ* 58, 65–6, 125–6, 131–2, 221–2; see also Makārim, 'Al-amr al-ilāhī' 7–13; De Smet, Le Verbe-impératif; Walker, *Early philosophical Shiism* 41, 53, 57–8, 81–6; Steigerwald, Le *Logos*; Steigerwald, Divine word; Corbin, L'Initiation ismaélienne.

[44] See al-Rāzī, *al-Iṣlāḥ* 24 ("*Li-anna l-mubdaʿ al-awwal huwa wa-l-ibdāʿ wāḥid* […] *huwa wa-l-ibdāʿ ays wāḥid*"), 39 ("[…] *Kadhālika l-ibdāʿ huwa wahmī lā taẓharu dhātuhu illā fī l-mubdaʿ al-awwal*").

lar vein and like the longer version of the *Theology*, al-Sijistānī describes the *ibdāʿ* as *laysa* ("not") in the sense that it is neither being nor nothingness (*nafy al-aysiyya wa-l-laysiyya*). The *amr* did not antecede the world and the world did not antecede the *amr*.[45] Finally, like the longer version, al-Sijistānī too identifies the *kalima* with the Divine will and knowledge (*irāda, ʿilm*) and links it to God's power (*qudra*).[46]

Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ

The doctrine of God's word and Divine will in its unique formulation in the longer version of the *Theology* and in the eastern Ismāʿīlī Neoplatonic writings is also found in the Epistles of Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ ("The Sincere Brethren"),[47] especially in the esoteric work "The Comprehensive Epistle" (*al-Risāla al-jāmiʿa*) which is attributed to them. This fact, however, has been disregarded by most scholars who have examined the doctrine discussed here, possibly due to the insufficient attention accorded to "The Comprehensive Epistle" in modern scholarship.[48] This Epistle is viewed by most scholars as a simple summary of the other 52 Epistles composed by the Ikhwān. However, according to the Ikhwān themselves, the *Jāmiʿa* is actually the most important part—indeed, the esoteric pinnacle—of their work: it includes all that is said in the other epistles, and at the same time clarifies and reveals all that is hidden and implied in them.[49] The fact that the Epistles of the Ikhwān contain a doctrine of the Divine word and will similar to the one found in the eastern Ismāʿīlī Neoplatonic writings is important for two main reasons. First, this is further evidence of the Ismāʿīlī affiliation of the Ikhwān. Second, since we know for a fact that

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[45] See al-Sijistānī, *al-Yanābīʿ* 39 ("*Fa-ammā l-ibdāʿ nafsuhu fa-huwa l-laysa bi-maʿnā nafy al-aysiyya wa-l-laysiyya*"); al-Sijistānī, *al-Iftikhār* 106 ("*Fa-idhan wujūd al-amr lā yataqaddamu l-ʿālam wa-la yataʾakhkharu*").

[46] See, for example, al-Sijistānī, *al-Yanābīʿ* 18, 77–8; al-Sijistānī, *al-Iftikhār* 187.

[47] Regarding the Ikhwān see the references above in the Introduction, pp. 28–30.

[48] Except for Pines (see Pines, Shīʿite terms 171–2, 174–8, 229), and, to a certain extent, Baffioni (see Baffioni, Ibdāʿ). On the Ikhwān as the authors of "The Comprehensive Epistle", see Hamdani, Arrangement 86, 89–91; Netton, *Muslim Neoplatonists* 2–3; Krinis, Judeo-Arabic manuscripts nn. 2, 16 (in Hebrew). Not all scholars are convinced that the Ikhwān were the authors of "The Comprehensive Epistle"; see, for example, De Smet, Les Climats du monde 75 and the references given there in n. 26 to previous studies of his; and De Smet, Henry Corbin 115 (referring to Ivanow). This issue requires further philological examination; be that as it may, the Ismāʿīlī affiliation of the *Jāmiʿa*'s authors (whoever they might be) seems to be certain.

[49] Thus, according to the Ikhwān themselves; see, for example, Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ, *al-Jāmiʿa* i, 47–8, 109, 122–3, 239, 608; Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ, *Rasāʾil* i, 42–3, iv, 250; cf. Krinis, Judeo-Arabic manuscripts, nn. 13–4.

the Ikhwān's Epistles—including "The Comprehensive Epistle"—reached al-Andalus during the 11th and perhaps even the 10th century A.D., we can assume that the doctrine of the word in its Ismāʿīlī version penetrated the Andalusī intellectual scene via the Epistles of Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ, among other possible sources.[50]

According to the Ikhwān, God's word, which is identical to the Divine knowledge, command, power (*qudra*), creation *ex nihilo* (*ibdāʿ*) and *kun*, is situated between God and the universal intellect:

> Thus it is proven that the knowledge of [God's] unity [...] is His first command which is above the second command [= the universal intellect] and the [universal] soul. It is the word which originated in Him and which will return to Him [...]

This Divine knowledge, identical with the *kalima*, is "the command which is above the [universal] intellect and soul and below the Creator, Glory be to Him".[51] God's word and command (*amr, amr allāh*) are responsible for creating the universal intellect and soul, and the world at large.[52] The Divine knowledge, identical to the Divine word and command, forms the various levels of the cosmic hierarchy (*marātib*) and is defined by the Ikhwān as the "root" (*aṣl*) and as "the truth by means of which this world was created" (*al-ḥaqq al-makhlūqa bihi l-dunyā*).[53] Along with the longer version of the *Theology* and the eastern Ismāʿīlī Neoplatonic writings,

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[50] On the date of the Epistles' arrival in Spain, see above in the Introduction, pp. 29–30. Note that in several manuscripts and in the works of some scholars, "The Comprehensive Epistle" is erroneously attributed to the Andalusī mathematician and astronomer Maslama b. Aḥmad al-Majrīṭī (on whom see above p. 29); see Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ, *al-Jāmiʿa* i, 3–13 (the editor's introduction); Krinis, Judeo-Arabic manuscripts n. 16; Fierro, Bāṭinism in al-Andalus 101–2. In my opinion, this erroneous attribution indicates that this epistle was brought into al-Andalus clandestinely and that the true identity of its authors (the Ikhwān) was hidden; see also Ebstein and Sviri, So-called *Risālat al-ḥurūf* 226 n. 34.

[51] See Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ, *al-Jāmiʿa* i, 622–3 ("*Wa-huwa l-amr al-ladhī fawqa l-ʿaql wa-l-nafs wa-dūna l-bārī subḥānahu* [...]"), 633 ("*Fa-bi-l-burhān anna l-ʿilm bi-tawḥīdihi wa-maʿrifat mā abdaʿahu min mawjūdātihi wa-gharāʾib maṣnūʿātihi huwa amruhu l-awwal al-ladhī huwa fawqa l-amr al-thānī wa-l-nafs wa-huwa l-kalima l-latī minhu badat wa-ilayhi taʿūdu*"). On the identification between the *kalima* and the Divine power, see Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ, *Rasāʾil* iv, 206; on the identification of God's speech (*kalām*) with the *ibdāʿ* and the *kun*, see ibid. iii, 517. On the Divine command (*amr* or *amr allāh*) situated above the intellect, cf. ibid. iv, 199–203.

[52] See Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ, *al-Jāmiʿa* i, 528–37, 545–53, 559 (cf. Tāmir's edition v, 140), 563–4, ii, 139, 248; Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ, *Rasāʾil* iv, 212.

[53] See Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ, *al-Jāmiʿa* i, 616, 619, 621 (cf. Tāmir's edition v, 157: *al-ḥaqq al-makhlūq bihi*), 629. On the *kalima* and *al-ḥaqq*, cf. ibid. 471–3. The expression *al-ḥaqq al-makhlūq bihi* is based on various Quranic verses, such as Q 10:5 and more; see the root ḥ.q.q. in ʿAbd al-Bāqī, *al-Muʿjam al-mufahras*.

the Ikhwān perceive the *kalima* as united (*muttaḥida*) with the universal intellect; the latter receives the *kalima*, or, it is the *mawḍiʿ* ("place", "object") of the *kalima*.[54]

However, despite these similarities, the Ikhwān's discussions concerning the *kalima* lack the philosophical-theological casuistry which is characteristic of the longer version and the eastern Ismāʿīlī Neoplatonic writings. Thus, in contrast to the longer version and to al-Sijistānī's conception, the Ikhwān do not define the *kalima* as *laysa* ("not"). Though the *kalima* is perceived by the Ikhwān as united with the intellect, there is no doubt that, for them, the *kalima* is a living and active entity situated between God and the intellect, an entity which bestows vitality and unity on the whole universe. The Ikhwān emphasize—even resorting, at times, to anthropomorphism—the aspect of speech inherent in the Divine *kalima*. Explaining the essence of Divine creation *ex nihilo* and the difference between this and the spontaneous process of composition (*tarkīb, taʾlīf*) which occurs continuously within nature, the Ikhwān state:

> This is similar to the speech of the speaker and the writing of the writer. One of these two resembles creation [*ex nihilo, ibdāʿ*], and this is speech; while the other resembles composition, and this is writing. If the speaker becomes quiet, the speech ceases to be; yet if the writer stops [writing], the existing writing does not cease. Hence, the existence of the world in relation to Allāh is like the existence of speech in relation to the speaker: if He stops His speaking, the speech ceases to be.[55]

This extraordinary approach is combined with Plotinus's concept of the *logoi*, translated in the *Theology of Aristotle* as *kalimāt* ("words"):

> [God's] words are found among His created beings through His saying, 'be!'. The word is thus the wellspring of the root of creation and the source of its origination. By His speech, His benevolence appeared [...] Like one who speaks: by his speech he brings to light his commandments and prohibitions which he has willed, as well as his will and choice which have been executed through this speech, according to his ability (*qudratihi*) and

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[54] See Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ, *al-Jāmiʿa* i, 528, 532, 563–4, 618–20, 667, ii, 31; Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ, *Rasāʾil* iv, 206. Concerning the term *mawḍiʿ*, cf. the term *maḥall amrihi* ("the place of His command") in al-Sijistānī, *Tuḥfat al-mustajībīn* 147.

[55] Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ, *Rasāʾil* iii, 337–8, 351 ("*wa-laysa l-ibdāʿ wa-l-ikhtirāʿ tarkīban wa-taʾlīfan bal iḥdāth wa-khtirāʿ min al-ʿadam ilā l-wujūd wa-l-mithāl fī dhālika kalām al-mutakallim wa-kitābat al-kātib fa-innā aḥadahumā yushbihu l-ibdāʿ wa-huwa l-kalām wa-l-ākhar yushbihu l-tarkīb wa-huwa l-kitāba fa-min ajli hādhā ṣāra idhā sakata l-mutakallim baṭala wijdān al-kalām fa-idhā amsaka l-kātib lā yabṭulu l-mawjūd min al-kitāba fa-wujūd al-ʿālam min allāh ka-wujūd al-kalām min al-mutakallim idhā amsaka ʿan al-kalām baṭala wijdān al-kalām*"); see also Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ, *al-Jāmiʿa* ii, 288–9.

> power (*wa-quwwatihi*). For we have already said that the effect contains the traces of the cause. It is thus proven that all existent beings came into being through Allāh's complete and universal words.

Like the longer version and the eastern Ismāʿīlī Neoplatonists, the Ikhwān view the *kalima* as the cause of the world, deriving from God's will and power. Yet the Ikhwān stress the aspect of speech related to this cause: for them, God's incessant creative speech and the Divine words which emanate from it and which are dispersed throughout the universe are the direct reason for the continuous existence of the world. Were this speech to cease,

> the heavens and the earth would vanish and creation would disappear; things would be reduced to nought all at once—were [God], glory be to Him, to stop the flow of His mercy and the blessings of His word.[56]

The process of creation as well as the physical and spiritual functioning of the universe are all dependent upon the *kalima* and on its power being channeled through the various hierarchal levels of the universe. According to the Ikhwān, the *kalima* and the *amr* are permanently attached (*muttaṣil*) to the universal intellect and, on a lower level, also to the sun and the moon, which manage and maintain the celestial spheres and the sub-lunar world.[57] Like the *logos* in Greek and Hellenistic thought, the *kalima* and the *amr* give unity to the universe: the whole world is "one body whose spirit is the word of Allāh".[58] The Ikhwān explain that

> the word of Allāh, may He be exalted, is continuously attached to [the world], reinforcing it with abundance (*ifāḍa*) and benevolence in order that it be complete and continue existing. [The *kalima*] begins its flow (*fayḍihā*) through its unification with the first created being, the active intellect

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[56] Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ, *al-Jāmiʿa* i, 472–3 ("[…] *Wa-kalimātuhu mawjūda fī makhlūqātihi bi-qawlihi kun fa-kānat al-kalima yanbūʿ aṣl al-khilqa wa-mabdaʾ awwal al-fiṭra fa-bi-kalāmihi ẓahara jūduhu* […] *kal-mutakallim al-mubdī bi-kalāmihi mā arāda min awāmirihi wa-nawāhīhi wa-mā tamma lahu bi-dhālika l-kalām min murādihi wa-khtiyārihi bi-ḥasab qudratihi wa-quwwatihi wa-qad qulnā inna fī l-maʿlūl tūjadu āthār al-ʿilla fa-bi-hādha l-burhān yajibu an takūna l-mawjūdāt bi-asrihā kānat bi-kalimāt allāh al-tāmma l-ʿāmma l-latī lā nfiṣām lahā wa-lā nfiṣāl idh law infaṣalat wa-nfaṣamat la-zālat al-samawāt wa-l-arḍ wa-dhahabat al-khalīqa wa-talāshat al-ashyāʾ bi-lā zamān kadhālika law qabaḍa subḥānahu fayḍ raḥmatihi wa-barakāt kalimatihi*"). The idea whereby God's words do not cease is found already in the Quran; see Q 18:109; 31:27; cf. al-Sijistānī, *al-Yanābīʿ* 82; and *Babylonian Talmud, Shabbat* 11:a.

[57] See Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ, *al-Jāmiʿa* i, 528–37; Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ, *Rasāʾil* iv, 212.

[58] See Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ, *al-Jāmiʿa* i, 635 ("*Faṣl fī anna l-ʿālam kullahu* […] *jism wāḥid wa-anna rūḥahu kalimat allāh ʿazza wa-jalla*"); on the *amr* as the unifying element of the universe, see ibid. ii, 5–6, 33–8.

> [= the universal intellect]; then, through the mediation of the intellect, [the *kalima* reaches] the universal soul, the passive intellect; then, through the mediation of the universal soul, [it reaches] prime matter; then, through the mediation of prime matter, the absolute body; finally, [the *kalima*] is scattered throughout the world.

The role of the *kalima* is not reduced to sustaining the universe solely in its physical aspects: "[The *kalima*] appropriates from among the human virtuous figures the prophets, messengers and righteous men".[59] The *kalima*, then, is manifested within the sub-lunar world in the figures of the prophets and righteous men, thus ensuring the proper spiritual course of human history. Likewise, the Ikhwān define Divine knowledge—identical, as stated above, to the *kalima* and the *amr*—as "the man of knowledge and the figure of religion" (*al-insān al-ʿilmī wa-l-shakhṣ al-dīnī*). This man or figure is realized in the sub-lunar world in "seven virtuous figures" (*sabʿa ashkhāṣ fāḍila*), who appear among men in the seven cycles of human sacred history. Each one of these seven figures is joined by twelve supporters from among "his most venerable companions, relatives and family members (*min ajillat aṣḥābihi wa-aqāribihi wa-ahl baytihi*)". To these supporters are subjected numerous other men whose mission it is to assist the "virtuous figure" in propagating his message and attracting followers to his cause (= *daʿwa*, literally: "summoning"). It is clear that the Ikhwān are referring here to the seven "speaker prophets" (*nuṭaqāʾ*) known to us from the Ismāʿīlī tradition, to their supporters (the twelve *nuqabāʾ*, "chiefs"), to the *imām*s who are members of the Prophet's family and to the hierarchal *daʿwa* organization subordinate to them.[60] In other words: God's word and the Divine knowledge and will are the ontological

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[59] Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ, *al-Jāmiʿa* i, 635–6 ("[…] *Wa-anna kalimat allāh taʿālā muttaṣila bihi tumidduhu bi-l-ifāḍa wa-l-jūd li-yatimma wa-yabqā fī l-wujūd wa-anna awwal fayḍihā ttiḥāduhā bi-l-mubdaʿ al-awwal wa-huwa l-ʿaql al-faʿʿāl thumma bi-wasāṭatihi ilā l-nafs al-kulliya wa-hiya l-ʿaql al-munfaʿil thumma bi-wasāṭat al-nafs al-kulliya ilā l-hayūlā l-ūlā thumma bi-wasāṭat al-hayūlā l-ūlā ilā l-jism al-muṭlaq thumma tanbaththu fī l-ʿālam bi-asrihi wa-annahā mukhtaṣṣa min al-ashkhāṣ al-insāniyya l-fāḍila bi-l-anbiyāʾ wa-l-mursalīn wa-l-ʿibād al-ṣāliḥīn*"). On "prime matter" and "the absolute body" see Altmann and Stern, *Isaac Israeli* 182–3; Nasr, *An introduction* 52, 58–9. For the term *imdād* ("increasing", "succoring", "reinforcing") and its derivatives (namely *mādda*, "continuous increase", "[spiritual] substance"), in their cosmic sense and in the context of *amr* and *kalima*, see also Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ, *al-Jāmiʿa* i, 658, 707–8, ii, 5, 139–40, 148; Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ, *Rasāʾil* iv, 201, 203–4; and see also below pp. 153–4.

[60] See Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ, *al-Jāmiʿa* i, 608–34 (the quotations are from pp. 616, 629–30); cf. Pines, Shīʿite terms 174–8. On the seven *nuṭaqāʾ*, see Daftary, *Ismāʿīlīs*, index, s.v. "*nāṭiq, nuṭaqāʾ*"; on the *nuqabāʾ* , see Daftary, *Ismāʿīlīs*, index, s.v. "*naqīb, nuqabāʾ*"; Hamdani, Evolution 90 n. 24.

root of "the friends of God" (*awliyāʾ*), the religious leaders of humanity. It is thus understandable why the Ikhwān view knowledge as the purpose of creation and as the ultimate object of mankind.[61]

Finally, it is important to note that according to the Ikhwān, creation is not only the result of Divine speech, but also of Divine writing. In a sense, the link between writing and God's word appears already in the Quran.[62] Moreover, in Islamic tradition, there is a widespread notion that the fate of all creatures, as well as the Holy Scriptures revealed to mankind by God throughout history, derive from a Divine heavenly book. This book is often identified in Islamic tradition with the Quranic terms "mother of the book" (*umm al-kitāb*) and "the preserved tablet" (*al-lawḥ al-maḥfūẓ*). According to a prevalent conception, the writing of lots by God or His angels is executed by means of the "pen" (*al-qalam*), which is also mentioned in the Quran.[63] These notions are incorporated by the Ikhwān into the Neoplatonic scheme: the cosmic pen designates the universal intellect, whose nature is active, while the cosmic tablet designates the universal soul, whose nature is passive. The Quranic pair *ʿarsh* and *kursī* (the Divine throne and footstool) likewise stand for the universal intellect and soul, respectively.[64] Now, according to the Ikhwān, God's writing, like His speech, is an expression of Divine will:

> His throne is the pen [= the universal intellect] which moves according to His command. It wrote upon the noble tablet the lines of volition and the letters of the will,[65] the true saying and the trustworthy promise, the complete words and the great names [...]

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[61] See Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ, *al-Jāmiʿa* i, 621–2; cf. ibid. 610. On the concept of *walāya* see chapter 3 of this work.

[62] See Q 18:109; 31:27.

[63] See Q 3:7; 13:39; 43:4; 68:1; 85:22; and Wensinck, Lawḥ; Geoffroy, Umm al-kitāb; Huart, Ḳalam. On the pen and tablet in Muslim theology, see also Wensinck, *Muslim creed*, index, s.v. "Table", "Pen".

[64] See, for example, Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ, *al-Jāmiʿa* i, 25, 536–7, 705 (cf. Tāmir's edition v, 179), ii, 8 (cf. Tāmir's edition v, 187), 33–4; cf. al-Sijistānī, *Tuḥfat al-mustajībīn* 148–9; al-Sijistānī, *al-Iftikhār* 110–5. For a similar identification in Ismāʿīlī mythical writings of the cosmic entities *Kūnī-Qadar* with *kursī-ʿarsh* (sic, in this order) and *qalam-lawḥ*, see Halm, *Kosmologie* 219. On the Divine throne and footstool in the Quran and Muslim theology, see the roots ʿ.r.sh. and k.r.s.i. in ʿAbd al-Bāqī, *al-Muʿjam al-mufahras*; and see Huart, Kursī; Wensinck, *Muslim creed* 67 and index, s.v. "Throne"; Gimaret, *Dieu à l'image de l'homme* 76–89.

[65] On *mashīʾa* (translated here as "volition") and *irāda* see above n. 34.

This Divine writing is made possible by, or is a result of the divine utterance "be!" (*kun*).[66] Thus, both the Divine speech and Divine writing are perceived by the Ikhwān as the source of creation and life.

The Andalusī Mystics

The various terms pertaining to God's word and Divine will (*kalima, kun, amr* and *irāda*) also play a central role in the writings of the Andalusī Sunni mystics Ibn Masarra and Ibn al-ʿArabī. As will be demonstrated, these terms were integrated by these authors into a Neoplatonic scheme, in a very similar way to what we have seen in the longer version of the *Theology of Aristotle* and in the Ismāʿīlī writings examined above.[67]

Ibn Masarra

As argued in the Introduction, Ibn Masarra, the first Muslim mystic in al-Andalus who is known to us from his own writings, should be viewed as a Neoplatonic mystic-philosopher. The Neoplatonic philosophy stands at the heart of his two works that have come down to us: the "Epistle on Contemplation" (*Risālat al-iʿtibār*) and the "Book on the Properties of Letters, their True Essences and Roots" (*Kitāb khawāṣṣ al-ḥurūf wa-ḥaqāʾiqihā wa-uṣūlihā*). Like the longer version of the *Theology of Aristotle* and the Ismāʿīlī Neoplatonic tradition, Ibn Masarra too integrates the terms relating to God's word and Divine will into a Neoplatonic scheme. According to Ibn Masarra,

> the remembrance (*al-dhikr*) is the universal intellect, which Allāh, may He be exalted, has designated exclusively for the greater soul [*al-nafs al-kubrā* = the universal soul], which is situated in the carrying footstool.

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[66] Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ, *al-Jāmiʿa* (Tāmir's edition) v, 12 ("*Fa-ʿarshuhu huwa l-qalam al-jārī bi-amrihi fa-khaṭṭa fī l-lawḥ al-karīm suṭūr al-mashīʾa wa-aḥruf al-irāda wa-qawl al-ḥaqq wa-waʿd al-ṣidq wa-kalimāt al-tamām wa-l-asmāʾ al-ʿiẓām* […]"). Cf. Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ, *Rasāʾil* iv, 203: "The Divine circle and the supreme forms in the [universal] intellect are a book whose shinning lines are written by the pen of will and the tablet of volition […]" ("[…] *Al-dāʾira l-ilāhiyya wa-l-ṣuwar al-ʿaqliyya l-ʿulwiyya hiya kitāb talūḥu suṭūruhu l-maktūba bi-qalam al-irāda wa-lawḥ al-mashīʾa* […]"). On Divine writing as resulting from the *kun*, see Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ, *al-Jāmiʿa* ii, 324. Finally, "the complete words and the great names" mentioned here were taught to Adam by God (see Q 2:37). From a strictly Shiʿi-Ismāʿīlī perspective, these are the names of the seven *Nuṭaqāʾ* and the *imāms*; see below pp. 149–51.

[67] I shall refer to the rapport between the longer version of the *Theology*, the Ismāʿīlī tradition and Andalusī mysticism in the concluding section of this chapter.

Above the hierarchal level (*martaba*) of "the remembrance" (the universal intellect) is the

> place of the 'be!' (*mawḍiʿ al-kun*): this is the coming out of the command from the supreme remembrance, which is the hidden realm, to the greater soul and the act of reinforcing the soul by this command.[68]

It is clear, then, that according to Ibn Masarra, the Divine creative fiat *kun* is situated above the universal intellect and is responsible for "reinforcing" the universal soul with (presumably) Divine abundance. Notwithstanding Ibn Masarra's idiosyncratic use of terms such as "remembrance",[69] his speculations echo the Neoplatonic scheme found in the longer version and in Ismāʿīlī writings. Especially noteworthy is his use of the terms *mawḍiʿ* and *imdād* in the above-mentioned passage: in Ismāʿīlī Neoplatonic literature, the same terms appear in the context of the supreme hypostasis of the *kalima*/*amr* and its relation to the lower levels of the cosmic hierarchy. In addition, the identification of the Divine footstool with the universal soul is also characteristic of Ismāʿīlī Neoplatonic thought.[70] Like the longer version of the *Theology* and Ismāʿīlī Neoplatonic literature, Ibn Masarra perceives the Divine will and *kun*—identical to the *amr* and *kalima*—as the cause (*ʿilla*) of all creation. Divine speech is God's command which manifests the Divine knowledge and will.[71]

Ibn Masarra too draws a link between Divine speech and Divine writing. "The whole world", declares Ibn Masarra, "is a book; its letters are His speech".[72] Similar to the Ikhwān, Ibn Masarra identifies the Quranic pairs *ʿarsh-kursī* (throne-footstool) and *qalam-lawḥ* (pen-tablet) with the universal intellect and soul. For him, Divine writing is an expression of God's will; he explains that the throne, i.e., the universal intellect, is "the place of supreme decrees and the great volition", stating that God "wrote

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[68] See Ibn Masarra, *Khawāṣṣ al-ḥurūf* 164–5 ("[…]*Wa-l-dhihn* [read: *wa-l-dhikr*] *huwa l-ʿaql al-kullī l-ladhī khaṣṣa llāh taʿālā bihi l-nafs al-kubrā l-latī fī l-kursī l-ḥāmil*"; "*Thumma fawqa l-dhikr fī l-martaba mawḍiʿ al-kun wa-huwa khurūj al-amr min al-dhikr al-aʿlā wa-huwa l-ghayb ilā l-nafs al-kubrā wa-imdāduhu iyyāhā* […]").

[69] For the term *dhikr* in the Quran, see the root dh.k.r. in ʿAbd al-Bāqī, *al-Muʿjam al-mufahras*. Though *dhikr* is an important Sufi concept, the cosmological-cosmogonic context in which Ibn Masarra employs this term points to a different source of inspiration, other than the Sufi tradition—namely, Neoplatonism. On Ibn Masarra, Sufism and Neoplatonism, see the Introduction to this work, pp. 25–6.

[70] On *mawḍiʿ*, see above n. 54; on *imdād*, see above n. 59; on the footstool and the universal soul, see above n. 64.

[71] See Ibn Masarra, *Khawāṣṣ al-ḥurūf* 136, 140–1, 145, 150, 153–4, 166.

[72] Ibn Masarra, *al-Iʿtibār* 175 ("[…] *Fa-l-ʿālam kulluhu kitāb ḥurūfuhu kalāmuhu* […]").

upon His throne all of His decrees and sentences as well as that to which His will applies".[73] In addition, according to Ibn Masarra, all the decrees are written upon the tablet by means of the pen, as an expression of the Divine will and volition.[74] Unlike the Ikhwān, however, Ibn Masarra identifies both the pen and the tablet with the universal intellect.[75]

Ibn al-ʿArabī

> Know that the existent beings are the words of Allāh which do not cease. [Allāh], exalted be He, said concerning the existence of Jesus, peace be upon him, that he is '[the messenger of God] and His word which He has cast unto Mary [Q 4:171]'; this is Jesus, peace be upon him. So this is why we say that the existent beings are the words of Allāh [...] The words known in the common language are formed by arranging the letters [that result] from the breath which comes out of the one who breathes. This breath is broken up in the various articulation points (*al-makhārij*), and the letters' entities thus appear according to specific ratios, producing words.[76]

This succinct passage, taken from the beginning of chapter 198 of *al-Futūḥāt al-makkiyya* ("The Meccan Revelations")—Ibn al-ʿArabī's largest and most important work—contains some of the most central ideas in Ibn al-ʿArabī's thought, at least as regards the issue of God's creative speech. According to Ibn al-ʿArabī, all existent beings are the words of God: in the same way that human speech is formed from letters and words which result from the process of breathing, so too the Divine speech is formed from letters and words which derive from God's breath, "the breath of the All-Merciful" (*nafas al-raḥmān, al-nafas al-raḥmānī*) or "the Divine breath" (*al-nafas al-ilāhī*). God's letters are therefore the building blocks of reality; from them the Divine words are created—i.e., the existent beings. In various passages, Ibn al-ʿArabī links the concept of *nafas al-raḥmān* with the term *kun* ("be!") and defines the latter as God's word (*kalima*) and command

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[73] Ibn Masarra, *al-Iʿtibār* 182, 184–5 ("[...] *Fa-qālū hādhā falak al-ʿaql ʿālam al-ʿaql fa-wajadū makān al-ʿarsh wa-mawḍiʿ al-maqādīr al-ʿulā wa-l-mashīʾa l-kubrā* [...]"), 188 ("[...]*Wa-kataba fī ʿarshihi jamīʿ maqādīrihi wa-qaḍāyāhu wa-mā tajrī ʿalayhi irādatuhu* [...]").

[74] Ibn Masarra, *Khawāṣṣ al-ḥurūf* 145–6.

[75] Ibn Masarra, *Khawāṣṣ al-ḥurūf* 154.

[76] See Ibn al-ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt* ii, 385 (the beginning of chapter 198: "*Iʿlam anna l-mawjūdāt hiya kalimāt allāh al-latī lā tanfadu qāla taʿālā fī wujūd ʿīsā ʿalayhi l-salām annahu wa-kalimatuhu alqāhā ilā maryam wa-huwa ʿīsā ʿalayhi l-salām fa-li-hādhā qulnā inna l-mawjūdāt kalimāt allāh* [...] *wa-l-kalimāt al-maʿlūma fī l-ʿurf innamā tatashakkalu ʿan naẓm al-ḥurūf min al-nafas al-khārij min al-mutanaffis al-mutaqaṭṭiʿ fī l-makhārij fa-yaẓharu fī dhālika l-taqāṭuʿ aʿyān al-ḥurūf ʿalā nisab makhṣūṣa fa-takūnu l-kalimāt*").

(*amr, amr ilāhī*). According to Ibn al-ʿArabī, all beings exist eternally in God's mind as "immutable entities" (*aʿyān thābita*), as infinite possibilities of existence (*mumkināt*). *Nafas al-raḥmān* and *kun* bring these immutable entities into existence, giving them life. Through *nafas al-raḥmān* and *kun*, the Divine letters, which are the entities of the existent beings, are formed into Divine words, i.e., into the beings themselves as they exist in the created world. The creative Divine speech occurs perpetually; creation is renewed with every breath of God. This is why the existent beings, in Ibn al-ʿArabī's own words, "are the words of Allāh which do not cease".[77]

These ideas have a lot in common with the Ismāʿīlī conceptions discussed above, especially with those found in the Epistles of Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ. It almost seems as if Ibn al-ʿArabī adopted the semi-anthropomorphic attitude of the Ikhwān, focusing as he does on the aspect of speech inherent in the notion of God's creative word. Like the Ikhwān, Ibn al-ʿArabī does not show any real interest in the philosophical-theological casuistry of this issue, and perceives Divine speech as a dynamic living entity which bestows vitality and existence to the universe. Furthermore, both the Ikhwān and Ibn al-ʿArabī emphasize the incessant state of Divine creation: the unceasing act of Divine speech is the only guarantee for the continuation of life and existence in the universe. In order to establish this idea of creation as being perpetually renewed, the Ikhwān do not content themselves with the Quranic notion of God's unceasing words,[78] but also quote the verse which states that "every day He is upon a task" (*kulla yawm huwa fī shaʾn*).[79] This verse recurs in Ibn al-ʿArabī's writings, expressing one of the most central ideas in his thought: the perpetual renewal of Divine creation brought about by God's speech or *nafas al-raḥmān*.[80] Both the Ikhwān and Ibn al-ʿArabī stress the Divine attribute of mercy as a central element that sets the unceasing creative process in motion.[81] However, it

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[77] For these concepts, see, for example, Ibn al-ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt* i, 224 (chapter 20, = ʿUthmān Yaḥyā's edition iii, 89–90), ii, 394–5 (chapter 198, *faṣl* 2), 395–7 (ibid. *faṣl* 5), iii, 507–8 (chapter 384), iv, 211–3 (chapter 558, "ḥaḍrat al-khalq wa-l-amr"); Ibn al-ʿArabī, *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam* 142, 211.

[78] See the references above in n. 56.

[79] See Q 55:29; and Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ, *Rasāʾil* iii, 338, 351; Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ, *al-Jāmiʿa* ii, 288–9; see also *Rasāʾil* iii, 370, iv, 209; *al-Jāmiʿa* ii, 320.

[80] See, for example, Ibn al-ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt* ii, 277 (chapter 167), 386 (the beginning of chapter 198), 389, 393–4 (chapter 198, *faṣl* 1), iii 507 (chapter 384), iv 169–70 (chapter 524), 229 (chapter 558, "ḥaḍrat al-rafʿa"); and Chittick, *Sufi path* 18–9, 96–112; Chittick, *Self-disclosure* 66–72.

[81] See, for example, Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ, *al-Jāmiʿa* i, 472–3; Ibn al-ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt* ii, 385 (the beginning of chapter 198); Ibn al-ʿArabī, *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam* 220–1; and s.v. "mercy" in

is important to note an essential difference between the Ikhwān and Ibn al-ʿArabī: while the former believe that the Divine words, which originate in God's creative word or the creative fiat *kun*, are scattered throughout the universe, bestowing life and existence to all creatures, Ibn al-ʿArabī clearly and boldly identifies the Divine words with the creatures themselves. This difference is understandable when we consider Ibn al-ʿArabī's mystical worldview, which perceives creation as the manifest aspect of God. One may add that this is a fine example of the way Ibn al-ʿArabī incorporates Ikhwānian-Ismāʿīlī motifs into his own distinctive system of thought, giving them a new and original interpretation.

The links between Ismāʿīlī speculations and Ibn al-ʿArabī's thought are also discernible in the hierarchal-cosmological position of *nafas al-raḥmān*. In the above-mentioned chapter 198 of *al-Futūḥāt al-makkiyya*, which discusses "the breath of the All-Merciful", Ibn al-ʿArabī states that the Divine breath is identical to the *ʿamāʾ*, i.e., the mythic cloud in which, according to a tradition (*ḥadīth*) attributed to the Prophet Muḥammad, God was situated before creation.[82] *Nafas al-raḥmān* or the *ʿamāʾ* are further identified by Ibn al-ʿArabī with "the truth by means of which the levels of the world and its entities were created" (*al-ḥaqq al-makhlūq bihi marātib al-ʿālam wa-aʿyānuhu*).[83] According to Ibn al-ʿArabī, the Divine breath is the cause of creation (*ʿillat al-ījād*) since it enables the manifestation of the Divine mercy, which seeks to bestow existence to all.[84] This is very similar to the Ismāʿīlī conception which views God's word—rather than God Himself—as the cause of creation.[85] In addition, according to the Ikhwān (see the discussion above), Divine knowledge—identical to God's word and command—is responsible for forming the hierarchal

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the indexes of Chittick, *Sufi path* and Chittick, *Self-disclosure*. On mercy in the Sufi tradition and its roots in the pre-Islamic heritage, see Sviri, Between fear and hope, especially pp. 333–7.

[82] For this tradition, see, for example, Ibn Ḥanbal, *al-Musnad* xii, 481 (*ḥadīth* 16132); see also Gimaret, *Dieu à l'image de l'homme* 61–5.

[83] Ibn al-ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt* ii, 386 (the beginning of chapter 198: "*Thumma lammā awjada l-ʿālam wa-fataḥa ṣūratahu fī l-ʿamāʾ wa-huwa l-nafas al-ladhī huwa l-ḥaqq al-makhlūq bihi marātib al-ʿālam wa-aʿyānuhu* [. . .]").

[84] Ibid. ("[. . .] *Wa-jaʿala fī l-nafas al-ilāhī ʿillat al-ījād min jānib al-raḥma bi-l-khalq li-yukhrijahum min sharr al-ʿadam ilā khayr al-wujūd* [. . .]").

[85] See above pp. 40, 44. Note that in various passages in his writings, Ibn al-ʿArabī explicitly states that God is not to be considered the cause of creation; see, for instance, *al-Futūḥāt* i, 136 (chapter 2, towards the end of *faṣl* 2, = ʿUthmān Yaḥyā's edition ii, 76), 168 (chapter 6, = ʿUthmān Yaḥyā's edition ii, 223), 227 (chapter 21, = ʿUthmān Yaḥyā's edition iii, 107–8); Ibn al-ʿArabī, *ʿUqlat al-mustawfiz* 69; cf. Chittick, *Self-disclosure* 16–20; Rosenthal, Ibn ʿArabī 32 n. 177.

levels of the universe (*marātib*) and is defined as "the truth by means of which this world was created" (*al-ḥaqq al-makhlūqa bihi l-dunyā*). In the same way that the Ikhwān view Divine knowledge or *al-ḥaqq al-makhlūqa bihi l-dunyā* as the ontological root of mankind's religious leaders and as the reason and goal of creation, so too Ibn al-ʿArabī identifies *al-ḥaqq al-makhlūq bihi*—the source of the cosmic hierarchy—with the figure of "the perfect man" (*al-insān al-kāmil*), the reason and goal of creation.[86] Moreover, Ibn al-ʿArabī explains that the first being to be created from the *nafas al-raḥmān* was the universal intellect, which he identifies with "the pen" (*qalam*); then the universal soul, "the tablet" (lawḥ), emanated; and from the soul, all other cosmic entities emanated, according to the Neoplatonic cosmological scheme.[87] Thus, similar to the Ismāʿīlī Neoplatonists, Ibn al-ʿArabī too places the hypostasis pertaining to God's creative speech above the universal intellect and soul, identifying the latter two with the Quranic pen and tablet. The Ismāʿīlī use of the term *imdād* ("increasing", "succoring", "reinforcing") in this context is also found in Ibn al-ʿArabī's writings: he states, for example, that "the [Divine] reinforcing is an act of merciful breathing (*tanaffus raḥmānī*)".[88]

The affinity between Ibn al-ʿArabī's thought and Ismāʿīlī conceptions, especially in their Ikhwānian formulation, is also reflected in the connection between Divine speech and Divine writing. "The World", says Ibn al-ʿArabī, "is written letters, inscribed in the open-spread parchment of existence. The writing in it is continuous—it will never end".[89] Like the

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[86] See Ibn al-ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt* ii, 390 (chapter 198): "[…] the perfect man is truly the truth by means of which—that is, because of which—the world was created […]" ("[…] *Fa-l-insān al-kāmil huwa ʿalā l-ḥaqīqa l-ḥaqq al-makhlūq bihi ay al-makhlūq bi-sababihi l-ʿālam* […]"). Regarding the perfect man's ontological root being situated above the universal intellect, see ibid. iii, 430 (chapter 371, *faṣl* 9). Note that Ibn al-ʿArabī also identifies God's speech and command with the Divine knowledge; see, for example, ibid. ii, 397 (chapter 198, *faṣl* 5). Finally, note that Ibn al-ʿArabī himself claims to have borrowed the concept of *al-ḥaqq al-makhlūq bihi* from the teachings of Ibn Barrajān, the Sunni mystic from Seville (d. 536/1141); see Chittick, *Sufi path* 133, 398 n. 15–6. However, as is clear from the current discussion, the notions concerning *al-ḥaqq al-makhlūq bihi* in the context referred to here—God's word and Divine will—are ultimately derived from the Neoplatonic scheme of the Ikhwān.

[87] See Ibn al-ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt* ii, 389 (chapter 198), iii, 429 (chapter 371, *faṣl* 9). Regarding the *ʿamā'* being situated above the universal intellect and identified with *al-ḥaqq al-makhlūq bihi*, see ibid. ii, 279 (towards the end of chapter 167). On *nafas al-raḥmān*, the *ʿamā'* and *al-ḥaqq al-makhlūq bihi* see also Chittick, *Sufi path* 125–30, 132–4.

[88] See Ibn al-ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt* ii, 465 (chapter 198, *faṣl* 50).

[89] Ibn al-ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt* i, 149 (the beginning of chapter 5: "[…] *Fa-l-ʿālam ḥurūf makhṭūṭa marqūma fī raqq al-wujūd al-manshūr wa-lā tazālu l-kitāba fīhi dā'ima abadan lā tantahī* […] *wa-hādhā kitāb aʿnī l-ʿālam al-ladhī natakallamu ʿalayhi* […]", = ʿUthmān

Ikhwān, Ibn al-ʿArabī views God's writing as an expression of the Divine will and knowledge. It is executed by means of the cosmic pen and tablet—that is, the universal intellect and soul:

> It was then that God dipped the pen of will in the ink of knowledge and wrote with the right hand of power upon the preserved and guarded tablet all that was, what is, what will be and what will not be [...][90]

It is especially important to note here the phrase "pen of will", which appears in a very similar context in the Epistles of the Ikhwān.[91]

The Divine Command in Sacred Human History and in Religion

The central role of God's word and Divine will is not restricted to the cosmogonic process or to the mere physical maintenance and management of the universe; it is also reflected in the religious and spiritual guidance of mankind, as was shown in our discussion of the Ikhwānian "man of knowledge and figure of religion" and of the concept of "the truth by means of which the world was created" in the thought of both the Ikhwān and Ibn al-ʿArabī. I will now discuss this issue in greater detail.

Ismāʿīlī Literature

The concept of the Divine command (*amr, amr allāh, amr ilāhī*) occupies a prominent place in Ismāʿīlī literature. Its importance for the Ismāʿīlī worldview stems from its relevance to the status of "God's friends" (*awliyāʾ*)—the prophets and the *imām*s. The Divine command, being an expression of the Divine will, is the direct source for the supreme status of the prophets and *imām*s and for their central role in human history. From the Divine command emanate the spiritual powers of the prophets and the *imām*s, as well as the special religious knowledge that they possess.

Yaḥyā's edition ii, 133). On creation as a book, see also ibid. 160 (chapter 5, "waṣl fī asrār umm al-qurʾān", = ʿUthmān Yaḥyā's edition ii, 184–7), ii, 463–4 (chapter 198, *faṣl* 46), iii, 441 (the beginning of chapter 373), iv, 170 (chapter 524); Ibn al-ʿArabī, *ʿAnqāʾ mughrib* 38, 42. For the expression "the open-spread parchment" (*al-raqq al-manshūr*) see Q 52:2–3; for its use in a context similar to the one discussed here, see Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ, *Rasāʾil* iv, 210.

[90] Ibn al-ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt* i, 37 ("khuṭbat al-kitāb": "*Thumma ghamasa qalam al-irāda fī midād al-ʿilm wa-khaṭṭa bi-yamīn al-qudra fī l-lawḥ al-maḥfūẓ al-maṣūn kull mā kāna wa-mā huwa kāʾin wa-sayakūnu wa-mā lā yakūnu* [...]", = ʿUthmān Yaḥyā's edition i, 48). Cf. ibid. 201 (chapter 13, = ʿUthmān Yaḥyā's edition ii, 350–1), ii, 279 (towards the end of chapter 167), iii 387 (chapter 369, *waṣl* 19); Ibn al-ʿArabī, *al-Tadbīrāt* 176–181, 222.

[91] See above n. 66.

The prophets and *imām*s are responsible for fulfilling God's will on earth and executing His command among men, by introducing the Divine religious law (the *sharīʿa*), developing its esoteric interpretation (*taʾwīl*) and divulging the sacred knowledge to the true believers who are initiated into the real faith. Hence, the Divine command which is directly linked to the status of the prophets and the *imām*s is the true essence of religion, the true meaning of the Divine *amr* and *nahy* (commandment and prohibition) and of *al-amr bi-l-maʿrūf wa-l-nahy ʿan al-munkar* ("commanding right and prohibiting wrong").[92] Accordingly, obeying the prophets and *imām*s is equivalent to obeying God's command, while disobeying them is considered to be an outright rebellion against the Divine will. Since God's will and command never change and since the bond connecting them with the prophets and their heirs always remains intact, the *amr* imparts to human history coherence, unity and continuity: God's command passes from one prophet to the next, from one *imām* to the one who follows him, linking together all prophets and *imām*s throughout the ages. Mankind is therefore always being led—manifestly or secretly—by a divinely sanctioned leadership. Thus, in the early Ismāʿīlī work *Kitāb al-kashf* ("The Book of Unveiling"), it is stated that

> [...] Allāh's command remains continuous (muttaṣil) from the first ones among His prophets, messengers and the leaders of His religion [*wa-aʾimmat dīnihi*, i.e., the *imām*s] to the last one among them. Whoever obeys the last one among them, it is as if he obeyed the first one among them, for Allāh's command remains continuous from the first one, through the one who follows and down to the last one. And whoever obeys the first one—his obedience will direct him and bring him to the last one. What is meant is Allāh's command which He establishes through each and every one of them in his own age; then it reaches the one who follows him.[93]

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[92] On this fundamental principal in Islam, see Cook, *Commanding right*.

[93] See Jaʿfar b. Manṣūr al-Yaman, *al-Kashf* 8–9 ("[...] *Amr allāh muttaṣil min awwal anbiyāʾihi wa-rusulihi wa-aʾimmat dīnihi ilā ākhirihim wa-man aṭāʿa ākhirahum fa-ka-annahu aṭāʿa awwalahum li-ttiṣāl amr allāh min al-awwal ilā man baʿdahu ilā l-ākhir wa-man aṭāʿa l-awwal fa-ṭāʿatuhu tahdīhi wa-tuʾaddīhi ilā l-ākhir fa-l-murād amr allāh al-ladhī yuqīmuhu bi-kull qāʾim minhum fī ʿaṣrihi thumma yaṣilu man baʿdahu* [...]"); cf. Pines, Shīʿite terms 174. For other passages in *Kitāb al-kashf* where the term *amr* occurs in the various contexts referred to above, see *al-Kashf* 12, 27, 32, 58, 65, 67–8, 72–3, 80, 83, 88, 95–7, 102–7, 109–10, 113, 119, 127, 131, 137–9, 148–9, 159, 161, 170; see also Krinis, *Idea* 175 (in Hebrew). *Kitāb al-kashf* was compiled by Jaʿfar b. Manṣūr al-Yaman (an Ismāʿīlī North-African author, d. circa 346/957), presumably during the reign of the Fāṭimī Caliph-*imām* al-Qāʾim (ruled 322/934–334/946); see Halm, *Kosmologie* 18–9, 28, 135; Daftary, *Ismaili literature* 121–2.

The various aspects of *amr*, especially historical continuity and unity, appear also in other Ismāʿīlī works dating from the 10th to 11th centuries.[94] In so far as, according to the Ismāʿīlī scheme, the Divine will is situated at the uppermost level of reality, God's command, which is an expression of this will, is perceived as descending or emanating from the threshold of the Divine, through the various hierarchal echelons of the universe down to our corporeal world.[95] In line with its various meanings hitherto discussed, *amr* may also be translated, in certain contexts, as "affair", "cause" or even "rule"—that is, the affair or cause at the basis of the Shiʿi-Ismāʿīlī faith, or the political-religious rule which, in accordance with the Divine will, belongs only to the *imām*s.[96]

A similar conception of *amr* appears in the Epistles of Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ. Like *kalima, amr* is perceived by the Ikhwān as descending or emanating through the various hierarchal levels of the universe. This process enables the physical-corporeal functioning of the various worlds as well as the spiritual-religious prosperity of humanity in the sub-lunar world.[97] It follows that in the Ikhwānian view, and in line with other Ismāʿīlī authors, the cosmogonic-cosmological aspect of *amr* cannot be separated from its religious-historical aspect. Thus, the Ikhwān state that the universal intellect was the first to receive and accept God's command, termed as "the commandment of Allāh and His just prohibition". The creative Divine command, which is situated between God and the universal intellect and is united with the latter, is none other than the *amr* and *nahy* known from the Islamic religion.[98] In the sub-lunar world, the human figure who corresponds to the universal intellect is "the messenger speaker" (*al-rasūl*

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[94] See, for instance, al-Qāḍī l-Nuʿmān, *al-Mudhhiba* 50, 52, 57–8; Jaʿfar b. Manṣūr al-Yaman, *al-ʿĀlim wa-l-ghulām*, index, s.v. "amr"; al-Sijistānī, *al-Iftikhār* 74, 139, 220; al-Sijistānī, *al-Yanābīʿ* 18; al-Sijistānī, *Tuḥfat al-mustajībīn* 152–3; al-Kirmānī, *al-Riyāḍ* 169–70, 177, 186–7, 201–2, 208, 210–1; al-Kirmānī, *Rāḥat al-ʿaql* 124, 326, 370, 414; al-Kirmānī, *al-Muḍīʾa* 59.

[95] See, for example, Jaʿfar b. Manṣūr al-Yaman, *al-ʿĀlim wa-l-ghulām* 2–3; al-Sijistānī, *al-Iftikhār* 185–7.

[96] See, for example, al-Sijistānī, *al-Iftikhār* 179; Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ, *al-Jāmiʿa* ii, 344 (cf. Tāmir's edition v, 285); al-Kirmānī, *Rāḥat al-ʿaql* 134, 152, 161, 345; and Amir-Moezzi, *Divine guide*, index, s.v. "amr".

[97] See Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ, *al-Jāmiʿa* i, 528–37, 545–53, 559 (cf. Tāmir's edition v, 140), 563–4.

[98] See Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ, *al-Jāmiʿa* ii, 248–9 ("*Wa-kāna l-ʿaql awwal al-qābilīna li-amr allāh ʿazza wa-jalla wa-nahyihi l-mustaqīm* […]"). See also ibid. 310: "Know […] that the law is a Divine command […] It is the command by means of which the heavens and the earth and all that is between them were set up […]" ("*Iʿlam* […] *anna l-nāmūs amr ilāhī* […] *wa-huwa l-amr al-ladhī qāmat bihi l-samawāt wa-l-arḍ wa-mā baynahumā* […]"). On religion as "command and prohibition", see ibid. 142.

al-nāṭiq), i.e., any one of the seven law-giving prophets in the seven cycles of human history. The *nāṭiq* is the source of spiritual movement (*ḥaraka*) which motivates men to gain knowledge of their Lord:

> This movement is given to him as support [*al-muʾayyad bihā*, from *taʾyīd*, "support"] from the command of Allāh, powerful and mighty is He, through the angels and Spirit who descend upon him with the commandment and prohibition, [aiding him in] composing the laws and religious codes (*al-nawāmīs wa-l-sharāʾiʿ*).[99]

The source for the religious activity and special virtues of each *raʾīs* ("chief", i.e., the *nāṭiq* in any given cycle) is the "heavenly support and Divine command (*taʾyīd samāwī wa-amr ilāhī*)".[100] According to the Ikhwān, towards the end of each historical cycle and at the beginning of the next one, God's command descends or emanates through the universal intellect and soul, and eventually reaches the relevant *raʾīs* or *nāṭiq*. The latter executes the new Divine command by establishing a new *sharīʿa* for mankind. The Divine command is therefore not only a cause for historical continuity and unity, but also reflects the dynamic aspect of the Divine realm.[101]

Finally, it should be noted that the term *amr* or *amr allāh* appears also in Shiʿi-Imāmī literature of the 9th–10th centuries. As in the Ismāʿīlī writings, the Imāmī traditions emphasize the aspect of historical continuity and unity pertaining to *amr*.[102] One should bear in mind that the Imāmī and Ismāʿīlī traditions derived from the same early Shiʿi heritage of the 8th–9th centuries. However, contrary to the Imāmī traditions, the Ismāʿīlī authors emphasize the cosmogonic and cosmological aspects of *amr*. Moreover, the Neoplatonic scheme into which this and various other related concepts are incorporated is distinctively Ismāʿīlī.

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[99] See Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ, *al-Jāmiʿa* ii, 249 ("[…] *Thumma yanbaʿithu minhu bi-hādhihi l-ḥaraka l-muʾayyad bihā min tilqāʾ amr allāh ʿazza wa-jalla bi-nuzūl al-malāʾika wa-l-rūḥ ilayhi bi-l-amr wa-l-nahy wa-waḍʿ al-nawāmīs wa-l-sharāʾiʿ* […]"); see also ibid. i, 531–4. On the term *nāṭiq*, see above n. 60. On the spirit mentioned here, see above pp. 35–6.

[100] Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ, *al-Jāmiʿa* i, 660; see also ibid. 664–5: "[…] The knowledge attached to it [the human soul] is a Divine command, through the mediation of the intellect […]" ("[…] *Wa-anna l-ʿilm al-muttaṣil bihā amr ilāhī bi-wāsiṭat al-ʿaql* […]").

[101] See Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ, *al-Jāmiʿa* i, 705–7 (cf. Tāmir's edition v, 179–80), ii, 138–54, 359–66; cf. Pines, Shīʿite terms 174–8; Krinis, *Idea* 175. Note that among the Ismāʿīlī authors there was disagreement on whether or not Adam (the first of the seven prophets) inaugurated a *sharīʿa*, and whether or not the seventh and last prophet (the messianic figure of the *mahdī* or *qāʾim*) will abrogate the Islamic *sharīʿa*. On this dispute see Halm, *Kosmologie* 101–9, 121–2; De Smet, Adam. On the *qāʾim* see Daftary, *Ismāʿīlīs*, index, s.v. "Qāʾim".

[102] See Pines, Shīʿite terms 170, 174; Krinis, *Idea* 174–5.

Ibn Masarra and Ibn al-ʿArabī

In his *Kitāb khawāṣṣ al-ḥurūf*, Ibn Masarra states that every created being has been given a part (*juzʾ*) of the universal intellect through which he may come to know his Creator. He adds that "the remembrance (*al-dhikr*) came down upon four prophets: Abraham, Moses, Jesus and Muḥammad, may Allāh's prayer be upon him and all the prophets".[103] As has already been explained, "the remembrance" designates the universal intellect. Elsewhere in *Kitāb khawāṣṣ al-ḥurūf*, Ibn Masarra replaces the term *al-dhikr* with *amr*:

> The command of [God], blessed be He and exalted, came down upon four prophets who are the repository of prophecy [*maʿdin al-nubuwwa*, literally: the mine of prophecy]. At the beginning, His command came down upon Abraham [...] Then, after that, it came down to Mount [Sinai, *al-ṭūr*, see Q 19:52 and more], upon Moses [...]

Finally, after the appearance of Jesus and his prophecy, "the command came down and reached Muḥammad, may Allāh's prayer and blessing be upon him and all the prophets".[104] Perceiving *amr* as a link connecting the various prophets of humanity throughout history, in a Neoplatonic context (*al-dhikr*, the universal intellect), seems to be an Ismāʿīlī motif.

As stated above, Ibn al-ʿArabī links together the terms *nafas al-raḥmān, kun, kalima* and *amr*. *Amr*, therefore, is associated with the creative Divine hypostasis of speech, located above the universal intellect. The concept of *amr* occupies an important place in Ibn al-ʿArabī's writings; however, as far as I know, no scholarly study of this concept (especially with reference to its Ismāʿīlī connotations) exists at the present. A comprehensive discussion of *amr* in Ibn al-ʿArabī's thought is beyond the scope of this chapter, but even a cursory overview will suffice to demonstrate the affinity between Ibn al-ʿArabī's speculations on *amr* and the Ismāʿīlī tradition.

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[103] Ibn Masarra, *Khawāṣṣ al-ḥurūf* 165 ("[...] *Wa-minhu aʿṭā jamīʿ man fī l-samawāt wa-l-arḍīna min al-malāʾika wa-l-jinn wa-l-ins juzʾan fa-ʿaqalū bihi wa-ʿalimū khāliqahum* [...] *li-annahu nazala l-dhikr ʿalā arbaʿa anbiyāʾ wa-hum ibrāhīm wa-mūsā wa-ʿīsā wa-muḥammad ṣallā llāh ʿalayhi wa-ʿalā jamīʿ al-nabiyyīna*").

[104] Ibid. 156–7 ("[...] *Li-anna nuzūl amrihi tabāraka wa-taʿālā kāna ʿalā arbaʿa anbiyāʾ wa-hum maʿdin al-nubuwwa fa-nazala amruhu awwalan ʿalā ibrāhīm* [...] *thumma nazala baʿda dhālika ilā l-ṭūr ʿalā mūsā* [...]"; "[...] *Wa-huwa nuzūl al-amr wa-ifḍāʾuhu ilā muḥammad ṣallā llāh ʿalayhi wa-sallama wa-ʿalā jamīʿ al-nabiyyīna* [...]"); see also ibid. 142; and Ibn Masarra, *al-Iʿtibār* 177: "The messengers conveyed information based on Allāh's command [...]" ("[...] *Fa-nabaʾat al-rusul ʿan amr allāh taʿālā* [...]").

As in Ismāʿīlī writings, so too in Ibn al-ʿArabī's works, the Divine command (*amr, amr allāh, amr ilāhī*)[105] is responsible for managing the world in both its physical-corporeal and spiritual-religious aspects. According to Ibn al-ʿArabī, the *kalima* and *amr* are the source of prophetic revelation through which men receive the religious law (*sharīʿa*) and the legal-religious "rulings" (*aḥkām*), and at the same time they are the source of mystical experience shared by the prophets and "the friends of God" (*awliyāʾ*) alike. This mystical experience yields the special knowledge called "reports" (*akhbār*).[106] Thus, akin to the Ismāʿīlī conception, especially in its Ikhwānian formulation, Ibn al-ʿArabī views religious knowledge—legal as well as esoteric—as deriving from the hypostasis of God's word and Divine will, located above the universal intellect. Furthermore, Ibn al-ʿArabī describes the *amr* as descending or emanating from *nafas al-raḥmān* through the various echelons of the universe. More precisely, the *amr* (or *kalima*) descends from *nafas al-raḥmān* to the Divine throne, and from there it continues descending till it reaches the Divine footstool, where its unity disappears and it splits into rulings and reports.[107] The rulings, in turn, split into *amr* and *nahy*, that is, the commandments and prohibitions dictated by the Islamic law.[108] The use of the term *amr* and *nahy* in the context of the Divine command's descent through the various hierarchal levels of the universe is very similar to the Ismāʿīlī specu-

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[105] The phrases *amr allāh* and *amr ilāhī* are very common in Ismāʿīlī sources; see above, pp. 46, 57–60. For these phrases in Ibn al-ʿArabī's writings, see, for example, Ibn al-ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt* iii, 122–3 (chapter 333), iv, 428 (chapter 559); see also the references above in n. 77 and below nn. 108–9, 111.

[106] See Chittick, *Sufi path* 169, 172, 250–1; Chittick, *Self-disclosure* 112–3; and the references below in n. 108. Concerning *akhbār*, cf. the Ismāʿīlī use of this term (see the references below in nn. 122, 130).

[107] Note that the throne and footstool in this context are not the universal intellect and soul, but the ninth and eighth celestial spheres (respectively), situated above the other seven spheres. Certainly, Ibn al-ʿArabī also identifies the throne and footstool with the universal intellect and soul; see, for example, Ibn al-ʿArabī, *al-Tadbīrāt* 123, 133–4, 152, 176–8, 211; Ibn al-ʿArabī, *ʿUqlat al-mustawfiz* 52; Ibn al-ʿArabī, *al-Mabādiʾ* 111–3; and the references in the following note. Similarly, according to Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ, the throne and footstool designate not only the universal intellect and soul, but also (respectively) the ninth sphere (*al-falak al-muḥīṭ*, "the encompassing sphere") and the eighth one (*falak al-kawākib al-thābita*, "the sphere of fixed stars"). See, for example, *Rasāʾil* ii, 26, iv, 224; see also above n. 64.

[108] For this cosmic process, see, for example, Ibn al-ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt* i, 159 (chapter 5, "laṭīfa", = ʿUthmān Yaḥyā's edition ii, 182–3), 201 (chapter 13, = ʿUthmān Yaḥyā's edition ii, 352), ii, 254 (chapter 158), 278 (chapter 167), 426 (chapter 198, *faṣl* 15), 428 (ibid. *faṣl* 17, where *al-nafas al-raḥmānī*, from whence the *kalima* descends to the throne, is called *al-amr al-ilāhī*), 429 (ibid. *faṣl* 18), 431 (ibid. *faṣl* 19), 662–3 (chapter 295), iii, 418–9 (chapter 371, *faṣl* 2), 447–9 (the beginning of chapter 374); Ibn al-ʿArabī, *ʿAnqāʾ mughrib* 42; Chittick, *Sufi path* 358–61.

lations examined above. In the process of this cosmic descent from the upper spiritual worlds to the lower corporeal worlds, the Divine command assumes the form of religion, in both its legal aspect (pertaining to the messengers and prophets) and its esoteric-mystic aspect (pertaining also to the friends of God—the *imām*s in the Ismāʿīlī tradition and the mystics in Ibn al-ʿArabī's thought). In addition, Ibn al-ʿArabī distinguishes between *amr takwīnī* and *amr taklīfī*. *Al-Amr al-takwīnī* ("the existentiating command"), or *amr al-mashīʾa* ("the command of volition") as it is sometimes termed, is the command that creates everything according to the Divine will and volition. In contradistinction, *al-amr al-taklīfī* ("the imposing command") is the command that imposes religious obligations and duties on mankind, in the framework of the *sharīʿa*. The *amr taklīfī* is also called *al-amr bi-l-wāsiṭa* ("the command through mediation"), i.e., the command that does not reach our world directly but via mediating links—the various cosmic entities and the prophets in the sub-lunar world.[109] The term *wāsiṭa* in this cosmic context of *amr* appears also in Ismāʿīlī writings.[110]

Finally, in his famous work *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam* ("The Ring-Gems of the Wisdoms"), Ibn al-ʿArabī declares that

> in the same way that it is said concerning the doctor that he serves nature, it is also said of the messengers and heirs [*wa-l-waratha*, i.e., the friends of God] that they serve the Divine command generally.[111]

Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ state in a similar vein:

> All beliefs and religions were established as medicines and potions which eliminate the doubts that overwhelm the souls, just as the medicine eliminates the fatal infirmities and illnesses that seize the body. The originators of the religious legal codes and those who establish the laws by the command of Allāh, powerful and mighty is He, are the doctors of the souls.[112]

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[109] See, for example, Ibn al-ʿArabī, *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam* 165–6; Ibn al-ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt* i, 236–7 (chapter 22, "manzil al-amr", = ʿUthmān Yaḥyā's edition iii, 142–3), iii, 122–3 (chapter 333); see also Chittick, *Sufi path* 291–4; Chittick, *Self-disclosure* 250–3.

[110] See, for example, Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ, *al-Jāmiʿa* i, 534 (cf. Tāmir's edition v, 134), 635–6, ii, 149; al-Sijistānī, *al-Iftikhār* 185–6. Concerning the phrase *al-amr al-takwīnī*, cf. the phrase *al-amr al-kunī* ("the command 'be!' "), in al-Sijistānī, *al-Yanābīʿ* 24.

[111] Ibn al-ʿArabī, *Fuṣūṣ* 97 ("*Wa-ʿlam annahu kamā yuqālu fī l-ṭabīb innahu khādim al-ṭabīʿa kadhālika yuqālu fī l-rusul wa-l-waratha innahum khādimū l-amr al-ilāhī fī l-ʿumūm*"); see also Ibn al-ʿArabī, *al-Tadbīrāt* 112: "[…] This is the pole [*al-quṭb*, the senior one among the friends of God], around whom the Divine command turns" ("[…] *Fa-huwa l-quṭb wa-ʿalayhi madār al-amr al-ilāhī* […]"); and see Chittick, *Sufi path* 272, 304–9.

[112] Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ, *al-Jāmiʿa* ii, 337 ("[…] *Al-madhāhib wa-l-diyānāt kullahā wuḍiʿat kal-adwiya wa-l-ashriba l-muzīla li-mā yaʿtarī l-nufūs min al-shubuhāt kamā bi-l-dawāʾ yazūlu*

The Ikhwān likewise designate as "doctors of the souls" those "who are learned in the rulings of the law" (*ʿulamāʾ aḥkām al-nāmūs*), the philosophers, and the supporters (*awliyāʾ*) and vicegerents (*khulafāʾ*) of the prophets.[113] Both the Ikhwān and Ibn al-ʿArabī perceive those who possess religious knowledge—legal and esoteric alike—as acting in accordance with the Divine command. The existence of prophets and heirs is therefore essential for mankind at all times. Indeed, the prophets and their heirs through the ages are portrayed by Ibn al-ʿArabī as forming various links of a single chain which begins with Adam and ends with the three messianic figures associated with the term *khātam/khatm al-awliyāʾ*, "the seal of God's friends". In various passages, Ibn al-ʿArabī refers to this historical chain or to its religious-spiritual activity as *amr*—"affair" or perhaps also "command".[114] Thus, like the Ismāʿīlīs, Ibn al-ʿArabī views sacred human history as a continuous, unified whole: this history is sustained by the leadership of the prophets and their heirs (the *imām*s in the Ismāʿīlī tradition and the mystics in Ibn al-ʿArabī's thought), and it ends with the appearance of a last, messianic figure—the seventh *nāṭiq* of the Ismāʿīlīs and the *khātam/khatm al-awliyāʾ* of Ibn al-ʿArabī.

Taʾyīd

The term *taʾyīd* ("support"), which has already surfaced in our discussion, plays an important role in the Ismāʿīlī worldview and is quite common in Ismāʿīlī literature, yet it has not been given due attention in modern

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mā yaʿriḍu lil-ajsām min al-āfāt wa-l-ʿilal al-muhlikāt wa-anna aṣḥāb al-sharāʾiʿ wa-wāḍiʿī l-nawāmīs bi-amr allāh ʿazza wa-jalla hum aṭibbāʾ al-nufūs").

[113] See Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ, *Rasāʾil* i, 348–9, ii, 141, iii, 11–12, iv, 14–7, 329–30, 376. Regarding the notion of the prophet as a spiritual doctor in Ismāʿīlī literature, see also al-Kirmānī, *Rāḥat al-ʿaql* 383–90; al-Ḥāmidī, *Kanz al-walad* 304; Walker, *Early philosophical Shiism* 122; Walker, *Ḥamīd al-Dīn al-Kirmānī* 73–4.

[114] See, for example, Ibn al-ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt* iii, 388 (chapter 369, *waṣl* 19): "[…] until the *amr* concerning this reaches the seal of God's friends, the seal of those who rule on legal issues from among Muḥammad's community [*khātam al-mujtahidīn al-muḥammadiyyīn*—presumably, Ibn al-ʿArabī himself], and then it reaches the universal seal [*al-khatm al-ʿāmm*—Jesus], who is Allāh's spirit and word […]", "[…] *Ilā an yantahiya l-amr fī dhālika ilā khātam al-awilyāʾ khātam al-mujtahidīna l-muḥammadiyyīna ilā an yantahiya ilā l-khatm al-ʿāmm al-ladhī huwa rūḥ allāh wa-kalimatuhu*"), 442 (chapter 373: "[…] and Muḥammad, the father of the heirs from Adam to the seal of the *amr* among the heirs […]", "[…] *Wa-muḥammad ṣallā llāh ʿalayhi wa-sallama abū l-waratha min ādam ilā khātam al-amr min al-waratha* […]"); cf. Ibn al-ʿArabī, *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam* 214; Ibn al-ʿArabī, *ʿAnqāʾ mughrib* 42, 71. On the seal of God's friends, see Chodkiewicz, *Seal of the saints* 116–46; Addas, *Quest* 76–81.

scholarship.[115] Therefore, before highlighting the links between the Ismāʿīlī tradition and the writings of Ibn al-ʿArabī and Ibn Masarra as regards *taʾyīd*, it may be useful to underscore some of the meanings of this term and the contexts in which it appears in Ismāʿīlī literature.

In the Quran, the term *taʾyīd* (or its derivatives) signifies the support given by God to the believers in the context of their struggle against fierce foes. It is also associated with the term *rūḥ* ("spirit"). As might be recalled, according to the Quran, *rūḥ, rūḥ al-qudus* ("the holy spirit") or *al-rūḥ al-amīn* ("the faithful spirit") functions as the source or means of prophetic revelation, and in this sense it seems to be identical with the angel Gabriel. In addition, *rūḥ al-qudus* is either the means by which Jesus received the Divine support, the *taʾyīd*, or the product of this support.[116] The Quranic *taʾyīd* entered Ismāʿīlī literature but received a different emphasis and a new context: it was integrated into various cosmological schemes, with the primary objective of explaining the supreme status of the prophets and the *imām*s and stressing their central role in human history. According to the Ismāʿīlī conception, the Divine *taʾyīd* connects the upper spiritual worlds with the lower corporeal ones, thereby guaranteeing the continuity of the Divine flow between the various worlds. *Taʾyīd* is the source of the power and special virtues possessed by the prophets and *imām*s; through it they receive Divine knowledge which is then manifested in the *sharīʿa* and its esoteric interpretation (*taʾwīl*). *Taʾyīd* is thus associated in Ismāʿīlī literature with the terms *amr* ("command") and *imdād* ("increasing", "succoring", "reinforcing"),[117] which also point to the unceasing flow of Divine graces, from the uppermost hypostasis—God's word and Divine will—through the various cosmic echelons and down to the prophets and *imām*s in the world of man.

Examples of the Ismāʿīlī use of *taʾyīd* can be found in the early Ismāʿīlī work *Kitāb al-kashf*, already referred to above. According to this work, the prophet-messenger and the *imām*s who follow him are the

> repositories of Allāh's command and revelation. The blessing of Allāh and His support (*wa-taʾyīduhu*) come down gradually upon them. He chooses them in every age and period so He can use them [on judgment day] as

[115] See Walker, *Early philosophical Shiism* 117–8; Halm, *Kosmologie* 53 n. 1.
[116] See above p. 36.
[117] On the term *imdād* see above n. 59.

> an argument against the beings He created and so that they may guide His servants to Him by His command.[118]

The existence of prophets and *imām*s is vital for mankind's salvation. Their religious-spiritual activity, which derives from, and at the same time executes, God's command, is enabled by the Divine *taʾyīd*. The religious knowledge of the prophets and *imām*s—both legal and esoteric—results from the *taʾyīd*. Thus, according to *Kitāb al-kashf*, the *ḥujja*—one of the most high-ranking dignitaries of the Ismāʿīlī hierarchy—is the curator of the esoteric knowledge, and from him the Ismāʿīlī believers obtain their knowledge. The *imām*, to whom the *ḥujja* is subordinate, "reinforces him with the foundations of his knowledge, by the support of Allāh, powerful and mighty is He".[119] Hence, the prophets and their heirs are the true possessors of Divine knowledge: "Through them Allāh comes to be known [by men]", for

> his command and support are found among them and with them [...] He has made them His servants who know His hidden realm, who have become enlightened by the light of His guidance and are continuously attached to the light of His being.[120]

The link between *taʾyīd* and *imdād* is reflected in yet another Fāṭimī work, *al-Risāla l-mudhhiba*, attributed to the famous al-Nuʿmān b. Muḥammad (d. 363/974), the chief Fāṭimī *qāḍī* (judge) and *dāʿī* (missionary). This work emphasizes the cosmic aspect of the terms discussed here: the Divine support flows unceasingly through the various spiritual entities in the

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[118] Jaʿfar b. Manṣūr al-Yaman, *al-Kashf* 102 ("[...] *Maʿādin amr allāh wa-waḥyihi wa-hum al-rasūl wa-l-aʾimma tatanazzalu fihim barakat allāh wa-taʾyīduhu ḥattā yaṣṭafiyahum fī kull ʿaṣr wa-zamān li-yaḥtajja bihim ʿalā khalqihi wa-yahdū ʿibādahu ilayhi bi-amrihi*"). The idea behind the expression "so He can use them as an argument against the beings He created" (*li-yaḥtajja bihim ʿalā khalqihi*) is that the *imām*s do not only constitute a proof (*ḥujja*) of God's existence, but also an argument (*ḥujja*) against mankind on judgment day, for men then will not be able to claim that they had been unaware of the true path. On the term *ḥujja*, see the indexes of Halm, *Kosmologie* and Daftary, *Ismāʿīlīs*; see also Hodgson, Ḥudjdja; and Hamdani, Evolution.

[119] Jaʿfar b. Manṣūr al-Yaman, *al-Kashf* 60–1 ("*Wa-ḥujjat al-imām ṣāḥīb al-taʾwīl fī ʿaṣrihi wa-summiya l-ḥujja bi-l-miskīn li-anna l-nufūs taskunu ilā ʿilmihi* [...]"; "[...] *Wa-huwa miskīn ilā l-imām limā yumidduhu bihi min qawāʿid ʿilmihi bi-taʾyīd allāh ʿazza wa-jalla*"); see also ibid. 84–5, 113. For the term *ḥujja*, see the references in the previous note.

[120] Ibid. 151 ("*Wa-l-ʿālimūna hum al-anbiyāʾ wa-l-mursalūna fī kull ʿaṣr wa-zamān al-ladhīna kushifa lahum ʿilm al-ḥaqīqa*"; "*ʿUrifa llāh bihim wa-ʿurifa llāh min qibalihim* [...] *ʿalā waǰhi anna llāh ʿazza wa-jalla amruhu wa-taʾyīduhu mawjūd fihim wa-maʿahum* [...] *wa-jaʿalahum ʿibādahu l-ladhīna ʿalimū ghaybahu wa-staḍāʾū bi-nur hidāyatihi wa-ttaṣalū bi-nūr anniyyatihi* [...]"); see also ibid. 169. On the philosophical term *anniyya* ("being"), see Adamson, *Arabic Plotinus*, index, s.v. "*anniyya*".

upper worlds until it reaches the Ismāʿīlī hierarchy in the corporeal world. The result of this cosmic process is the Divine knowledge, which is possessed solely by the prophets, their heirs and those who follow them. This is the knowledge of "the boundaries (*al-ḥudūd*)", i.e., the supreme cosmic entities and their earthly equivalents among the dignitaries of the Ismāʿīlī hierarchy,

> the means and salvation for anyone who seeks the [knowledge] of [God's] unity and receives the traces of the support from the higher boundaries which reinforce the lower boundaries.[121]

The term *taʾyīd* plays an important role in the thought of the Ismāʿīlī Neoplatonist Abū Yaʿqūb al-Sijistānī, who devoted to it a whole chapter in his book *al-Yanābīʿ* ("The Wellsprings")—the last chapter, entitled "On the way in which the support is attached to those who receive support in the physical world" (*fī kayfiyyat ittiṣāl al-taʾyīd bi-l-muʾayyadīn fī l-ʿālam al-jasadānī*). According to al-Sijistānī, the support becomes attached to "those who receive support" (*al-muʾayyadūn*) in the same way that the powers of the celestial bodies are attached to the physical things in our world, except that it is "nobler and finer" (*ashraf wa-alṭaf*). In contradistinction to the ordinary learned man (*ʿālim*), he who receives the *taʾyīd* does not need the physical senses and their corporeal objects (*al-maḥsūsāt*) in order to obtain the abstract objects of the intellect (*al-maʿqūlāt*) and keep them stored in his memory, since his mental consciousness is the product of *taʾyīd*. When the *taʾyīd* becomes attached to the *muʾayyad*, "truths from the sciences of the hidden realm (*ḥaqāʾiq min ʿulūm al-ghayb*)" and "many secrets of the concealed matters (*asrār kathīra min al-khafiyyāt*)" are revealed to him. Hence the absolute superiority of the knowledge resulting from *taʾyīd*, knowledge which is also referred to by al-Sijistānī as *akhbār* ("reports"). The *taʾyīd* is the source of the *nāmūs*—the Divine

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[121] See al-Qāḍī l-Nuʿmān, *al-Mudhhiba* 60 ("*Fa-ʿlam anna maʿrifat al-ḥudūd al-latī hiya l-sabab wa-l-najāt li-kull man ṭalaba l-tawḥīd wa-qabila āthār al-taʾyīd min al-ḥudūd al-ʿulwiyya l-latī hiya mumidda lil-ḥudūd al-sufliyya* [. . .]"); cf. ibid. 30–1, 39, 45–7, 54–6, 84. On al-Qāḍī l-Nuʿmān and *al-Risāla l-mudhhiba* see Daftary, *Ismaili literature* 142, 145; Daftary, *Ismāʿīlīs* 167–72. It seems that this work (or at least parts of it) was written during the reign of the Fāṭimī Caliph-*imām* al-Muʿizz (ruled 341/953–365/975), under whom al-Qāḍī l-Nuʿmān served; see *al-Mudhhiba* 38, 43, 53; Halm, *Kosmologie* 136, 171; and De Smet, *Risāla al-mudhhiba*. For the meaning of the epistle's title see Stern, Earliest cosmological doctrines 6 ("The Epistle which Dispels [Doubts]") and De Smet, *Risāla al-mudhhiba* 337 n. 51 ("[. . .] eliminates temptations from Satan [. . .]"). On the cosmic aspect of *taʾyīd* in Ismāʿīlī mythical writings, see also Stern, Earliest cosmological doctrines 10.

religious law.[122] Like *al-Risāla l-mudhhiba*, al-Sijistānī views the *taʾyīd* as originating in the higher spiritual worlds: it flows from the universal intellect, and via the various cosmic entities it reaches the prophets, *imām*s and the subordinate *daʿwa* dignitaries.[123]

Similarly, Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ hold that the prophets receive *taʾyīd*, by means of which they are granted revelation (*waḥy*) and Divine knowledge is communicated to them by angels.[124] In line with the Neoplatonic scheme, the *taʾyīd* is described by the Ikhwān as being permanently attached (*muttaṣil*) to the universal intellect, and from the latter it passes down unto the universal soul.[125] Furthermore, the *taʾyīd* is directly linked to God's word and command which are situated above the universal intellect:

> [...] Revealing themselves to the prophets, the angels grant them support and descend upon them with commandments and prohibitions, bringing down the command of their Lord upon whomsoever He wills [...]

Likewise, "the man of knowledge and figure of religion" is described as "the holy soul supported by the power of the Divine word" (*al-nafs al-qudsiyya l-muʾayyada bi-quwwat al-kalima l-ilāhiyya*).[126] The Divine revelation and support become attached to the prophets by means of the angels, enabling the prophets to perform miracles, to compose the holy scriptures and to develop their esoteric interpretation.[127] However, according to the Ikhwān, the *imām*s too are "supported" (*muʾayyadūn*) and so are the believers—more precisely, those believers who follow the prophets and their heirs or those who adhere to the religious-spiritual path outlined by the Ikhwān in their Epistles.[128] This is why, time and again throughout

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[122] See al-Sijistānī, *al-Yanābīʿ* 94–6. Concerning *akhbār*, compare its use in Ibn al-ʿArabī's writings; see the references above in n. 106.

[123] See al-Sijistānī, *al-Yanābīʿ* 3, 9–12, 35–6, 48, 75, 85, 92–4; al-Sijistānī, *al-Iftikhār* 124, 152–3, 158; al-Sijistānī, *Tuḥfat al-mustajībīn* 148, 153; see also Walker, *Early philosophical Shiism* 117, 130.

[124] See Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ, *al-Jāmiʿa* i, 434, 540, ii, 114–5 (cf. Tāmir's edition v, 218).

[125] See Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ, *al-Jāmiʿa* i, 32, ii, 36; Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ, *Rasāʾil* iii, 186, 198.

[126] See Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ, *al-Jāmiʿa* i, 493 ("[...] *Kamā tūḥī l-malāʾika ilā l-anbiyāʾ bi-l-taʾyīd wa-tahbuṭu ilayhim bi-l-awāmir wa-l-nawāhī wa-tanzilu bi-amr rabbihā ʿalā man yashāʾu min ʿibādihi* [...]"), 616, 619; and above p. 49. For the link between the Divine command (*al-amr al-ilāhī*) and *taʾyīd*, see also *al-Jāmiʿa* i, 660; Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ, *Rasāʾil* iv, 375. For the link between God's word or speech (*kalima, kalām*) and *taʾyīd*, see *al-Jāmiʿa* i, 698; Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ, *Rasāʾil* iii, 141.

[127] See Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ, *al-Jāmiʿa* i, 539, ii, 381.

[128] See, for instance, Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ, *al-Jāmiʿa* i, 342, ii, 63, 332; Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ, *Rasāʾil* ii, 476.

their Epistles, the Ikhwān address the reader with the blessing "may Allāh support us both with a spirit from Him" (*ayyadaka llāh wa-iyyānā bi-rūḥ minhu*). This blessing is based on the assumption that anyone who follows the Ikhwān's path—be he a prophet, an *imām* or an ordinary believer—is likely to gain Divine support.[129]

Like al-Sijistānī, the Ikhwān emphasize the difference between conventional human knowledge and the knowledge resulting from *taʾyīd*. According to the Ikhwān, there are two kinds of knowledge: knowledge produced by mental reflection or consideration (*naẓarī*) and knowledge that stems from "reports" (*khabarī*). The former pertains to the physical objects which are apparent to the eye and is obtained by means of the senses, basic human intuitions and the intellect, whereas the latter pertains to unseen matters and is gained via tradition and the reading of books. This latter kind of knowledge, the one based on reports, the Ikhwān further divide into two categories: the first is related to physical matters that either occur in faraway places or which have occurred in the past (= history), while the second is related to nonphysical matters such as foretelling the future, astrology, philosophy, cosmogony, cosmology and eschatology. This second category is the knowledge possessed by the prophets—it is included in the holy scriptures and results from "a higher support" (*taʾyīdāt ʿulwiyya*).[130] The knowledge granted to the reader of their Epistles—especially that which pertains to eschatological issues—the Ikhwān portray as esoteric in nature, as secret Divine knowledge that must be concealed from the common people. This knowledge can be attained only by

> those who have inner vision, who are trained in the intellectual sciences [= the sciences emanating from the universal intellect] and are given Divine support. [They have received this] from what the angels have taught them [or: cast unto them], from the holy spirit by which they were supported and from that which is contained in the revealed books.[131]

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[129] This blessing appears throughout the Ikhwānian corpus, especially at the beginning of their Epistles. For other Ismāʿīlī writings in which a similar blessing is found, see, for example, al-Qāḍī l-Nuʿmān, *al-Mudhhiba* 65–6, 80, 83; Stern, Earliest cosmological doctrines 15.

[130] See Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ, *al-Jāmiʿa* i, 38–42. Concerning the term *akhbār*, see above nn. 106, 122. On philosophical knowledge as the fruit of *taʾyīd*, see *al-Jāmiʿa* i, 430. On the magical and astrological knowledge of the prophets and their heirs as originating in *taʾyīd* and the Divine command, see Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ, *Rasāʾil* iv, 374–6, 378.

[131] Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ, *al-Jāmiʿa* i, 109–10 ("*Wa-kāna hādhā l-faṣl min al-ʿilm ghāmiḍan daqīqan ẓāhiruhu ʿilm jalīl wa-bāṭinuhu sirr nabīl mastūr wa-khafī lā yaṣilu ilayhi illā ahl al-baṣāʾir al-murtāḍūna bi-l-ʿulūm al-ʿaqliyya l-muʾayyadūna bi-l-taʾyīdāt al-rabbāniyya

There is no mention here of prophets or *imām*s: it is understood that any believer might obtain Divine knowledge by means of *ta'yīd*.

Ta'yīd is also a central term in the writings of Ḥamīd al-Dīn al-Kirmānī.[132] Like his predecessors, al-Kirmānī too views the *ta'yīd* as originating in the higher worlds—according to his own metaphysical system, in the world of the ten intellects. The *ta'yīd* is indispensable for obtaining prophecy, and through it the prophets reach the level of "the second perfection" (*al-kamāl al-thānī*), i.e., the transition from the state of spiritual-intellectual potentiality to the one of full actuality. The prophets thus gain Divine knowledge and are able to establish the religious law for mankind. Like al-Sijistānī and the Ikhwān, al-Kirmānī stresses the difference between ordinary human knowledge, obtained by teaching and learning (*ta'līm*), and Divine knowledge originating in *ta'yīd*. The latter is also given to the *imām*s, and its effects reach the *da'wa* dignitaries.[133] These various meanings and contexts of the term *ta'yīd* resurface in the important work *Kanz al-walad* ("The Treasure of the Child"), written by the Yemenite Ismā'īlī-Ṭayyibī author Ibrāhīm b. al-Ḥusayn al-Ḥāmidī (d. 557/1162). *Kanz al-walad*, which owes much to the writings of the Ikhwān and al-Kirmānī, had a profound influence on the Ismā'īlī-Ṭayyibī tradition.[134]

Finally, along with the term *amr, ta'yīd* also appears in Shi'i-Imāmī literature. In various Imāmī traditions, the prophets and their heirs, the *imām*s, are perceived as being divinely "supported" (*mu'ayyadūn*).[135] This is not surprising: the Imāmīs and the Ismā'īlīs share the same early Shi'i heritage. However, what sets the Ismā'īlīs apart is the centrality of the term *ta'yīd* in their writings and the great emphasis they place on its cosmological aspect. This aspect is directly related to the issue of God's word and command and is formulated by various Ismā'īlī authors in accordance with the Neoplatonic philosophy—which represents a distinctive Ismā'īlī trait in the Shi'i world of the 10th to 12th centuries.

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mimmā laqqanahu ilayhim al-malā'ika wa-mā uyyidū bihi min rūḥ al-qudus wa-mā jā'a fī l-kutub al-munazzala"; cf. Tāmir's edition v, 33, where he has *alqathu* instead of *laqqanahu*); see also ibid. 332. On the esoteric aspect of knowledge in the thought of the Ikhwān, in comparison with Ibn al-'Arabī, see Ebstein, Secrecy 319–29, 338–9.

[132] Regarding this author, see above n. 30.

[133] See al-Kirmānī, *Rāḥat al-'aql* 83–4, 89, 93, 122–3, 163, 169, 198, 206–8, 217, 266, 268, 298, 329, 342–3, 354–6, 361–3, 365–7, 370–2, 380–1, 391, 400–38.

[134] For the term *ta'yīd* in *Kanz al-walad*, see al-Ḥāmidī, *Kanz al-walad* 3, 42, 47, 57–8, 69, 74, 79–80, 83–4, 88–9, 104–5, 157–8, 166–7, 172–3, 176, 231–2, 241, 245, 247, 290. On al-Ḥāmidī and his thought, see Daftary, *Ismā'īlīs* 264–5, 269–76; Daftary, *Ismaili literature* 113. For *ta'yīd* in the Nizārī tradition, see Steigerwald, Divine word 341–2, 346–7.

[135] See Krinis, *Idea* 58, 102–3 and the references given there.

Traces of the Ismāʿīlī use of the term *taʾyīd* can be detected in the works of Ibn al-ʿArabī. As in Ismāʿīlī literature, so too in Ibn al-ʿArabī's writings, *taʾyīd* is perceived as directly related to God's command and as the source of Divine knowledge granted to the prophets and their heirs, the friends of God. For example, Ibn al-ʿArabī distinguishes between two types of Divine spirit: the spirit of life which is breathed into every created being, called "the spirit of the letter *yāʾ* which is affixed [to God's name]" (*rūḥ yāʾ al-iḍāfa, al-rūḥ al-iḍāfī* or *al-rūḥ al-yāʾī*), i.e., the spirit which is affixed to God himself in several Quranic verses (such as Q 15:29); and the spirit which emanates from the Divine command, "the spirit of the command" (*rūḥ al-amr, al-rūḥ al-amrī*).[136] The spirit deriving from the Divine command is bestowed to the prophets and the friends of God as part of the Divine support, the *taʾyīd*. This spirit descends upon them by means of the angels and grants them Divine knowledge, "Divine power" (*quwwa ilāhiyya*) and the ability to perform miracles.[137] The link drawn by the Ismāʿīlī authors between *taʾyīd* and *imdād* can also be found in Ibn al-ʿArabī's writings.[138] Throughout his writings, Ibn al-ʿArabī addresses the reader with the Ikhwānian-style blessing: "may Allāh support you" (*ayyadaka llāh*), "may Allāh support us both" (*ayyadanā llāh wa-iyyāka*), "may Allāh support you with a spirit from Him" (*ayyadaka llāh bi-rūḥ minhu*), "may Allāh support us both with a spirit from Him" (*ayyadanā llāh wa-iyyāka bi-rūḥ minhu*), "may Allāh support you with the holy

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136 On the Quranic association of *rūḥ* with *amr*, see above n. 14.

137 On the two kinds of spirit mentioned here and *taʾyīd*, see, for example, Ibn al-ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt* iii, 124 (chapter 333); and Chittick, *Self-disclosure* 271–3, 276–9, 320, 342, 369. On *taʾyīd* and mystical knowledge, mystical experiences, Divine power and miracles, see, for example, Ibn al-ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt* i, 36 ("khuṭbat al-kitāb", = ʿUthmān Yaḥyā's edition i, 44, 46), 158 (chapter 5, "miftāḥ", = ʿUthmān Yaḥyā's edition ii, 176), 159 (ibid. "īḍāḥ", = ʿUthmān Yaḥyā's edition ii, 178–9, 181), 160 (ibid. "wāqiʿa", = ʿUthmān Yaḥyā's edition ii, 188), 530 (chapter 69, towards the end of "faṣl bal waṣl fī l-tashahhud fī l-ṣalāt", = ʿUthmān Yaḥyā's edition vi, 325–6), ii, 23 (chapter 73, on the *aḥbāb*, = ʿUthmān Yaḥyā's edition xi, 370), 26 (ibid. "waṣl", = ʿUthmān Yaḥyā's edition xi, 387–8), 366 (chapter 186), 397 (chapter 198, *faṣl* 7), 476 (chapter 206; cf. i, 888, chapter 72, *ḥadīth* 27, = ʿUthmān Yaḥyā's edition xi, 162), 594 (chapter 278), 664 (chapter 295), iii, 492 (chapter 381); Ibn al-ʿArabī, *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam* 47–8; Ibn al-ʿArabī, *al-Mabādiʾ* 137 ("[…] Let him know this by means of support from Allāh's command […]", "*fa-l-yaʿlam hādhā bi-taʾyīd min amr allāh*"). On *taʾyīd* and Divine power in Ismāʿīlī literature, see, for example, Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ, *Rasāʾil* ii, 127; Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ, *al-Jāmiʿa* ii, 36; see also al-Kirmānī, *Rāḥat al-ʿaql* 83, 371, 424; al-Ḥāmidī, *Kanz al-walad* 104–5, 269.

138 See, for example, Ibn al-ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt* i, 151–2 (the beginning of chapter 5, "waṣl", = ʿUthmān Yaḥyā's edition ii, 144–6); Ibn al-ʿArabī, *Kitāb al-alif* 3; Ibn al-ʿArabī, *Kitāb al-yāʾ* 12.

spirit" (*ayyadaka llāh bi-rūḥ al-qudus*), etc.[139] Ibn Masarra too uses a very similar blessing.[140]

The Jewish Context

The presence of terms pertaining to God's word and Divine will (*kalima, kun, amr, irāda* and *taʾyīd*) in the writings of Ibn Masarra and Ibn al-ʿArabī, who employ them in the framework of Neoplatonic philosophy and within the context of cosmogonic and cosmological speculations, points to a deep affinity between their thought and the Ismāʿīlī tradition. A distinctive feature of the Ismāʿīlī Neoplatonic scheme is that God's word and Divine will are placed between God and the universal intellect; this very same feature resurfaces in the writings of Ibn Masarra and Ibn al-ʿArabī. In so far as this feature is also found in the longer version of the *Theology of Aristotle*, it is possible that Ibn Masarra and Ibn al-ʿArabī were influenced by this work as well, directly or via some other source. However, given unassailable evidence linking the longer version to the Ismāʿīlī Neoplatonic tradition, it is plausible to assume that a link also exists between the Ismāʿīlī Neoplatonic tradition and the Neoplatonism of Ibn Masarra and Ibn al-ʿArabī. Furthermore, various elements in the writings of these two authors relating to the issue of God's word and Divine will—such as the motif of *al-ḥaqq al-makhlūq bihi* and the ontological root of the friends of God; the concept of Divine writing and the identification of the Quranic pen and tablet, throne and footstool with the universal intellect and soul; the religious and historical aspects of *amr*; and *taʾyīd*—these and other elements testify to the Ismāʿīlī impact on the Andalusī mystical-philosophical thought of the 10th to 12th centuries, i.e.,

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[139] As in the epistles of the Ikhwān, these blessings appear in many of the chapters of the *Futūḥāt*, mostly at their beginning. See also Ibn al-ʿArabī, *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam* 68, 158; Ibn al-ʿArabī, *ʿAnqāʾ mughrib* 71; and more.

[140] See Ibn Masarra, *Khawwāṣ al-ḥurūf* 134, 141–2. Another blessing recurring both in the epistles of the Ikhwān and in the writings of Ibn al-ʿArabī and Ibn Masarra is related to the term *tawfiq* ("success" or "succor" granted by God): "may Allāh grant you success/succor" (*waffaqaka llāh*), etc.; see, for example, Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ, *Rasāʾil* i, 157, 182, 275, 389, ii, 6, 378, iii, 268 and more; Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ, *al-Jāmiʿa* ii, 349, 354; Ibn Masarra, *al-Iʿtibār* 175 (and see Stroumsa, Ibn Masarra 101); Ibn al-ʿArabī, throughout his *Futūḥāt*, mostly at the beginning of various chapters; Ibn al-ʿArabī, *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam* 115; Ibn al-ʿArabī, *Inshāʾ al-dawāʾir* 5, 29, 32 (where the blessing is combined with *sadād*, "rightness" or "truth"; for this combination see the references to the Ikhwān in this note). Note that according to al-Sijistānī, *tawfiq* originates in the universal soul; see al-Sijistānī, *al-Yanābīʿ* 2, 12, 83; see also Jaʿfar b. Manṣūr al-Yaman, *al-Kashf* 113; al-Kirmānī, *Rāḥat al-ʿaql* 403, 409.

the Neoplatonic-oriented school of thought to which Ibn Masarra and Ibn al-ʿArabī both belong.

Further evidence of this Ismāʿīlī impact may be found in the Jewish intellectual world of North Africa and al-Andalus during the 10th to 12th centuries. To begin with, such evidence can be adduced from the writings of Isaac Israeli, the 10th century Jewish Neoplatonic philosopher who lived in Qayrawān in North Africa. Like the Ismāʿīlī Neoplatonic tradition, Israeli's thought can also be linked to the longer version of the *Theology of Aristotle*. Modern scholars differ on the exact nature of this link: according to Samuel M. Stern, Isaac Israeli and the unknown author/s of the longer version were both influenced by some common pseudo-Aristotelian Neoplatonic source which has not come down to us. In contradistinction, F. W. Zimmermann denies the existence of such an unknown source and holds that the longer version may have been the source from which Israeli derived his ideas.[141] Be that as it may, there is no doubt a linkage between the thought of Isaac Israeli and the longer version of the *Theology*. Moreover, Israeli was personally connected to the Ismāʿīlī world—he served in Qayrawān as the physician of the Caliph-*imām* ʿAbdallāh / ʿUbaydallāh al-Mahdī, founder of the Fāṭimī Empire (ruled 297/909–322/934). It seems that Israeli enjoyed a high status in the Fāṭimī court not only in his capacity as a doctor but also by virtue of his philosophical activities.[142] It is evident, then, that a tripartite connection exists between the longer version of the *Theology*, the Ismāʿīlī Neoplatonic tradition and the writings of Isaac Israeli. The latter's works contain various elements that evoke the theory of God's word and Divine will as formulated in the longer version and in the Ismāʿīlī Neoplatonic writings. Israeli, the longer version and the Ismāʿīlī Neoplatonists all posit the existence of an intermediate hypostasis between God and the universal intellect, contrary to the common Neoplatonic scheme and the shorter version of the *Theology*. True, the longer version and the Ismāʿīlī Neoplatonists identify this hypostasis primarily with God's creative word, whereas Israeli places the first matter and form between God and the universal intellect. In his view, it is the first matter and form that the intellect is created from. Nevertheless, Israeli, the

[141] See Altmann and Stern, *Isaac Israeli* xxiii, 95–7, 127–9; Stern, Ibn Ḥasdāy's Neoplatonist; Zimmermann, Origins 129, 190–6; see also Adamson, *Arabic Plotinus* 24–25; De Smet, *Empedocles Arabus* 104–5 and n. 235.

[142] See Ha-Israeli, *Sefer ha-yesodot* 3 (in Hebrew); see also Altmann and Stern, *Isaac Israeli* xvii–xxiii. Note that Ibn Masarra too spent time in Qayrawān during this period; see above in the Introduction, pp. 6–7.

longer version and the Ismāʿīlī Neoplatonists all emphasize the centrality of the Divine will and power in the cosmogonic process. Israeli holds that the Divine will and power create the first matter and form, and while they do not constitute a real hypostasis, they are conceived of as Divine forces which are active in the first stages of creation. It seems, then, that despite the various differences between Israeli's thought, on the one hand, and the longer version and Ismāʿīlī Neoplatonism, on the other, an affinity exists between all three traditions.[143]

Additional evidence of the Ismāʿīlī role in the formation of Andalusī thought in the context dealt with here is found in the writings of the Jewish Andalusī author Judah Ha-Levi (d. 1141). Shlomo Pines and later Ehud Krinis both demonstrated a deep affinity between the Ismāʿīlī notion of *amr* and Ha-Levi's *al-amr al-ilāhī*, one of the most important concepts in his *Book of Kuzari*.[144] Similar traces of Ismāʿīlī notions can perhaps also be seen in the important role which the concept of *amr allāh* plays in Almohad political-religious thought.[145] Finally, one may also draw a connecting line between the Neoplatonic thought of the 11th century Andalusī author Solomon Ibn Gabirol, on the one hand, and the distinctive type of Neoplatonism found in the longer version of the *Theology*, the Ismāʿīlī Neoplatonic tradition and Isaac Israeli's writings, on the other. Like Israeli, Ibn Gabirol places the first matter and form between God and the universal intellect. Unlike Israeli, Ibn Gabirol holds that the first matter and form, from which the intellect was created, are universal, that is, they are manifested in every echelon of creation. Moreover, according to Ibn Gabirol, the Divine will plays a central role in creation—not only in its highest levels (= the realm between God and the first matter and form), but also in the lower worlds.[146] I will

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[143] On the elements in Israeli's thought referred to here, see Altmann and Stern, *Isaac Israeli* 83–90, 98–103, 111, 119, 154–7, 159–64; see also Fenton, Arabic and Hebrew versions 255–6; and cf. De Smet, Le Verbe-impératif 408–10.

[144] See Pines, Shīʿite terms; Krinis, *Idea* 164–207. For *taʾyīd* in the *Kuzari*, see ibid. 57–8. On *ittiṣāl* and *amr* in Ha-Levi's thought—a combination found in Ismāʿīlī sources as well—see Lobel, Ittiṣāl. It is noteworthy that despite his objection to the Neoplatonic theory of emanation (see Krinis, *Idea* 164 n. 668), Ha-Levi seems to have been influenced by various Neoplatonic notions; see ibid. 166–7, 171–2, 192–3; and cf. Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ, *Rasāʾil* i, 148–9.

[145] See Peña, El término, especially pp. 199–200, 209, 218–20. On the Almohads, see above n. 18 in the Introduction.

[146] On Ibn Gabirol's thought, see Schlanger, *La Philosophie*. Note that like Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ, Ibn Masarra and Ibn al-ʿArabī, Ibn Gabirol too views creation as an act of Divine speech and writing, associating the latter with the Divine will; see ibid. 47–9, 273, 280–1, 286–8; see also Liebes, Rabbi Solomon Ibn Gabirol's use 84 (in Hebrew). It seems that Ibn Gabirol's concept of Divine will influenced the 13th century Kabbalist Itsḥaq b. Laṭif, in

add that Ibn Gabirol was acquainted with the Epistles of Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ and was influenced by them.[147]

It seems to me that these various traditions—the longer version of the *Theology of Aristotle*, Ismāʿīlī Neoplatonism, Isaac Israeli's thought, and the writings of Ibn Masarra, Ibn Gabirol, Judah Ha-Levi and Ibn al-ʿArabī—should all be viewed as variations of one and the same unique type of Neoplatonism. These variations have essential differences and at the same time significant similarities that pertain mostly to the metaphysical realm between God and the universal intellect or to the issue of God's word and Divine will. If we examine their common features in light of the geographical (North Africa and al-Andalus) and the chronological context (the 10th to 12th centuries), we can contend with a fair degree of assurance that the various traditions dealt with here all belong to a common intellectual world. Each one of these traditions adopted certain elements from its Neoplatonic heritage, developing, adapting and incorporating them in an original manner into its own distinctive worldview.[148] It is evident, however, that the Ismāʿīlīs played a crucial role in forming the distinctive type of Neoplatonism to which these various traditions belong. Not only were the Ismāʿīlīs instrumental in passing Neoplatonic materials from the eastern parts of the Islamic world to the west, but by reworking these materials and adapting them to their own Shiʿi outlook, they also contributed greatly to the formation of a new and unique Neoplatonic tradition, distinct from other Neoplatonic traditions in the Islamic

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whose writings the traces of Ismāʿīlī Neoplatonism can be detected; see Wilensky, 'First created being', especially pp. 66–7.

147 See Haneberg, Ueber das Verhältniss; Schlanger, *La Philosophie* 94–7; Krinis, *Idea* 30–1 and n. 126. For the various opinions in modern scholarship concerning the sources of Ibn Gabirol's thought, see the discussions and references in Pines, La Longue récension 8, 20; De Smet, *Empedocles Arabus* 15–20, 95 n. 196; Schlanger, *La Philosophie* 52–109; Dillon, Solomon Ibn Gabirol's doctrine 52–6; Liebes, Rabbi Solomon Ibn Gabirol's use 118 n. 68 (in Hebrew).

148 To this common intellectual world one may also add the Arabic Neoplatonic tradition attributed to Empedocles and other Pre-Socratic philosophers. This tradition is reflected in various Arabic sources, many of which are Andalusī. Regarding this tradition, see De Smet, *Empedocles Arabus*, especially pp. 91–121; Altmann and Stern, *Isaac Israeli* 162–3. On the links between this tradition and Ismāʿīlī Neoplatonism, see De Smet, Les Bibliothèques 490; De Smet, La Doctrine avicennienne 81 and n. 26; Affifi, *Mystical philosophy* 181–3; Stroumsa and Sviri, Beginnings 207–11; Stroumsa, Review of *Empedocles Arabus* 96–7. On the problem of the relation between this tradition and Ibn Masarra's thought, see above pp. 11–3. On the problem of the relation between this tradition and Ibn Gabirol's thought, see the references given in the previous note.

world of that period.[149] One should bear in mind that, during the 10th century, Neoplatonic philosophy was widespread among the Ismāʿīlīs of North Africa and Egypt and that, during that time, it was even officially adopted by the Fāṭimī Empire.[150] Naturally, each one of the traditions mentioned above was influenced by various sources other than Neoplatonic philosophy: Jewish sources (Ibn Gabirol and Judah Ha-Levi), Sufi sources (Ibn al-ʿArabī), etc.

Ultimately, the links and affinities between the various traditions discussed here and the significant role played in this respect by the Ismāʿīlīs are important not only for understanding the development of Islamic mystical-philosophical thought in al-Andalus, but perhaps also for fathoming the Jewish intellectual world in medieval Spain, including the emergence of *Kabbalah*.[151]

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[149] Cf. Zimmermann, Origins 129: "Presumably, *L* [the longer version of the *Theology*, M.E.] was brought to Egypt, together with the Neoplatonism of the Ismaʿilis of Persia, under the Fatimids. That would confirm the Ismaʿili connexion of *L*. The question whether *L* was the source or the product of Ismaʿili Neoplatonism remains"; see also Fenton, Arabic and Hebrew versions 255.

[150] See De Smet, Les Bibliothèques; De Smet, *Risāla al-mudhhiba*; Halm, *Kosmologie* 135–8; Daftary, *Ismāʿīlīs* 223–34; see also Zimmermann, Origins 231 n. 123, p. 237 n. 334. It seems that Neoplatonic writings circulated among the Ismāʿīlīs in North Africa much before the official adoption of Neoplatonism by the Fāṭimī Caliph-*imām* al-Muʿizz; see the reference to De Smet in this note.

[151] On the influence of Isaac Israeli on the Kabbalists in the Gerona circle of the 13th Century, see Altmann and Stern, *Isaac Israeli* 130–2. Regarding the possibility of Ismāʿīlī influences on certain Kabbalistic writings, see Wilensky, 'First created being'; Goldreich, Theology (in Hebrew); Idel, *Sefirot* 270–7 (in Hebrew); cf. Pines, Shīʿite terms 243–7.

CHAPTER TWO

LETTERS

Letter speculations—be they of the philosophical, religious, hermeneutical, mystical or magical kind—are a common feature of various literary traditions in the ancient world and in Late Antiquity. In Judaism, speculations on the letters of the Hebrew alphabet are found in Rabbinic literature and in the mystical *Heichalōt* ("Palaces") literature of the Talmudic era, in the work entitled *Ōtiyōt de-rabbī ʿakīvā* ("The Letters of Rabbi Akiva") and in the famous *Sefer yetsīrah* ("The Book of Creation").[1] In addition, letters play a major role in Jewish *Kabbalah* which evolved during medieval times. Apart from Judaism, letter speculations are also present in Greek and Hellenistic thought—in the Neopythagorean and Neoplatonic traditions, in Gnostic writings, in certain Late-Antique Christian works and in Samaritan sources.[2]

In Islam, letter speculations are particularly prevalent in mystical literature, though references to the letters of the Arabic alphabet and to their sacredness likewise appear in classical Islamic works that do not belong to the mystical genre.[3] The great reverence with which the Arabic letters are treated in Islamic tradition is due, first of all, to the sacredness of the

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[1] See Weiss, *A conceptual examination* (in Hebrew); Liebes, *Ars poetica* (in Hebrew). The dating of the last two works mentioned above is a matter of dispute between modern-day scholars, their estimated time of composition ranging from the first century A.D. (*Sefer yetsīrah*), or from the 5th–6th centuries (*Ōtiyōt de-rabbī ʿakīvā*), to the 8th–9th; see the discussion and references in Weiss, *A conceptual examination* 191 nn. 93–7, 248 n. 54. According to several scholars, *Sefer yetsīrah* was influenced by Islamic-Arabic culture, especially by the Shiʿi-Ismāʿīlī tradition; see Wasserstrom, Sefer yeṣira; Wasserstrom, Further thoughts. This thesis was strongly rejected by Liebes and others; see Liebes, *Ars poetica* 232–7.

[2] See mainly Weiss, *A conceptual examination*; see also Weiss, The perception (in Hebrew); Dornseiff, *Alphabet*; Idel, *Kabbalah*, index, s.v. "letters"; La Porta and Shulman, *Poetics*; Bitton-Ashkelony and Kofsky, *Monastic school* 107–26; Bitton-Ashkelony, Counseling. On the Neopythagorean tradition see also below nn. 24, 90; on Gnosticism see also below n. 136.

[3] On letter speculations in Islam, see Lory, *La Science*; Lory, Symbolism; Gril, Science; Böwering, Sulamī's treatise; Fahd, *La Divination* 214–45; Fahd, Ḥurūf; MacDonald, Sīmiyā'; Massignon, La Philosophie; Massignon, *Essay* 68–72; Massignon, *Passion* iii, 92–9; Canteins, Hidden sciences; Ryding, Alchemical phonology; Schimmel, Primordial dot; Schimmel, *Mystical dimensions* 411–25; Schimmel, Secrecy 89–91; Sviri, Words of power and the references given there in n. 4; Sviri, *Kun*; Zoran, Magic 40–54 (in Hebrew); Dornseiff, *Alphabet* 142–5.

Arabic language itself—the language of the Quran, considered by Muslims to be the speech of God (*kalām allāh*)—and, second, to the presence of the *fawātiḥ* in the Quran, i.e., the fourteen mysterious Arabic letters that appear, either isolated or in various combinations, at the beginning of twenty-nine *sūras*.[4]

Many discussions of the Arabic letters are found in Ismāʿīlī sources and in the writings of both Ibn Masarra and Ibn al-ʿArabī. Often treating of cosmogonic and cosmological issues, these discussions reflect a unique perception of the letters as building blocks of creation. This perception, which will be analyzed in detail in what follows, is quite different from the traditional or mainstream view of medieval Muslim scholars as it is conveyed in classical interpretations of the *fawātiḥ* and in Sufi works which were composed in the central and eastern parts of the Islamic world prior to Ibn al-ʿArabī's time. Certainly, eastern Sufi authors view the Arabic letters and particularly the *fawātiḥ* as a Divine secret, the decipherment of which leads the mystic to Divine knowledge and mystical experiences. Consequently, Sufi authors interpret the Arabic letters, including the *fawātiḥ*, in accordance with Sufi ideals and conceptions. However, Sufi speculations on the letters typically lack the cosmogonic-cosmological dimension, and they do not reflect any perception of the letters as building blocks of the universe.[5]

In Ismāʿīlī literature and in the works of Ibn Masarra and Ibn al-ʿArabī, letter speculations are far more central than in classical Sufi works. Discussions of the Arabic letters characterize many Ismāʿīlī writings, of both the philosophical and the more mythical kind. Letters also play an essential role in the scientific-alchemical theories espoused in the Shiʿi-Ismāʿīlī corpus attributed to Jābir b. Ḥayyān.[6] Similarly, Ibn Masarra dedicated an entire work to the letters of the Arabic alphabet, *Kitāb khawāṣṣ al-ḥurūf wa-ḥaqāʾiqihā wa-uṣūlihā* ("The Book on the Properties of Letters, their True Essences and Roots"), and Ibn al-ʿArabī devoted to

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[4] On the *fawātiḥ* and their various interpretations in Islamic tradition and in modern scholarship, see Welch, Mysterious letters; Massey, Mysterious letters; and see also the references given in Böwering, Sulamī's treatise 342 n. 14.

[5] For an example of such Sufi speculations, see Böwering, Sulamī's treatise, especially pp. 356–69. For a more detailed discussion of the differences between the Sufi type of letter speculations and the Shiʿi-Ismāʿīlī type, see Ebstein and Sviri, So-called *Risālat al-ḥurūf*, especially pp. 230–2. Concerning the epistle on letters attributed to Sahl al-Tustarī, the 9th century Sufi master, see ibid. and the discussion below on pp. 90–1.

[6] On this corpus, see above pp. 30–2 of the Introduction; on letters in the Jābirian corpus, see below pp. 96–101.

this subject a long and detailed chapter (chapter two) in his *magnum opus*, *al-Futūḥāt al-makkiyya* ("The Meccan Revelations"). In fact, different issues in the second chapter of the *Futūḥāt* are based on an earlier work by Ibn al-ʿArabī, entitled *Kitāb al-mabādiʾ wa-l-ghāyāt fī maʿānī l-ḥurūf wa-l-āyāt* ("The Book of Beginnings and Ends Concerning the Meanings of the Letters and the Miraculous Signs"). Ibn al-ʿArabī deals with the Arabic letters in other chapters of the *Futūḥāt* and in additional works of his as well.[7]

Letter speculations in the Ismāʿīlī tradition and in the thought of Ibn Masarra and Ibn al-ʿArabī should be viewed as closely linked to the notion of the Divine creative speech as analyzed above in chapter 1. Given that the whole universe is perceived as a product of God's speech, much significance is ascribed to the letters comprising human language, which in many ways parallels the 'Divine language'.[8] Such a radical conception which views human language as corresponding to the Divine speech and which perceives letters as the building blocks of creation is quite exceptional in the landscape of mainstream medieval Islam. Indeed, it seems that letter speculations were regarded by Islamic orthodoxy as an undesirable and dangerous occupation, one that is often accompanied by magical-alchemical practices.[9] Hence, at least as regards letter speculations, the Ismāʿīlī authors, Ibn Masarra and Ibn al-ʿArabī can be viewed as standing in a common position vis-à-vis their orthodox opponents, Shiʿi and Sunni alike.[10]

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[7] See, for instance, chapter 198 of *al-Futūḥāt al-makkiyya*; see also Ibn al-ʿArabī, *Kitāb al-mīm wa-l-wāw wa-l-nūn* ("The book on the [Letters] *Mīm*, *Wāw* and *Nūn*"); and Ibn al-ʿArabī, *Kitāb al-yāʾ* ("The book on the [Letter] *Yāʾ*"). For the mention of *Kitāb al-mabādiʾ wa-l-ghāyāt* in the second chapter of the *Futūḥāt*, see, for example, *al-Futūḥāt al-makkiyya* i, 95 (chapter 2, the beginning of *faṣl* 1, = ʿUthmān Yaḥyā's edition i, 236); see also Ibn al-ʿArabī, *Kitāb al-mīm* 2. On the importance of letters in the thought of Ibn al-ʿArabī, see also Gril, Science 123 n. 30; Lory, *La Science* 123. For a general discussion of Ibn Masarra's teachings on letters, see Garrido, Science.

[8] See also Lory, *La Science* 13.

[9] See, for example, Böwering, *Mystical vision* 80; see also the discussion below on pp. 96–101; and see also Weiss, *A conceptual examination* 60, 282. The fear of Islamic orthodoxy may explain why Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ (*Rasāʾil* iii, 382) define the *fawātiḥ* as a secret which must be kept hidden from the eyes of the common Muslims ("*Wa-hiya l-sirr al-maktūm al-ladhī lā yaṣluḥu an yaʿlamahu kull aḥad illā l-khawāṣṣ min ʿibād allāh al-mukhliṣīna* [...] *wa-dalalnā ʿalā annahā sirr al-qurʾān wa-lā yajūzu l-ifṣāḥ ʿanhā idh lam yaʾdhan lanā l-ḥukamāʾ wa-l-anbiyāʾ ṣalawāt allāh ʿalayhim*").

[10] Concerning Shiʿi orthodoxy, one may mention the *Ithnā ʿAsharī* ("Twelver") Shiʿa as it evolved from the 10th century (and especially from the second half of that century) onwards. On the emergence of an orthodox trend among *Ithnā ʿAsharī* scholars during this period, see below n. 153.

Common Conceptions Regarding the Letters

The Letters as the Building Blocks of the Universe

The letters of the alphabet play a central role in both Ismāʿīlī mythical writings and Ismāʿīlī Neoplatonic thought.[11] In the former, letters are perceived as the building blocks of the universe: God creates the cosmos by means of his speech, and constructs the worlds with the letters of the alphabet. To be sure, such a perception is not an Ismāʿīlī innovation, but rather is found in various pre-Islamic religious traditions: in Rabbinic literature and in the *Heichalōt* literature of the Talmudic era, in *Sefer yetsīrah*, in Late-Antique Christian works and in Gnostic and Samaritan writings.[12] Although the tendency of Ismāʿīlī Neoplatonic authors is to moderate and tone down the mythic dimension of the conception dealt with here, nevertheless, their letter speculations do exhibit certain mythic traits.[13] The combination of Neoplatonic philosophy and mythic motifs is likewise reflected in the thought of Ibn Masarra and Ibn al-ʿArabī.

In the Ismāʿīlī myth of *Kūnī-Qadar*,[14] the letters *kāf* and *nūn* comprising *kun* (the Divine fiat "be!") are said to form the material from which the universe is created: "Allāh brought all things into being by creating them from the *kāf* and the *nūn*". According to the Ismāʿīlī myth, the cosmogonic letters *kāf* and *nūn* were then joined by the letters *wāw* and *yāʾ*, enabling the creation of *Kūnī*—the supreme spiritual being which, in turn, completes the creation of the remaining existents.[15] It is important to note that in this cosmogonic myth, God is described as having a real voice

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[11] Concerning Ismāʿīlī mythical writings see above pp. 41–3.

[12] See Weiss, *A conceptual examination* 46–50, 163–231 (in Hebrew); Weiss, Different traditions (in Hebrew); Weiss, On the matter of language; Liebes, *Ars poetica*.

[13] Mythic motifs are also found in the Jābirian corpus alongside the more scientific type of letter speculations; see Kraus, *Jābir ibn Ḥayyān* ii 235, 265–6. One exceptional case in this regard is the Ismāʿīlī author Ḥamīd al-Dīn al-Kirmānī, in whose philosophical thought the letters of the alphabet were divested of any mythic dimension. This anti-mythic, philosophical stance is no doubt linked to al-Kirmānī's rejection of his predecessors' theory concerning God's creative word; see above pp. 40–1 and below n. 36.

[14] See above pp. 41–3.

[15] See Stern, Earliest cosmological doctrines 8 ("[…] *Wa-kawwana llāh jamīʿ al-ashyāʾ mubdaʿa min al-kāf wa-l-nūn wa-takawwun wa-mukawwin wa-kāʾin thumma llāh thumma bi-l-wāw wa-l-yāʾ fa-ṣāra sman li-man fawqahu fa-sammāhu kūnī* […]"). The importance of the letters *wāw* and *yāʾ* probably derives from the Quranic expression *fa-yakūnu*, "and it is", in the verse: "If We will something, all We say to it is 'be!' and it is (*innamā qawlunā li-shayʾ idhā aradnāhu an naqūla lahu kun fa-yakūnu*)" (16:40; and more). In this expression, the letters *wāw* and *yāʾ* are grouped together with the letters *kāf* and *nūn* (يكون).

(*ṣawt*).[16] Similarly, in the early Ismāʿīlī work *al-ʿĀlim wa-l-ghulām*,[17] it is stated that the first thing created by God was light. From this light, three Divine words emanated (*tafarraʿa*, literally: "branched off") one after the other: *irāda* ("will"), *amr* ("command") and *qawl* ("saying", i.e., the Divine saying "be!"). From these three words, seven letters emanated: *kun* ("be!", comprised of two letters: كن) and *fa-yakūnu* ("and it is", comprised of five letters: فيكون). These cosmogonic words and letters form the basis for the creation of the universe.[18]

According to the early Ismāʿīlī work *Kitāb al-kashf*,[19] all twenty-eight letters of the Arabic alphabet are the building blocks of creation. This view is expressed in the second part of *Kitāb al-kashf*, dedicated to a discussion of the Divine throne (*ʿarsh*) and footstool (*kursī*), by means of which the universe was created. Between His throne and His footstool, Allāh placed an axis or a pole (*quṭb*),

> and when their axis began moving[20] towards the footstool's gate, Allāh transformed them into twenty-eight letters in seven boundaries. He then called these twenty-eight letters by their names [...][21]

The twenty-eight letters of the Arabic alphabet thus constitute the basis of all creation. Moreover, according to *Kitāb al-kashf*, God's actual pronunciation of the letters' names forms an essential part of His creative act: by spelling the names of the first seven cosmogonic letters (*alif, bāʾ, tāʾ, thāʾ, jīm, ḥāʾ, khāʾ*), God is said to have created sixteen letters (a, l, f, b, a, t, a, th, a, j, i, m, ḥ, a, kh, a). The diacritical points of the Arabic letters are likewise

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[16] Ibid. ("[...] *Wa-awqaʿa minhu ṣawtan* [...]").

[17] On this work and its author, see above p. 43.

[18] See Jaʿfar b. Manṣūr al-Yaman, *al-ʿĀlim wa-l-ghulām* 14–5: from the seven letters, "seven things branched off" ("*Fa-dhālika thalāth kalimāt tafarraʿa minhā kun ḥarfayni fa-yakūnu khamsa aḥruf fa-dhālika sabʿa aḥruf tafarraʿa minhā sabʿa ashyāʾ*"); from the light mentioned above, air was created (*hawāʾ*); from the three words *irāda, amr* and *qawl*, the water (*māʾ*), the *darkness* (*ẓulma*) and the light of the heavens and the earth were produced; and from the last three, vapor (*dukhān*), mud (*ḥamaʾ*) and fire (*nār*) emerged. Finally, from the vapor, the seven heavens were created, and from the mud, the seven layers of earth.

[19] On this work see above p. 58 n. 93.

[20] *Fa-lammā an jarat* [sic.; see Halm, *Kosmologie* 41 n. 25] *quṭbuhā*. The pronominal suffix *hā* in the word *quṭbuhā* ("their" in the translation above) seems to refer to the term *ḥudūd* mentioned earlier on in the text, i.e. the "boundaries" or "definitions" of all future existents, located within the Divine throne. Cf. Halm, *Kosmologie* 41 n. 24.

[21] Jaʿfar b. Manṣūr al-Yaman, *al-Kashf* 48 ("*Fa-lammā an jarat quṭbuhā ilā bāb al-kursī jaʿalahā llāh thamāniya wa-ʿishrīna ḥarfan fī sabʿa ḥudūd thumma sammā llāh hādhihi l-ḥurūf al-thamāniya wa-l-ʿishrīna bi-asmāʾihā* [...]"). For a translation of this text into German and a discussion of it, see Halm, *Kosmologie* 38–44.

perceived as playing an important role in the Divine creation: the second series of seven cosmogonic letters produced by God (*dāl, rāʾ, ṣād, ṭāʾ, ʿayn, fāʾ, kāf* = د, ر, ص, ط, ع, ف, ك) was followed by six letters which are written in the same way but with diacritical points (*dhāl, zāy, ḍād, ẓāʾ, ghayn, qāf* = ذ, ز, ض, ظ, غ, ق). It is important to note the significance of the number seven in this 'linguistic cosmogony' of *Kitāb al-kashf*.[22]

The mythic conceptions discussed so far have influenced the thought of the 10th century Ismāʿīlī Neoplatonic authors Abū Ḥātim al-Rāzī and Abū Yaʿqūb al-Sijistānī, in whose writings one may detect mythic motifs alongside Neoplatonic schemes.[23] Al-Rāzī states that "the first cause, which is the word [of God], is the matter (*hayūlā*) of all the worlds", i.e., it is the matter from which the universe was created or of which it is comprised. Al-Rāzī explains that the form of the *kalima*, situated above the universal intellect, is *kun*; the letters *kāf* and *nūn* constitute the *kalima*'s body while their vowels (the *ḥaraka* and the *sukūn*, كُنْ) constitute its spirit.[24] It follows that the universe is created from the Divine *kun*—from its letters and vowels.

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[22] See Jaʿfar b. Manṣūr al-Yaman, *al-Kashf* 48–50; for similar motifs in another Ismāʿīlī text see Halm, *Kosmologie* 44–5. Speculations on the diacritical marks (the *Niqqud*) are also found in *Sefer yetsīrah*; for a comparison between the latter and *Kitāb al-kashf*, see Halm, *Kosmologie* 48–9. On the importance of diacritical marks in Jewish *Kabbalah*, see Zoran, Magic 47 n. 124 (in Hebrew). In addition, the number seven figures as well in cosmogonic-cosmological letter speculations in *Sefer yetsīrah*, in the Samaritan *Memar marqah* (whose date of composition ranges, according to the various scholarly opinions, from the first to the 9th century) and in the Christian work *The Mysteries of the Greek Letters* (most likely dating from the 6th century); see Weiss, *A conceptual examination* 191–203 (in Hebrew).

[23] On these authors see above p. 44.

[24] See al-Rāzī, *al-Iṣlāḥ* 39 ("[…] *Al-ʿilla l-ūlā* […] *wa-hiya ʿinda l-ḥukamāʾ kalimat al-bārī jalla wa-taʿālā ṣūratuhā kun wa-humā ḥarfāni kāf mutaḥarrika wa-nūn sākina fa-l-kāf wa-l-nūn lil-kalima bi-manzilat al-jasad wa-l-ḥaraka wa-l-sukūn lahā bi-manzilat al-rūḥ* […]"; "[…] *Wa-l-ʿilla l-ūlā l-latī hiya l-kalima hiya hayūlā l-ʿawālim kullihā*"). A similar analogy is expressed by Ibn al-ʿArabī, who holds that letters are like matter (*mawādd*) in relation to words, whereas the vowels are like the Divine spirit infused into man; see Ibn al-ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt* i, 130 (chapter 2, the beginning of *faṣl* 2, = ʿUthmān Yaḥyā's edition ii, 51–2). Interestingly, according to Judah Ha-Levi's *The Kuzari* and various Kabbalistic writings, the body corresponds to the letters and the spirit (or the soul) corresponds to the vowels and the diacritical marks (the *Niqqud*). Alternatively, the letters correspond to matter and the vowels correspond to the form; see Judah Ha-Levi, *al-Kitāb al-khazarī* 150 (fourth part, paragraph c, = Hirschfeld's translation, p. 178); Scholem, *Studies* 99–100 (in Hebrew); Aloni, Ha-ōtiyōt (in Hebrew); Liebes, *Prakīm* 174–6 (in Hebrew); Meroz, Ōr bahīr 151 n. 50 (in Hebrew; I thank Mr. Oded Porat for his help in finding these sources). Notwithstanding the possibility of an Ismāʿīlī influence in this context on Ibn al-ʿArabī, Ha-Levi and the *Kabbalah*, the analogy between the consonants and the body and between the vowels and the soul is already found in the Hellenistic-Pythagorean tradition; see Kraus, *Jābir ibn Ḥayyān* ii, 210; Dornseiff, *Alphabet* 33.

An even more radical mythic conception is reflected in a tradition quoted by Abū Ḥātim al-Rāzī in his *Kitāb al-zīna* ("The Book of the Ornament"). According to this long and detailed tradition, attributed to the Shiʿi *imām* Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq (d. in 148/765),[25] creation originated in the Divine acts of imagination (*tawahhum*), will (*irāda*) and volition (*mashīʾa*). These three acts, in turn, gave rise to the letters:

> The object of His imagination, volition and will was the letters. He made them, powerful and mighty is He, the root of everything, a sign indicating that which can be grasped and an aid for deciding in difficult matters.

The world as we know it was created by means of the letters and the words composed of them:

> That which the letters grouped together or separated was accomplished by means of the letters: the creation of heaven or earth, land or sea, sun or moon, genies, men or angels, celestial spheres, air, or anything else which was arranged by these letters, according to their grouping together and separating.[26]

Like *Kitāb al-kashf*, here too, all the letters of the Arabic alphabet are perceived as building blocks of reality.[27] In light of the importance he ascribes to the notion of Divine creative speech, it is not difficult to understand

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[25] The fifth *imām* according to the Ismāʿīlī tradition and the sixth according to the Twelver Shiʿis.

[26] See al-Rāzī, *al-Zīna* i, 66 ("*Kāna awwal mā tawahhama llāh ʿazza wa-jalla shayʾan mutawahhaman wa-arāda murādan wa-shāʾa mashīʾan fa-kāna tawahhumuhu wa-mashīʾatuhu wa-irādatuhu lil-ḥurūf al-latī jaʿalahā ʿazza wa-jalla aṣlan li-kull shayʾ wa-dalīlan ʿalā kull mudrak wa-fāṣilan li-kull mushkil*"), 67 ("*Wa-mā jamaʿathu l-ḥurūf aw faraqathu fa-huwa mafʿūl bi-l-ḥurūf min khalq samāʾ aw arḍ aw barr aw baḥr aw shams aw qamar aw jinn aw ins aw malak aw falak aw hawāʾ aw ghayr dhālika fī tadbīr tilka l-ḥurūf ḥaythu jamaʿat aw faraqat*"). This tradition is translated into French by Vajda, Les Lettres, and into German by Halm, *Kosmologie* 50–1. On *tawahhum*, *irāda* and *mashīʾa* as hypostatic beings situated above *Kūnī* in the myth of *Kūnī-Qadar*, see above p. 43. Note that in Twelver sources, this tradition is attributed to the eighth *imām* ʿAlī l-Riḍā (d. 203/818); see Ibn Bābawayhi, *ʿUyūn akhbār al-riḍā* ii, 154–5; Ibn Bābawayhi, *al-Tawḥīd* 435–7; al-Majlisī, *Biḥār al-anwār* x, 314–5, lvii, 50–1; Ibn Shuʿba l-Ḥarrānī, *Tuḥaf al-ʿuqūl* 424–5. In most of these sources, the term *tawahhum* is substituted by the less anthropomorphic and more philosophical term *ibdāʿ* ("creation [*ex nihilo*]"). This may indicate that al-Rāzī's version is earlier than the Twelver one.

[27] According to the tradition quoted by al-Rāzī, the twenty-eight letters of the Arabic alphabet include the twenty-two letters of the Hebrew and Syriac languages, and are also joined by an additional five letters representing all other human languages. Thus, the cosmogonic letters—thirty three in number—are the basis for all the languages of the world; see al-Rāzī, *al-Zīna* i, 66; cf. Ibn Bābawayhi, *ʿUyūn akhbār al-riḍā* ii, 154; Ibn Bābawayhi, *al-Tawḥīd* 436; al-Majlisī, *Biḥār al-anwār* lvii, 54; and see also Kraus, *Jābir ibn Ḥayyān* ii, 245 n. 2; Amir-Moezzi, Persian; Rubin, Language; Weiss, Medieval Muslim discussions.

why al-Rāzī endeavors to defend the tradition discussed here against those who criticize it for its blunt anthropomorphism. Although al-Rāzī justifies the use of the term *tawahhum* in this tradition by distinguishing between human and Divine imagination, nevertheless, he does not call into question the main conception conveyed by this tradition—namely, that the letters articulated by God are the building blocks of creation.[28]

Letter speculations occupy a prominent place in the writings of the Ismāʿīlī Neoplatonic philosopher Abū Yaʿqūb al-Sijistānī. The mythic dimension in the latter's treatment of the letters is somewhat mitigated: in accordance with Neoplatonic philosophy, al-Sijistānī is careful not to attribute any anthropomorphic traits to God,[29] and does not ordinarily perceive the letters as existing on a cosmological level. He rather views the letters as signs indicating (*dalīl*/*dalīla ʿalā*), paralleling or corresponding to (*muqābil*/*muqābila, yuwāzī*/*tuwāzī, bi-izāʾ*) the various cosmological and terrestrial beings of the universe. This is evident in the first chapter of his *Kitāb al-yanābīʿ* ("The Book of Wellsprings"). According to al-Sijistānī,[30] the letters comprising the name *Allāh* (*alif, lām, lām* and *hāʾ*) indicate and correspond to the four "spiritual wellsprings" (*al-yanābīʿ al-rūḥāniyya*), i.e., the universal intellect, the universal soul, the *nāṭiq* ("the speaker prophet") and the *asās* ("the foundation", the *nāṭiq*'s legatee),[31] as well as the four "natural wellsprings" (*al-yanābīʿ al-ṭabīʿiyya*), i.e., the four elements (fire, air, water and earth), and the four "pegs" (*awtād*) into which the zodiac is divided. Al-Sijistānī further claims that the letters *ʿayn, ḥāʾ, khāʾ* and *hāʾ* parallel or are similar to (*naẓīr*) the four "spiritual wellsprings": just as the points of articulation (*makhārij*) of these four letters are situated in the rearmost parts of the human vocal tract, so too the four "spiritual wellsprings" are closest to the *kalima*—God's creative word—in terms of

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[28] See al-Rāzī, *al-Zīna* i, 67. In other traditions which are attributed either to Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq or to Muḥammad al-Bāqir (the fourth *imām* according to the Ismāʿīlīs, the fifth according to the Twelvers, d. circa 114/732), letters are described as the first thing to have been created by God; see Jaʿfar b. Manṣūr al-Yaman, *al-Kashf* 90 ("*Awwal mā khalaqa llāh ḥurūf al-muʿjam*"); al-Maḥmūdī (ed.), *al-Uṣūl al-sitta ʿashar* 284 ("*Innī la-aʿlamu awwal shayʾ khuliqa qāla wa-mā huwa qāla l-ḥurūf*").

[29] See, for example, Al-Sijistānī, *al-Iftikhār* 101–2, where the author stresses the fact that God did not articulate the letters *kāf* and *nūn* (*kun*) during creation, since unlike humans, He has no voice.

[30] Al-Sijistānī, *al-Yanābīʿ* 8–15.

[31] On the *nāṭiq* see above p. 49 n. 60; on the *asās* see Daftary, *Ismāʿīlīs*, index, s.v. "asās".

their ability to receive its Divine flow.[32] Hence, despite the fact that he does not view the letters as concrete building blocks of reality, al-Sijistānī does perceive them as signs indicating and paralleling the very structure of the universe, in accordance with Neoplatonic cosmology.

A more mythic conception of letters is reflected in al-Sijistānī's discussion of "the seven supreme letters" (*al-ḥurūf al-ʿulwiyya l-sabʿa*, i.e., the letters *kūnī-qadar*), a theme that will be dealt with in more detail later on in this chapter.[33] According to al-Sijistānī, since the numerical value of the letters comprising *kun* is 70 (*kāf* + *nūn* = 20 + 50), which corresponds to the number seven, one may conclude that "through His command, which is called will, Allāh desired to manifest the seven supreme letters, by means of which he gave rise to the spiritual forms". These seven letters correspond to the seven planets, the seven *nuṭaqāʾ* ("the speaker prophets"), the seven organs of the human body, etc.—all of which are a product of God's will.[34] Although at times al-Sijistānī treats the theme of "the seven supreme letters" in a less mythic and more philosophical manner,[35] it is evident that in his view, these seven letters do exist on a cosmological level, albeit in a spiritual form.[36]

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[32] See al-Sijistānī, *al-Yanābīʿ* 14 ("*Wa-inna abʿad al-ḥurūf makhrajan min al-badan hiya l-ʿayn wa-l-ḥāʾ wa-l-khāʾ wa-l-hāʾ kadhālika abʿad al-ḥudūd ghawran wa-aqrabuhā qubūlan min al-kalima l-uṣūl al-arbaʿa fa-l-ʿayn minhā naẓīr al-sābiq* […] *wa-l-ḥāʾ minhā naẓīr al-tālī* […] *wa-l-khāʾ minhā naẓīr al-nāṭiq* […] *wa-l-hāʾ minhā naẓīr al-asās* […]"). See also ibid. 90–2, where the letters comprising the word *kalima* are said to parallel or to be similar to (*naẓīr*) the four "spiritual wellsprings". In addition, see ibid. 18, where the letters *kāf*, *lām*, *mīm* and *nūn* (= the letters of *kun* and the two letters located between them according to the alphabetical order) likewise correspond to (*ʿalā*) these four wellsprings. On the letters of the *shahāda* (the Islamic declaration of faith) and the four "spiritual wellsprings", see ibid. 70–3. For additional examples of the use of the expressions *bi-izāʾ*, *yuwāzī*/*tuwāzī*, *dalāla ʿalā* and *ʿalā* in order to designate the correspondences between the letters and various cosmological beings, see ibid. 72, 92–4; al-Sijistānī, *al-Iftikhār* 124–5. For the expression *kināya ʿan* ("alluding to") in this context, see ibid. 106–7.

[33] See pp. 113–4.

[34] Al-Sijistānī, *al-Yanābīʿ* 18 ("*Fa-kaʾannahu yunbiʾuka anna amr allāh al-ladhī yuqālu lahu irāda innamā arāda llāh an yuẓhira bihi l-ḥurūf al-ʿulwiyya l-sabʿa l-latī bihā anshaʾa l-ṣuwar al-rūḥāniyya*"). On the seven organs of the human body, see also ibid. 58, 80 and below p. 193.

[35] See, for example, *al-Iftikhār* 124–5, where the pair *kūnī-qadar* is said to indicate the universal soul and universal intellect respectively, as well as other spiritual and physical beings which populate the universe. Cf. al-Rāzī, *al-Iṣlāḥ* 205–6.

[36] Al-Kirmānī too addressed the motif of "the seven supreme letters" in his philosophical oeuvre. However, by interpreting "the seven supreme letters" as merely designating the lower seven intellects, al-Kirmānī divested this motif of its mythic dimension. See al-Kirmānī, *Rāḥat al-ʿaql* 104, 121, 132, 139, 147; al-Kirmānī, *al-Riyāḍ* 79, 105; Walker, *Ḥamīd al-Dīn al-Kirmānī* 96; Halm, *Kosmologie* 66; and see also above n. 13.

The combination of mythic and philosophical-Neoplatonic motifs is also characteristic of the writings of Ibn Masarra and Ibn al-ʿArabī. In his *Kitāb khawāṣṣ al-ḥurūf* ("The Book on the Properties of Letters"), Ibn Masarra perceives the letters of the Arabic alphabet in much the same way as al-Sijistānī, i.e., as signs indicating the structure of the universe, in accordance with Neoplatonic philosophy. For example, in referring to the letters *alif-lām-mīm*, which form one of the clusters of the *fawātiḥ*, Ibn Masarra explains that

> those who possess knowledge of the hidden discourse said that *a-l-m* is the great name of Allāh. The *alif* points to (*ishāra ilā*) the essence of Allāh, may He be exalted, since it is [written] separately without being attached [to other letters]. This is the primeval, eternal name which cannot be interpreted by anything more than 'He'. And given that the *lām* is the only letter that accompanies the *alif* and is attached to it, it indicates (*kānat dālla ʿalā*) the first veil and the concealed hiddenness. This is the name by which Allāh has named Himself. And since in the view of men, there is nothing after Divinity which is greater than domination, leadership and the power over things, *mīm* is the permanent name. This is why [God], powerful is He, said: 'He knows the hidden and the manifest' [see, for example, Q 13:9], for all things are two: external and inner (*ẓāhir wa-bāṭin*), and He has knowledge that encompasses both the inner and the external. That which encompasses the inner is unique to Him: it is His preserved tablet and His concealed name—the *lām*. That which encompasses the external, the universal body, is the greater soul [= the universal soul]. The latter constitutes the dominion and is that to which He, may His memory be exalted, alluded (*kanā ʿanhā*) by means of the *mīm*. The perfect knowledge of Allāh rests in the knowledge of these three names which the letters indicate (*dallat*) [...][37]

Ibn Masarra perceives the letters as indicating or alluding to the structure of reality, in accordance with Neoplatonic philosophy: the Divine essence

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[37] See Ibn Masarra, *Khawāṣṣ al-ḥurūf* 143-4 ("*Qāla ahl al-ʿilm bi-l-kalām al-bāṭinī inna a l m huwa ism allāh al-aʿẓam wa-inna l-alif ishāra ilā dhāt allāh taʿālā li-nfirād al-alif ʿan al-ittiṣāl wa-huwa l-ism al-qadīm al-azalī l-ladhī lā yufassaru bi-akthar min huwa wa-lammā kānat al-lām taṣḥabu l-alif wa-tattaṣilu bihā min bayni sā'ir al-ḥurūf kānat dālla ʿalā l-ḥijāb al-awwal wa-l-ghayb al-maknūn wa-huwa l-ism al-ladhī tasammā llāh bihi wa-lammā lam yakun baʿd al-ulūhiyya fī naẓar al-khalq aʿẓam min al-malīka* [read: *al-mamlaka*] *wa-l-tara"us wa-l-qudra ʿalā l-ashyā' wa-kānat al-mīm al-ism al-thābit wa-li-dhālika qāla ʿazza min qā'il ʿālim al-ghayb wa-l-shahāda li-anna jamīʿ al-ashyā' shay'āni ẓāhir wa-bāṭin wa-lahu ʿilm muḥīṭ bi-l-bāṭin wa-l-ẓāhir fa-l-muḥīṭ bi-l-bāṭin huwa l-ladhī nfarada bihi wa-huwa lawḥuhu l-maḥfūẓ wa-smuhu l-maknūn wa-huwa l-lām wa-l-muḥīṭ bi-l-ẓāhir al-ladhī huwa jism al-kull fa-hiya l-nafs al-kubrā wa-hiya l-mulk wa-hiya l-latī kanā ʿanhā taʿālā dhikruhu bi-l-mīm fa-kamāl maʿrifatihi fī maʿrifat hādhihi l-thalātha l-asmā' al-latī dallat al-ḥurūf ʿalayhā* [...]"). Concerning the reading "المملكة" instead of "المليكة", cf. Garrido-Clemente, Edición crítica del *K. Jawāṣṣ al-ḥurūf* 70.

is indicated by the *alif*, the universal intellect by the *lām*, and the universal soul by the *mīm*.[38] The terminology he employs in this context (*ishāra ilā, dālla ʿalā, kanā ʿan*) is familiar to us from al-Sijistānī's writings.[39]

Two themes in particular in this passage from Ibn Masarra's *Khawāṣṣ al-ḥurūf* bear a resemblance to Ismāʿīlī speculations. First, Ibn Masarra identifies the universal intellect with the name *Allāh* and "the first veil".[40] Similarly, in the myth of *Kūnī-Qadar*, the Divine names are perceived as a veil which, on the one hand, separates God's essence from the created beings and, on the other, functions as the only possible means of gaining knowledge of God. In fact, God, to whom nothing can be attributed, is called "the creator of all created beings" (*bāriʾ al-barāyā*), whereas the name *Allāh* designates *Kūnī*, and *al-Raḥmān* ("the All-Merciful") designates *Qadar*.[41] In Ismāʿīlī philosophy, *Kūnī* was replaced by the universal intellect (or by the first intellect, according to al-Kirmānī and his Ṭayyibī followers). The latter was thus identified with the name *Allāh* and was perceived as the first veil in the series of cosmic veils that separate God from man.[42] Second, Ibn Masarra associates the universal intellect and soul with the pair *bāṭin-ẓāhir*; similar speculations are found in Ismāʿīlī writings.[43]

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[38] On the *lām* as indicating the universal intellect, see also Ibn Masarra, *Khawāṣṣ al-ḥurūf* 151, where Ibn Masarra states that the *lām* alludes to God's tablet, which is the throne and the "model" (*mithāl*) according to which the existents were created. The throne and the model are identified with the universal intellect (see Ibn Masarra, *al-Iʿtibār* 184-5; Ibn Masarra, *Khawāṣṣ al-ḥurūf* 149, 152).

[39] See above n. 32; see also Ibn Masarra, *Khawāṣṣ al-ḥurūf* 136–7, 146, 151, 154–5, 157, 159–60, 164; and see also Garrido, Science 53–4.

[40] See also his interpretation of the cluster *a-l-m-ṣ* in *Khawāṣṣ al-ḥurūf* 146–51.

[41] See Stern, Earliest cosmological doctrines 7, 10–2. Note in particular the blessing *tabāraka wa-taʿālā* which is conferred on *Kūnī*, ibid. 9. See also Ibn Masarra's interpretation of the *basmala* (the formula *bi-smi llāh al-raḥmān al-raḥīm*, "in the name of Allāh, the All-Merciful and the Compassionate"), in his *Khawāṣṣ al-ḥurūf* 132–3 ("*Wa-min al-ulūhiyya maʿa l-raḥmān maʿa l-raḥīm taʿlamu anna l-ʿaql al-kullī mustaghriq fī l-nafs al-kulliyya wa-anna l-nafs al-kulliyya mustaghriqa fī juththat al-ʿālam* [. . .]"). According to this interpretation, *Allāh* designates the universal intellect and *al-Raḥmān* designates the universal soul, just as in the myth of *Kūnī-Qadar*, the two supreme beings following *bāriʾ al-barāyā* are called *Allāh* and *al-Raḥmān*.

[42] See, for example, al-Kirmānī, *Rāḥat al-ʿAql* 64, 87–8; al-Kirmānī, *al-Muḍīʾa* 56–7; al-Ḥāmidī, *Kanz al-walad* 44, 68, 79, 98, 157; see also (Pseudo?) Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ, *Jāmiʿat al-jāmiʿa* 338; and Halm, *Kosmologie* 88–9. Note that al-Sijistānī too links the name *Allāh* with the universal intellect: as explained above (see p. 84), according to al-Sijistānī, the letters of *Allāh* indicate the universal intellect and soul as well as their terrestrial equivalents, the *nāṭiq* and the *asās*. See also al-Daylamī, *Qawāʿid ʿaqāʾid āl Muḥammad* 53–4.

[43] See, for example, Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ, *al-Jāmiʿa* ii, 7–8, 11. Note, however, that the Ikhwān define the intellect as *ẓāhir* and the soul as *bāṭin*, since the powers of the soul, which are active in this world, are hidden and unseen. One may add that in Twelver sources (see

Neoplatonic notions appear in other passages as well in Ibn Massara's *Khawāṣṣ al-ḥurūf*.[44] As in the writings of Abū Ḥātim al-Rāzī and Abū Yaʿqūb al-Sijistānī, this work of Ibn Masarra too abounds with mythic motifs. Two of these motifs in particular merit a close examination: the *kun* and the *habāʾ* (literally, "dust", see below). According to one conception conveyed by Ibn Masarra, the letters composing *kun* (*kāf* and *nūn*), or, alternatively, the letters of the *habāʾ* (that is, all the letters of the Arabic alphabet), are the building blocks of creation. According to another conception expressed by Ibn Masarra, the *fawātiḥ* are the building blocks of creation. An example of the first conception is found in Ibn Masarra's explanation of the letters *k-h-y-ʿ-ṣ*, which form one of the clusters of the *fawātiḥ*:

> Some say that the meaning of *kāf* is that it is the *kāf* of *kun*, the word which is the cause of all being [...]
>
> The [letter] *hāʾ* comes after *kun* [which is indicated by the letter *kāf* in the cluster *k-h-y-ʿ-ṣ*], since it is the dust (*habāʾ*): these are the letters articulated by Allāh before creation. From them were composed the inner matters which are uncompounded spiritual powers (*wa-minhā taʾallafat al-umūr al-bāṭina wa-hiya qiwā mufrada nafsāniyya*). This is why the speaking faculty is one level above the letters [i.e. *kāf* is above *hāʾ* in the cluster *k-h-y-ʿ-ṣ*], for when you want to express a certain meaning, you compose speech from the letters, cover the speech with a spirit, and then it appears to the sense of hearing [...]

Further on, Ibn Masarra explains that

> the Creator, may He be exalted, willed things at first. Then He rendered them firm and sound, arranging them in their various levels and giving them their forms; and He finally manifested this by means of His command. The command is a speaking faculty, composed letters, a delimited spirit and indicated knowledge.[45]

Amir-Moezzi, La Préexistence 112–3) as well as in the Ismāʿīlī *Kitāb al-kashf* (42–3, 48), the *ʿarsh* (God's throne) is linked to the *bāṭin* while the *kursī* (His footstool) is linked to the *ẓāhir*. In Ismāʿīlī Neoplatonic philosophy and in Ibn Masarra's thought, the *ʿarsh* is identified with the universal intellect and the *kursī* with the universal soul (see above p. 50 n. 64, p. 52).

[44] See, for example, *Khawāṣṣ al-ḥurūf* 146–51 (on the letters *a-l-m-ṣ*), 162–6 ("al-qawl fī tartīb hādhihi l-suwar").

[45] See Ibn Masarra, *Khawāṣṣ al-ḥurūf* 153 ("*Al-qawl ʿalā khyʿṣ ammā hādhihi fa-qīla inna maʿnā l-kāf hiya kāf al-kun wa-hiya l-kalima l-latī hiya ʿillat al-kawn kullihi* [...]"; "*Wa-l-hāʾ baʿd al-kun li-annahā hiya l-habāʾ wa-hiya l-ḥurūf al-latī naṭaqa llāh bihā min qabli l-khalq wa-minhā taʾallafat al-umūr al-bāṭina wa-hiya qiwā mufrada nafsāniyya wa-li*[*dhālika*] *ṣārat al-quwwa l-nāṭiqa fī l-martaba fawqa l-ḥurūf fa-idhā aradta l-taʿbīr ʿan al-maʿānī allafta min al-ḥurūf kalāman wa-kasathu* [read: *wa-kasawtahu*] *rūḥan fa-ẓahara lil-samʿ* [...]"), 154 ("[...] *Li-anna l-bāriʾ taʿālā arāda l-ashyāʾ awwalan fa-aḥkamahā*

The mythic dimension in Ibn Masarra's explanation is quite evident: God creates the world through the articulation of the letters which form the basis of the universe. This mythic dimension and the emphasis on *kun* and its letters is common to both Ibn Masarra and the Ismāʿīlī authors.

According to the second conception mentioned above, the *fawātiḥ* are the building blocks of the universe:

> Those who possess knowledge of the hidden realm have stated that the letters at the beginning of the *sūra*s are the root of all things. From them Allāh manifested His knowledge and from them are the prophets. Indeed, Sahl b. ʿAbdallāh al-Tustarī has said that the letters are the dust: they are the root of things at the beginning of their creation. From them the command was composed and the dominion appeared.

According to Ibn Masarra, God rendered the number of the letters twenty-eight: fourteen "manifest" (*ẓāhira*) and fourteen "hidden" (*bāṭina*). The hidden letters are the *fawātiḥ*, and their secret was given to the Prophet Muḥammad; they are therefore not only the source of creation but also the source of prophetic knowledge.[46] Elsewhere, Ibn Masarra links the fourteen *fawātiḥ* to the fourteen "roots of things" (*uṣūl al-ashyāʾ*) from which all beings were created: the pen and the tablet (*qalam* and *lawḥ*, both identified by Ibn Masarra with the universal intellect), the *kun* and the letter *ṣād* (identified with the universal soul), air (*hawāʾ*), the cloud (*ʿamāʾ*) which is the dust (*habāʾ*), wind (*rīḥ*), the atmospheric air (*jaww*), water, fire, light, darkness (*ẓulma*) and clay (*ṭīn*).[47] This list of primordial

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wa-rattabahā wa-ṣawwarahā thumma aẓhara dhālika bi-amrihi wa-l-amr quwwa nāṭiqa wa-ḥurūf muʾallafa wa-rūḥ maḥṣūra wa-ʿilm madlūl ʿalayhi"). See also ibid. 141, 155, 161; on "the speaking faculty" see below n. 103.

[46] See Ibn Masarra, *Khawāṣṣ al-ḥurūf* 135 ("*Zaʿama ahl al-ʿilm bi-l-bāṭin anna l-ḥurūf al-latī fī mabādiʾ al-suwar annahā aṣl li-jamīʿ al-ashyāʾ wa-minhā aẓhara llāh ʿilmahu wa-anna minhā l-anbiyāʾ wa-qad qāla sahl bnu ʿabdillāh al-tustarī inna l-ḥurūf hiya l-habāʾ wa-hiya aṣl al-ashyāʾ fī awwal khilqatihā wa-minhā taʾallafa l-amr wa-ẓahara l-mulk* […]"; "[…] *Li-annahā ḥawl maʿa* [read: *jawāmiʿ*] *ʿilmihi wa-tadbīrihi wa-munbiʾa ʿan irādatihi wa-dālla ʿalā ḥikmatihi wa-kull ḥarf minhā āya min āyātihi wa-ṣifa min ṣifātihi fa-man aḥāṭa bi-maʿrifatihā fa-qad iṭṭalaʿa ʿalā maʿnā min al-nubuwwa*"). Concerning the reading "جوامع" instead of "حول مع", cf. Garrido-Clemente, Edición crítica del *K. Jawāṣṣ al-ḥurūf* 63, who reads "محولة إلى".

[47] See Ibn Masarra, *Khawāṣṣ al-ḥurūf* 155–6. Cf. Garrido-Clemente, Edición crítica del *K. Jawāṣṣ al-ḥurūf* 79: the author prefers the reading "والعماء والهباء" ("and the cloud and the dust") instead of "والعماء وهو الهباء" ("and the cloud which is the dust"), thus totaling fourteen "roots of things" rather than thirteen. On the identification of the pen-tablet with the universal intellect and the *kun*-*ṣād* with the universal soul, see also *Khawāṣṣ al-ḥurūf* 154. Note that the letter *ṣād* mentioned above signifies "the place" (*makān*) where all beings were created. On the cosmogonic role of "the cloud" in *Ḥadīth* literature, see above p. 55 n. 82; on the cosmogonic role of the throne, water and air in the Quran, in *Ḥadīth* literature

entities brings to mind a similar list in *al-ʿĀlim wa-l-ghulām* which is likewise linked to the theme of cosmogonic letters.[48]

Ibn Masarra attributes his speculations on *kun* and the *habāʾ* to Sahl al-Tustarī, the famous Sufi master (d. in 283/896). However, this attribution seems to be erroneous: the statements regarding *kun* and the *habāʾ* in Ibn Masarra's work do not tally with the teachings of Sahl as reflected in classical Sufi sources. Moreover, although the term *habāʾ* does appear in the Quran (see Q 25:23; 56:6) and in certain sayings ascribed to Sahl in Sufi works, it lacks the cosmogonic-cosmological context in which it is employed by Ibn Masarra.[49] The cosmogonic-cosmological dimension of *habāʾ* is found rather in *Kitāb al-taṣrīf*, a Neoplatonic work which belongs to the Shiʿi-Ismāʿīlī corpus attributed to Jābir b. Ḥayyān.[50] In this work, the *habāʾ* signifies the matter (*hayūlā*) or substance (*jawhar*) situated below (or encircled by) the universal soul. According to the cosmological scheme of *Kitāb al-taṣrīf*, the *habāʾ* is followed by the four natures/qualities (heat, cold, dryness and humidity); following the latter are the various celestial spheres, the spheres of the four elements (fire, air, water and earth) and the sub-lunar world. In the Jābirian corpus, the *habāʾ* (or the matter/substance) is defined as "the root of all things" (*aṣl al-ashyāʾ kullihā*).[51] Now, as mentioned above, Ibn Masarra holds that the *habāʾ*, which he identifies with the cosmogonic letters, is "the root of things" (*aṣl al-ashyāʾ*); from the letters or *habāʾ* "were composed the inner matters which are uncompounded spiritual powers (*wa-minhā taʾallafat al-umūr al-bāṭina wa-hiya qiwā mufrada nafsāniyya*)".[52] In the Jābirian corpus, the term *mufradāt* signifies the four natures which follow the *habāʾ*.[53] As we shall see below, according to the Jābirian view, the natures correspond to the letters of the alphabet—just as all things in the sub-lunar world are composed of natures, so too words are composed of letters. Consequently, the letters indicate the natures. The similarity between Ibn

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and in Ismāʿīlī mythical writings, see the references in Ebstein and Sviri, So-called *Risālat al-ḥurūf* 250.

48 See above n. 18.

49 See Ebstein and Sviri, So-called *Risālat al-ḥurūf*, especially pp. 221–4.

50 On this corpus see above pp. 30–2. *Kitāb al-taṣrīf* deals with issues such as cosmology, the four natures, "the science of balance" and "the balance of the letters" (on these terms see below pp. 96–7). The title of this work is translated by Kraus as "le livre de la Transmutation; ou de la Morphologie"; see Kraus, *Jābir ibn Ḥayyān* i, 98. On the term *taṣrīf* see Kraus, *Jābir ibn Ḥayyān* ii, index, s.v. "*taṣrīf*".

51 See Kraus, *Jābir ibn Ḥayyān* ii, 10 n. 3, 142, 152, 153 n. 2, 154 n. 6, 170 n. 3.

52 See above pp. 88–9.

53 See Kraus, *Jābir ibn Ḥayyān* ii, 157 n. 4, 166, 173 nn. 1–2.

Masarra's notion of the *habāʾ* and that of the Jābirian authors is striking: both endow the *habāʾ* with a cosmological dimension, and link it—directly (Ibn Masarra) or indirectly (the Jābirian authors)—to the letters of the alphabet. Notwithstanding the essential differences in this context between Ibn Masarra and the Jābirian authors—the latter do not identify the *habāʾ* itself with the letters, nor do they perceive the letters as playing a cosmogonic-cosmological role—it seems that Ibn Masarra's speculations on the *habāʾ* and those found in the Jābriain corpus are closely related.

Further evidence for the Shiʿi-Ismāʿīlī provenance of the term *habāʾ* in its cosmogonic-cosmological context is found in Ibn al-ʿArabī's *al-Futūḥāt al-makkiyya*. As in the Jābirian corpus, Ibn al-ʿArabī too views the *habāʾ* as situated below the universal soul, or more precisely: below nature (*ṭabīʿa*) which is located beneath the universal soul. In various passages, Ibn al-ʿArabī states that the term *habāʾ* originates in a tradition which goes back to ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib, and in one passage he claims that this term was mentioned by ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib, Sahl b. ʿAbdallāh (al-Tustarī) and other men who were granted mystical unveilings.[54] It should be noted, however, that Ibn al-ʿArabī links the *habāʾ* situated below the universal soul with *al-ḥaqīqa l-kulliyya* / *ḥaqīqat al-ḥaqāʾiq* ("the universal true essence" / "the true essence of all true essences"), which, according to Ibn al-ʿArabī's metaphysical system, functions as an intermediary between God and creation. Alternatively, he links the *habāʾ* with *nafas al-raḥmān* ("the breath of the All-Merciful"), which is identical to the *ʿamāʾ* ("cloud") and is located above the universal intellect. According to Ibn al-ʿArabī, *nafas al-raḥmān* / the *ʿamāʾ* receives the various forms of the created universe and manifests itself through them, in the same way that the *habāʾ*, which is a substance (*jawhar*) or matter (*hayūlā*), receives the diverse forms of nature and manifests itself through them. At times, Ibn al-ʿArabī explicitly employs the term *habāʾ* in order to designate the *ʿamāʾ*.[55] It is possible

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[54] See Ibn al-ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt* i, 169 (chapter 6, = ʿUthmān Yaḥyā's edition ii, 226; and cf. ibid. 201, chapter 13, = ʿUthmān Yaḥyā's edition ii, 349–50), 172 (chapter 7, = ʿUthmān Yaḥyā's edition ii, 236), ii, 424-6 (chapter 198, *faṣl* 14).

[55] See, in addition to the references given in the previous note, Ibn al-ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt* i, 122 (chapter 2, "maʿrifat alif al-lām al", = ʿUthmān Yaḥyā's edition i, 331–3), 167 (the beginning of chapter 6, = ʿUthmān Yaḥyā's edition ii, 220), 192 (chapter 11, = ii, 316), ii, 389 (chapter 198), 662–3 (chapter 295); Ibn al-ʿArabī, *al-Tadbīrāt* 168; Ibn al-ʿArabī, *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam* 144, 219; see also *al-Futūḥāt* iv, 229 (chapter 558, "ḥaḍrat al-rafʿa"); and cf. Asín Palacios, *Mystical philosophy* 125–7. In these passages, Ibn al-ʿArabī also employs the terms *jawhar*, *al-jawhar al-habāʾī*, *al-jawhar al-hayūlānī* or *al-hayūlā l-kull* in order to signify the *habāʾ*.

that this identification of the *habā'* with the *'amā'* is influenced by Ibn Masarra's *Kitāb khawāṣṣ al-ḥurūf*.[56] Be that as it may, the basic meaning of the term *habā'* in Ibn al-'Arabī's writings seems to derive from the Jābirian corpus. The ascription of this term to 'Alī (among others) strengthens the hypothesis concerning its Shi'i-Ismā'īlī origin.

Ibn al-'Arabī's conceptions regarding the letters of the Arabic alphabet likewise bear resemblance to Shi'i-Ismā'īlī notions. Like the Ismā'īlī Neoplatonists examined above and Ibn Masarra, Ibn al-'Arabī combines in his treatment of the letters mythic themes with Neoplatonic schemes. This is clearly reflected in chapters 2 and 198 of his *al-Futūḥāt al-makkiyya*. Chapter 2 will be analyzed below, since it deals, *inter alia*, with the relationship between letters and the four natures; chapter 198, dedicated to the concept of *nafas al-raḥmān*, will be discussed here. As we have seen in the previous chapter,[57] Ibn al-'Arabī perceives Divine creation as corresponding to human speech which consists of breathing, the pronunciation of letters according to the various points of articulation (*makhārij*) and the assembling of the letters into words (= the existents). Letters are therefore the basic elements or building blocks of reality. The mythic dimension of this conception is evident not only in the attribution of breathing and speaking to God but also in the literary manner in which Ibn al-'Arabī chooses to describe the act of Divine creation:

> We say: the breath itself is the cloud, for the expression 'the breath of he who breathes' does not mean that this breath is like wind, but rather that it is like vapor. This is the true essence of any given breath. From [the breath] came the cloud, just like a cloud is formed from the vapor which originates in the humidity of the [four] elements: the [vapor] ascends and rises, and, at first, the cloud emerges from it. Then, subsequently, it becomes thicker, the air carries it and the wind drives it. Hence, it is not the air itself but the vapor itself. This is why it is said, concerning the cloud in which our Lord was situated before creation, that it was a cloud above which and below which no air was found.[58] He [the Prophet Muḥammad, to whom this tradi-

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The use of the terms *jawhar* and *hayūlā* for *habā'* is familiar from the Jābirian corpus; see the references to Kraus above in n. 51.

[56] See above n. 47: it is possible that Ibn Masarra himself identified the *habā'* with the *'amā'*, in which case Ibn al-'Arabī may have been influenced by him in this regard. Alternatively, if the identification between the two terms originated with some later copyist of *Kitāb khawāṣṣ al-ḥurūf*, it is possible that this copyist was influenced by Ibn al-'Arabī's writings.

[57] See especially pp. 53–7.

[58] Or, "[…] above which and below which [only] air was found". On this mythic tradition, see above p. 55 n. 82.

> tion regarding the cloud is attributed] stated that the [cloud] has an upper aspect, which means that the Truth was in it, and a lower aspect, which means that the world was in it. Thus, there was nothing there except the breath of the Truth and within it the air. Then, both stormy and moderate winds blew—these are the strong letters [i.e., *alif, bāʾ, tāʾ, jīm, dāl, ṭāʾ, qāf, kāf*] and the lax letters [*thāʾ, ḥāʾ, khāʾ, dhāl, zāy, sīn, shīn, ṣād, ḍād, ẓāʾ, ghayn, fāʾ, hāʾ*]. From this breath, sounds of thunder appeared like the vocal letters [*alif, hamza, bāʾ, jīm, dāl, dhāl, rāʾ, zāy, ḍād, ṭāʾ, ẓāʾ, ʿayn, ghayn, qāf, lām, mīm, nūn, wāw, yāʾ*], and a light breeze—these are the non-vocal letters [*tāʾ, thāʾ, ḥāʾ, khāʾ, sīn, shīn, ṣād, fāʾ, kāf, hāʾ*]. Then the layers (*al-ṭibāq*) of the celestial spheres appeared, like the emphatic letters [*al-ḥurūf al-muṭbaqa*: *ṣād, ḍād, ṭāʾ, ẓāʾ*] in the breath of a human being who intends to speak. In the Divine sciences, this is 'if We will [something], [all] We say to it is 'be!'' [see, for example, Q 16:40]. So, the emphatic letters in the Divine breath are the existence of the heavens in seven layers [...][59]

The mythic elements in this passage are quite striking: the Divine breath is accompanied by storms, winds and thunders; the natural phenomena and the beings that are created during this process are all a product of the Divine letters, articulated by God Himself. To be sure, the thunders are "like the vocal letters", and the celestial spheres are "like the emphatic letters"—in other words, the Divine creation corresponds to human speech, but is not identical to it. Similarly, the mythic tradition concerning the primordial Divine cloud is here also given an allegorical interpretation: God and the world were in some way united before creation. However, the phrasing of the passage discussed here indicates that Ibn al-ʿArabī did not interpret the idea of Divine creative speech in a strictly allegorical sense, and that he deliberately chose not to eliminate the mythic dimension inherent in the notion of letters as the building blocks of reality.

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[59] Ibn al-ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt* ii, 386 (the beginning of chapter 198: "[...] *Fa-qulnā ʿayn al-nafas huwa l-ʿamāʾ fa-inna nafas al-mutanaffis al-maqṣūd bi-l-ʿibāra ʿanhu mā yatanazzalu manzilat al-rīḥ wa-innamā yatanazzalu manzilat al-bukhār fa-l-nafas hādhā ḥaqīqatuhu ḥaythu kāna fa-kāna ʿanhu l-ʿamāʾ kamā yaḥduthu l-ʿamāʾ ʿan bukhār ruṭūbāt al-arkān fa-yaṣʿadu wa-yaʿlū fa-yaẓharu minhu l-ʿamāʾ awwalan thumma baʿda dhālika yakthufu wa-l-hawāʾ yaḥmiluhu wa-l-rīḥ tasūquhu fa-mā huwa ʿayn al-hawāʾ wa-innamā huwa ʿayn al-bukhār wa-li-dhālika jāʾa fī ṣifat al-ʿamāʾ al-ladhī kāna fīhi rabbunā qabla khalq al-khalq annahu ʿamāʾ mā fawqahu hawāʾ wa-mā taḥtahu hawāʾ fa-dhakara anna lahu l-fawq wa-huwa kawn al-ḥaqq fīhi wa-l-taḥt wa-huwa kawn al-ʿālam fīhi fa-lam yakun thamma ghayr nafas al-ḥaqq fa-fīhi yakūnu l-hawāʾ wa-jarat al-riyāḥ mā bayna zaʿzaʿ wa-rukhāʾ wa-hiya l-ḥurūf al-shadīda wa-l-rikhwa wa-ẓahara ʿan hādhā l-nafas aṣwāt al-ruʿūd ka-l-ḥurūf al-majhūra wa-hubūb al-nasīm wa-hiya l-ḥurūf al-mahmūsa wa-ẓaharat al-ṭibāq fī l-aflāk ka-l-ḥurūf al-muṭbaqa min tanaffus al-insān bi-l-qawl idhā qaṣadahu wa-huwa fī l-ilāhiyyāt idhā aradnāhu an naqūla lahu kun fa-l-ḥurūf al-muṭbaqa fī l-nafas al-ilāhī wujūd sabʿ samawāt ṭibāqan wa-kull mawjūd fī l-ʿālam ʿalā jihat al-inṭibāq*").

The emphasis on articulation in the context of cosmogonic or cosmological letters is common to Ibn al-ʿArabī's teachings and to al-Sijistānī's thought. As explained above,[60] al-Sijistānī holds that the order of the letters, according to their articulation points (*makhārij*), corresponds to the hierarchal structure of the universe, in line with Neoplatonic cosmology. The various existents in this universe all derive, in varying degrees, from God's creative word—the *kalima*, which is situated above the universal intellect. Ibn al-ʿArabī too views the hierarchal structure of the universe as corresponding to the order of the alphabetical letters, according to their different points of articulation. Although al-Sijistānī refers in this context only to the letters *ʿayn, ḥāʾ, khāʾ* and *hāʾ*, and to the universal intellect, the universal soul, the *nāṭiq* and the *asās*, the basic principle is the same as that reflected in chapter 198 of Ibn al-ʿArabī's *Futūḥāt*. Thus, according to Ibn al-ʿArabī, the first created being to emerge out of *nafas al-raḥmān* or the *ʿamāʾ* was the universal intellect; from the latter, the universal soul emanated; and from the universal soul, in turn, the remaining levels of the cosmic hierarchy came into being, all in accordance with Neoplatonic cosmology. Every one of these levels—twenty-eight in number—corresponds to a certain letter of the Arabic alphabet, as well as to a specific Divine name and to one of the twenty eight lunar mansions (*manāzil*).[61] It is important to remember that in Ibn al-ʿArabī's mystical-metaphysical worldview, creation is a product of the Divine names, a locus for their manifestation.[62] Hence, every level of the cosmic hierarchy is produced by a certain Divine name (see table 1).[63]

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[60] See p. 84.

[61] This term appears already in the Quran; see Q 10:5; 36:39. On the letters and the lunar mansions, see also below pp. 103–8.

[62] See Chittick, *Sufi path* 8–11, 16, 33–58, 94–6; Elmore, Four texts.

[63] See Ibn al-ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt* ii, 389 (chapter 198). Note that the order of the letters in this chapter, according to their modes of articulation, is almost identical to the order of the letters as found in *Futūḥāt* i, 109–19 (= ʿUthmān Yaḥyā's edition i, 295–323). Ibn Masarra too sees a basic correspondence between the order of the letters, according to their points of articulation (*makhārij*), and the hierarchal structure of the universe, in accordance with Neoplatonic cosmology; see Ibn Masarra, *Khawāṣṣ al-ḥurūf* 139–41 (on the letters *hāʾ*, *hamza*, *alif*, *wāw* and *yāʾ*); and cf. Ibn al-ʿArabī's discussion of the letters *alif*, *wāw* and *yāʾ* in *al-Futūḥāt* ii, 385–6 (the beginning of chapter 198).

Table 1.

The Created Being	Its Creative Divine Name	The Corresponding Letter	The Corresponding Lunar Mansion
1. The Universal Intellect	*al-Badīʿ* (The Originator of Creation)[64]	*hamza*	*al-Sharaṭān*
2. The Universal Soul	*al-Bāʿith* (He Who Causes Emanation/Resurrection)[65]	*hāʾ*	*al-Buṭayn*
3. Nature (*ṭabīʿa*)	*al-Bāṭin* (The Hidden)	*ʿayn*	*al-Thurayyā*
4. *Habāʾ*	*al-Ākhir* (The Last)	*ḥāʾ*	*al-Dabarān*
5. The Universal Body (*al-jism al-kull*)	*al-Ẓāhir* (The Manifest)	*ghayn*	*al-Hakʿa* / *Maysān*
6. The Form (*al-shakl*)	*al-Ḥakīm* (The Wise)	*khāʾ*	*al-Taḥiyya* / *al-Hanʿa*
7. The Throne	*al-Muḥīṭ* (The All-Encompassing)	*qāf*	*al-Dhirāʿ*
8. The Footstool	*al-Shakūr* (The Grateful)[66]	*kāf*	*al-Nathra*
9. The Zodiac (*al-falak al-aṭlas*)	*al-Ghanī* (The Self-Sufficient)	*jīm*	*al-Ṭarf*
10. The Sphere of the Fixed Stars (*falak al-kawākib al-thābita*)	*al-Muqaddir* (He Who Decrees/Allots)	*shīn*	*al-Jabha*
11. The First Heaven	*al-Rabb* (The Lord)	*yāʾ*	*al-Kharātān*
12. The Second Heaven	*al-ʿAlīm* (The All-Knower)	*ḍād*	*al-Ṣarfa*
13. The Third Heaven	*al-Qāhir* (He Who Subdues)	*lām*	*al-ʿAwwā*
14. The Fourth Heaven	*al-Nūr* (The Light)	*nūn*	*al-Simāk al-aʿzal*

[64] The Divine names *al-badīʿ* and *al-bāʿith* are based, in this cosmological context, on Neoplatonic terminology. The term *ibdāʿ* (from the same root as *badīʿ*), signifying Divine creation *ex nihilo*, appeared as early as the 9th century in the circle of al-Kindī, and is very common in Ismāʿīlī Neoplatonic writings. *Ibdāʿ* typically refers to the creation of the universal intellect by God, whereas *inbiʿāth* designates the emanation of the universal soul from the universal intellect. *Inbiʿāth* also carries an eschatological connotation: to be resurrected. See Altmann and Stern, *Isaac Israeli* 68–74; Walker, *Early philosophical Shiism* 41, 53, 57, 76, 82–6; Blumenthal, On the theories. Ibn al-ʿArabī makes the same distinction as the Ismāʿīlī authors between *ibdāʿ* (pertaining to the universal intellect) and *inbiʿāth* (the universal soul); see, for example, *al-Futūḥāt* i, 140 (chapter 3, = ʿUthmān Yaḥyā's edition ii, 97), ii, 279 (chapter 167), 414–22 (chapter 198, *faṣl* 11–2), 662 (chapter 295), iii, 387 (chapter 369, *waṣl* 19).

[65] See the previous note.

[66] I.e., He who rewards or forgives much.

cont.

The Created Being	Its Creative Divine Name	The Corresponding Letter	The Corresponding Lunar Mansion
15. The Fifth Heaven	*al-Muṣawwir* (The Giver of Forms)	*rāʾ*	*al-Ghafr*
16. The Sixth Heaven	*al-Muḥṣī* (The Enumerator)[67]	*ṭāʾ*	*al-Zubānā*
17. The Seventh Heaven	*al-Matīn* (The Strong)	*dāl*	*al-Iklīl*
18. The Sphere (*kurra*) of Fire	*al-Qābiḍ* (The Taker of Souls / The Withholder)	*tāʾ*	*al-Qalb*
19. The Sphere of Air	*al-Ḥayy* (The Living)	*zāy*	*al-Shawla*
20. The Sphere of Water	*al-Muḥyī* (The Giver of Life)	*sīn*	*al-Naʿāʾim*
21. The Sphere of Earth	*al-Mumīt* (He Who Causes Death)	*ṣād*	*al-Balda*
22. Minerals	*al-ʿAzīz* (The Mighty)	*ẓāʾ*	*Saʿd al-dhābiḥ*
23. Plants	*al-Razzāq* (The Provider)	*thāʾ*	*Saʿd bulaʿ*
24. Animals	*al-Mudhill* (He Who Abases)	*dhāl*	*Saʿd al-suʿūd*
25. Angels	*al-Qawī* (The Powerful)	*fāʾ*	*Saʿd al-akhbiya*
26. Genies	*al-Laṭīf* (The Benevolent)	*bāʾ*	*Fargh al-dalw al-muqaddam*
27. Human Beings	*al-Jāmiʿ* (The Gatherer)[68]	*mīm*	*Fargh al-dalw al-muʾakhkhar*
28. The Level (*al-martaba*) = the Goal (*al-ghāya*)	*Rafīʿ al-darajāt* (The Exalted One in Respect of Degrees)	*wāw*	*al-Rishāʾ*

Ibn al-ʿArabī's speculations on the letters also entail a somewhat more 'scientific' aspect, related to the connection between letters and the four natures. This aspect too links him to the Shiʿi-Ismāʿīlī tradition.

The Letters and the Four Natures

Letters play a significant role in the scientific-alchemical theories of the Shiʿī-Ismāʿīlī corpus attributed to Jābir b. Ḥayyān.[69] In various works that

[67] Or, He who counts everything, that is, nothing escapes Him.
[68] I.e. He who gathers all created beings on the day of resurrection.
[69] On this corpus see above in the Introduction pp. 30–2.

belong to this corpus, the treatment of the letters forms an integral part of "the science of the balance" (*ʿilm al-mīzān*), and is consequently called "the balance of the letters" (*mīzān al-ḥurūf*). "The science of the balance" is based on the assumption that all existent things in the sub-lunar world can be measured and quantified by discovering the exact ratio between the four natures or qualities of which they are composed (heat, cold, humidity and dryness). This science constitutes the basis of alchemy, since, according to the Jābirian theory, changing the ratio between the four natures enables one to manipulate matter. "The balance of the letters" assumes a correspondence between the letters and the four natures: words are composed of letters in the same way that existent things are composed of natures. Moreover, the letters indicate the quantitative and qualitative structure of the objects signified by the words which the letters comprise. Hence, in order to discover the inner structure of any existent thing—i.e., the ratio between its four natures—one must analyze the letters that comprise the name signifying that very thing. "The science of the balance" and "the balance of the letters" derive from various Greek and Hellenistic conceptions, mainly those originating in the Platonic and Pythagorean traditions.[70]

The Jābirian linkage of the letters to the four natures resurfaces in the writings of Ibn al-ʿArabī. In the second chapter of his *Futūḥāt*—the main chapter in this work dealing with the subject of letters—Ibn al-ʿArabī presents different classifications of the Arabic letters. The first classification is based on the tripartite connection between the letters, the four natures and the celestial spheres (*aflāk*). Thus, the simple letters of the alphabet[71] are divided into four "levels" (*marātib*), according to the number of spheres from which each letter emanates. Each letter is further characterized by two of the four natures, which also emanate from the motions of the spheres. In addition, every one of the four categories of existents—Divinity, human beings, genies and angels—is linked to one of the four levels.[72] The terms which Ibn al-ʿArabī employs in order to

[70] See Kraus, *Jābir ibn Ḥayyān* ii, 187–270; Lory, *Alchimie* 130–50. Note that in Greek, the word *stoicheion* signifies, *inter alia*, both "letter" and "element"; see Weiss, *A conceptual examination* 39, 216–8; Bitton-Ashkelony, Counseling 188–90.

[71] *Basā'iṭ al-ḥurūf*, i.e. the letters that compose the name of any given letter. For example, the *basā'iṭ* of the letter *ʿayn* (عين = ع(ين, ياء, نون) are *yā'*, *nūn*, *alif*, *hamza* and *wāw*.

[72] For instance, "the ninth level" is linked to the genies and includes the letters *ʿayn* (whose nature is cold and dryness), *ghayn* (cold and dryness), *sīn* (heat and dryness) and *shīn* (heat and dryness). Every one of these letters is produced from the motion of nine celestial spheres. In addition, the spheres from which the letters *ʿayn* and *ghayn* are produced also function as the source of cold and dryness, whereas the spheres from which *sīn* and *shīn* are produced function as the source of heat and dryness. The genies likewise

signify the four natures (*al-ʿanāṣir al-uwal*) or the simple letters (*basā'iṭ*) likewise denote the natures in the Jābirian corpus.[73] In addition, in Ibn al-ʿArabī's works, the term *imtizāj* signifies the merging of the natures into four pairs from which the four elements are formed (heat + dryness = fire, heat + humidity = air, cold + humidity = water, cold + dryness = earth). Similarly, in the Jābirian corpus, *imtizāj* denotes the merging of the natures with one another as well as their merging with the *habā'* which precedes them in the cosmic hierarchy.[74] Moreover, in various other discussions of the letters found in his works, Ibn al-ʿArabī explicitly mentions Jābir b. Ḥayyān or "the disciple of Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq".[75] Notwithstanding his disagreements with Jābir on different issues (see below), it is clear that Ibn al-ʿArabī was influenced by Jābirian concepts related to the connection between the four natures and the letters.[76]

There are, however, essential differences in this context between Ibn al-ʿArabī and the Jābirian corpus. To begin with, according to the first classification of the letters presented in the second chapter of the *Futūḥāt*, the Arabic letters, like the natures, emanate from the celestial spheres, and hence are perceived as concrete building blocks of reality. In contradistinction, according to the Jābirian theory, the letters do not exist on

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come from the spheres of this ninth level. See Ibn al-ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt* i, 94–5 (chapter 2, *faṣl* 1, = ʿUthmān Yaḥyā's edition i, 232–8). For a general analysis of chapter 2 of the *Futūḥāt* and for translations of selected sections from it, see Gril, Science; see also Lory, *La Science* 115–36; Lory, Symbolism.

[73] See Kraus, *Jābir ibn Ḥayyān* ii, 147 n. 7, 165 n. 6, 173 n. 2, 179 n. 3. For the expression *al-ʿanāṣir al-uwal* in Ibn al-ʿArabī's writings, see *al-Futūḥāt* i, 95 (chapter 2, *faṣl* 1, = ʿUthmān Yaḥyā's edition i, 234–5). Ibn al-ʿArabī also refers to the letters as *mufradāt* ("uncompounded units") and to the words composed of them as the product of *tarkīb* ("composition"); see ibid. i, 130 (chapter 2, *faṣl* 2, = ʿUthmān Yaḥyā's edition ii, 53–4), ii, 386 (chapter 198), iii, 507 (chapter 384). In the Jābirian corpus (and presumably in al-Nasafī's thought as well, see Halm, *Kosmologie* 224), the term *mufradāt* signifies the natures and the term *murakkabāt* signifies the elements composed of them; see above n. 53.

[74] See Ibn al-ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt* i, 98 (chapter 2, *faṣl* 1, = ʿUthmān Yaḥyā's edition i, 246–7), ii, 386 (chapter 198); Kraus, *Jābir ibn Ḥayyān* ii, 167–8. On the importance of the term *mizāj* in the Jābirian corpus, see ibid. 311 and n. 5; and see also Walker, *Early philosophical Shiism* 58–9.

[75] See Ibn al-ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt* i, 250 (chapter 26, = ʿUthmān Yaḥyā's edition iii, 204); Ibn al-ʿArabī, *Kitāb al-mīm* 4–6; Ibn al-ʿArabī, *ʿUqlat al-mustawfiz* 67 (see also Kraus, *Jābir ibn Ḥayyān* ii, 244 n. 11); Ibn al-ʿArabī, *al-Tajalliyyāt* 41 (see also Kraus, *Jābir ibn Ḥayyān* ii, 266 n. 1; Pseudo al-Majrīṭī, *Ghāyat al-ḥakīm* 7); and Gril, Science 124, 128–30.

[76] See also Ibn al-ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt* i, 98–9 (chapter 2, *faṣl* 1, = ʿUthmān Yaḥyā's edition i, 248, 250); and see also Gril, Science 203 nn. 200–1; Kraus, *Jābir ibn Ḥayyān* ii, 326–7; Sezgin, *Geschichte* iii, 71, 86.

a cosmological level, although they do indicate the four natures.[77] Second, from one passage in chapter 2 of the *Futūḥāt*, one may infer that the four natures do not exist on their own cosmological level, but are rather found only as components of the four elements—in contradistinction to the Jābirian theory and contrary to what Ibn al-ʿArabī himself says in other passages in his work.[78] Third, the classification of the letters and the four natures which appears at the beginning of the second chapter of the *Futūḥāt* is considerably different from the Jābirian classification.[79] In chapter 26 of the *Futūḥāt*, Ibn al-ʿArabī overtly criticizes the Jābirian classification.[80] Moreover, throughout the second chapter of the *Futūḥāt*, Ibn al-ʿArabī presents additional classifications of the letters that are significantly different from the first one found at the beginning of this chapter. One such classification is semi-scientific like the first one—that is, the letters are linked to the spheres and to the four elements (not to the four natures)—yet is different in its details.[81] The other classifications are not at all 'scientific': the letters are not linked to the spheres, the natures or the elements, but are rather divided according to varying criteria.[82] In some of these classifications, a different conception of the letters is conveyed: they are perceived as populating other worlds, parallel to the world known to us.[83] Finally, Ibn al-ʿArabī's division of the letters into the different

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[77] According to the Jābirian view, language is not an accidental product (*ʿaraḍ*) of human convention (*waḍʿ*, *iṣṭilāḥ*), but is rather a substance (*jawhar*) created naturally by the soul. Consequently, language is in harmony with nature, and, therefore, the letters indicate the four natures; see Kraus, *Jābir ibn Ḥayyān* ii, 256–7; Lory, *Alchimie* 139–42.

[78] See Ibn al-ʿArabī, *al-Futūhāt* i, 98 (chapter 2, *faṣl* 1, = ʿUthmān Yaḥyā's edition i, 248–9); Kraus, *Jābir ibn Ḥayyān* ii, 135–85. In the first classification of the letters in the second chapter of the *Futūḥāt*, the natures are said to emanate from the celestial spheres, and hence are perceived as existing on a separate cosmological level, before their merging into the four elements.

[79] Compare Ibn al-ʿArabī, *al-Futūhāt* i, 94-5 (chapter 2, *faṣl* 1, = ʿUthmān Yaḥyā's edition i, 232–5), 109–19 (= ʿUthmān Yaḥyā's edition i, 295–323) to Kraus, *Jābir ibn Ḥayyān* ii, 223–36.

[80] See Ibn al-ʿArabī, *al-Futūhāt* i, 250 (chapter 26, = ʿUthmān Yaḥyā's edition iii, 204–5).

[81] See ibid. 98–9 (chapter 2, *faṣl* 1, = ʿUthmān Yaḥyā's edition i, 249–50).

[82] See ibid. 99–102 (chapter 2, *faṣl* 1, = ʿUthmān Yaḥyā's edition i, 253–63), 109–19 (= ʿUthmān Yaḥyā's edition i, 295–323); see also Ibn al-ʿArabī's explanations of these classifications on pp. 124–30 (= i, 341–61).

[83] See ibid. 101 (chapter 2, *faṣl* 1, = ʿUthmān Yaḥyā's edition i, 260–61): "Know [...] that the letters form one nation among many. [God] addresses them and imposes on them [commandments and prohibitions], and among them are messengers of their kind [...]"; "They are divided into [different] classes like those in the known world"; "[The letters] form [different] worlds: every world has a messenger of its kind and a religious legal code (*sharīʿa*) to which it is subjugated" ("*Iʿlam* [...] *anna l-ḥurūf umma min al-umam*

classes and categories seems somewhat arbitrary, contrary to the Jābirian division which is based on the order of the Arabic alphabet.[84]

Ibn al-ʿArabī was no doubt aware of these differences between his theories regarding the letters and those expounded in the Jābirian corpus. This may be the main reason why he emphasizes throughout the second chapter of the *Futūḥāt* that his knowledge on this subject is of Divine origin, deriving solely from mystical unveilings.[85] Ibn al-ʿArabī thus challenges the religious-scientific authority of Jābir b. Ḥayyān, seeking to appropriate this authority for himself. One should bear in mind that according to the Jābirian corpus, the source of Jābir's esoteric knowledge is the Shiʿi *imām* Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq, the alleged teacher of Jābir.[86] In other words, whereas in the Shiʿi worldview, the *imām*—being a member of the Prophet's family—is the ultimate source of Divine knowledge, Ibn al-ʿArabī holds that any human being, regardless of his genealogical descent, is capable of attaining Divine knowledge, depending on his religious-spiritual efforts and primarily on his election by God.

The various classifications of the letters in the second chapter of the *Futūḥāt* are accompanied by mystical-philosophical speculations on different issues such as God's transcendence as opposed to His manifested aspect, the rapport between God and man, the relation between Divine unity and the plurality in the created world, and so forth. The content of these speculations, which naturally abound with Sufi motifs, is very typical of Ibn al-ʿArabī's thought in general.[87] The subject of letters thus

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mukhāṭabūna wa-mukallafūna wa-fihim rusul min jinsihim […]"; "*Wa-hum ʿalā aqsām ka-aqsām al-ʿālam al-maʿrūf fī l-ʿurf*"; "*Fa-hāʾulāʾi ʿawālim wa-li-kull ʿālam rasūl min jinsihim wa-lahum sharīʿa taʿabbadū bihā* […]"). Cf. ibid. 123 (= ʿUthmān Yaḥyā's edition i, 335); and Ibn al-ʿArabī, *Kitāb al-mīm* 1. This perception of the letters brings to mind the Islamic notion of genies: the world of the genies parallels the world of man, comprising of believers, heretics, etc.

[84] See the references above in n. 79.

[85] See Ibn al-ʿArabī, *al-Futūhāt* i, 94 (chapter 2, *faṣl* 1, = ʿUthmān Yaḥyā's edition i, 232), 99–100 (= ʿUthmān Yaḥyā's edition i, 253, 255–6), 102 (= i, 264–5), 108 (= i, 293–4), 115–6 (= i, 312–3).

[86] See Kraus, *Jābir ibn Ḥayyān* i, xxv–xxvii; Lory, *Alchimie* 59–62. Note, however, that Ibn al-ʿArabī is careful not to criticize Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq himself; see, for example, *Kitāb al-mīm* 5–6.

[87] See, for example, Ibn al-ʿArabī, *al-Futūhāt* i, 95–7 (chapter 2, *faṣl* 1, = ʿUthmān Yaḥyā's edition i, 237–43), 99 (= ʿUthmān Yaḥyā's edition i, 253–4), 102–8 (= i, 266–94), 120–3 (= i, 325–34). See also the polar opposites of *rajāʾ-khawf* ("hope"-"fear"), *basṭ-qabḍ* ("expansion"-"contraction") and *jamāl-ijlāl* ("beauty"-"exaltedness") in the poem on the letter *kāf* in ibid. 111–2 (= i, 303). In addition, note the division of the letters into two opposite groups: those pertaining to Divine mercy and those pertaining to Divine power and subjugation (*qahr*), in ibid. 124-5 (= i, 341–3). See also Ibn al-ʿArabī, *Kitāb al-mīm* 8–16. On the opposing attributes of God and the polar mystical states, see Sviri, Between fear and hope.

serves Ibn al-ʿArabī as a means of expressing his mystical-philosophical theories—contrary to the practical-alchemical objective of the Jābirian "balance of the letters". On the other hand, Ibn al-ʿArabī also views the letters as a practical tool which enables the mystic or friend of God to attain both spiritual-mystical goals and magical powers.[88] This is a natural outcome of Ibn al-ʿArabī's perception of the letters as building blocks of reality: since the letters are found in every level of the universe, they have the potential power to influence all existents. In general, however, Ibn al-ʿArabī is quite careful not to delve too deeply into the magical aspect of letter speculations, and consequently he does not reveal all his theoretical and practical knowledge in this regard.[89] Ibn al-ʿArabī's caution here stems from a number of reasons: first, the knowledge of the practical-magical powers of the letters is secret, and is suitable only for the true friends of God, not for ordinary men. Second, the magical practice related to letter speculations might draw criticism from orthodox circles and may even lead to punitive measures. Third, the manipulation of reality by means of the letters can lead to impertinence and arrogance vis-à-vis God; the true mystic should rather observe the appropriate "etiquette" or "courtesy" (*adab*) in his intimate relationship with his Lord.

Despite the various differences between Ibn al-ʿArabī and the Jābirian authors, it is clear that the former was acquainted with and influenced by Jābirian conceptions regarding the letters and the natures. However, it is also evident that Ibn al-ʿArabī succeeded in adapting these conceptions to his own unique worldview, thereby creating a new type of letter speculations distinct from that found in the Jābirian corpus.

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[88] On the mystical experiences and Divine knowledge that can be attained by means of the letters, see, for example, Ibn al-ʿArabī, *al-Futūhāt* i, 129 (chapter 2, *faṣl* 1, = ʿUthmān Yaḥyā's edition i, 357–8); Ibn al-ʿArabī, *al-Mabādiʾ*, especially pp. 141–61.

[89] For evidence of Ibn al-ʿArabī's knowledge in this domain, see, for example, Ibn al-ʿArabī, *Kitāb al-mīm* 7–8; Ibn al-ʿArabī, *al-Futūhāt* i, 223–6 (chapter 20, = ʿUthmān Yaḥyā's edition iii, 88-99), 234 (chapter 22, "manzil lām al-alif", = ʿUthmān Yaḥyā's edition iii, 133–7), 249–51 (chapter 26, = iii, 201–8), ii, 390 (chapter 198, on the power of the letter *wāw*); and cf. Gril, Science 123–4. Note also the expression *sulṭānuhu fī* or *ẓuhūr sulṭānihi fī* ("the rule/power of the [letter] is manifested in-") recurring on pp. 109-19 in the second chapter of the *Futūḥāt* (= ʿUthmān Yaḥyā's edition i, 295–323). This expression implies that the letters influence the various dimensions of reality; see also *Kitāb al-yāʾ* 3–4. The magical-practical aspect of the letters is especially evident in the work attributed to Ibn al-ʿArabī entitled *al-ʿIqd al-manẓūm fī mā taḥwīhi l-ḥurūf min al-khawāṣṣ wa-l-ʿulūm* ("The Necklace Concerning the Properties and Knowledge Inherent in the Letters"). This work is a manual for the magical-astrological use of the Arabic letters, based on the connection between the letters, the natures, the lunar mansions, the zodiac and the stars. It is not clear, however, whether or not Ibn al-ʿArabī is the real author of this work; this question demands further research.

The Notion of Parallel Worlds and the Letters

The notion of parallel worlds, according to which creation is comprised of various corresponding dimensions, is of paramount importance in both the Ismāʿīlī tradition and the thought of Ibn Masarra and Ibn al-ʿArabī. This notion will be analyzed in detail in chapter 5 of this study; here I will refer to the relation between letters and the idea of parallel worlds.

In Ismāʿīlī literature and in the writings of Ibn Masarra and Ibn al-ʿArabī, the letters of the alphabet are perceived as corresponding to the various worlds of which the universe is comprised. This notion is already found in Hellenistic literature, especially in Pythagorean and Neoplatonic sources.[90] In the Ismāʿīlī myth of *Kūnī-Qadar*, the seven letters *kūnī-qadar* correspond to the seven Cherubs and, by implication, to the seven heavens, the seven layers of the earth and the seven seas; the twelve signs of the zodiac correspond to the twelve "spiritual beings" (*al-rūḥāniyya*).[91] Similarly, in the Ismāʿīlī work *al-ʿĀlim wa-l-ghulām*, the seven letters of *kun* and *fa-yakūn* (كُن + فيكون) are the source of the seven primordial beings—air, water, darkness, light, vapor, mud and fire.[92] In addition, the number of letters composing the cosmogonic words *irādat amr bi-qawl* ("the will of a command by means of a saying ['be!']", إرادة أمر بقول) amounts to twelve. Hence, the twelve signs of the zodiac and the seven heavens, as well as the twelve regions of the world (termed *jazāʾir*, literally: "islands", singular: *jazīra*) and the seven seas, are all evidence or signs (*shawāhid*, *āyāt*) indicating the cosmogonic words and letters. The seven heavens are also the external-manifest aspect (*ẓāhir*) and the symbol (*mathal*) pointing to the seven *nuṭaqāʾ*, who are the inner-hidden aspect (*bāṭin*) and the object which is symbolized (*mamthūl*). Equally, the seven layers of the earth indicate the seven *imām*s, the twelve signs of the zodiac indicate the twelve "chiefs" (*nuqabāʾ*, i.e. the supporters of each *nāṭiq*), and the twelve regions of the world indicate the twelve "proofs" (*ḥujaj*, singular: *ḥujja*) who are subordinate to each one of the *imām*s.[93]

Similar motifs are also found in Ismāʿīlī Neoplatonic writings. For instance, al-Sijistānī views the letters as corresponding to the various

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[90] See Kraus, *Jābir ibn Ḥayyān* ii, 199–223, especially pp. 207–14.

[91] Stern, Earliest cosmological doctrines 9. On the seven Cherubs and the twelve spiritual beings see above pp. 41–3.

[92] See above n. 18.

[93] See Jaʿfar b. Manṣūr al-Yaman, *al-ʿĀlim wa-l-ghulām* 15, 17. On the *nuqabāʾ* and the *ḥujaj* see above chapter 1 nn. 60, 118. On the term *jazīra* see Daftary, *Ismāʿīlīs*, index, s.v. "*jazīra*"; Stern, Cairo as the centre 248–9.

cosmological beings known from Neoplatonic philosophy as well as to the religious leaders of mankind and the organs of the human body.[94] In a similar vein, Ibn al-ʿArabī perceives the letters as paralleling the various Neoplatonic cosmological entities, the Divine names and the lunar mansions.[95] The link between the letters and the lunar mansions likewise appears in *Kitāb khawāṣṣ al-ḥurūf* of Ibn Masarra and in the Epistles of Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ. This common motif merits a close examination.

As mentioned above,[96] in his *Kitāb khawāṣṣ al-ḥurūf*, Ibn Masarra defines the fourteen mysterious letters found at the beginning of twenty-nine *sūra*s (the *fawātiḥ*) as "the root of all things". He describes them as "hidden" (*bāṭina*), as opposed to the remaining fourteen letters of the Arabic alphabet which are "manifest" (*ẓāhira*). Ibn Masarra further claims that

> they [those who possess knowledge of the hidden realm] also said that the number of these letters [the *fawātiḥ*] is the same as that of the lunar mansions. If you contemplate (*wa-in iʿtabarta*) the lunar mansions, you will discover that they too consist of fourteen mansions that are manifest and fourteen that are hidden. You will also discover that the days of the month correspond to the moon as it grows and diminishes.

According to Ibn Masarra, the twenty-eight letters of the Arabic alphabet correspond to the twenty-eight lunar mansions: just as there are fourteen hidden letters and fourteen manifest ones, so too there are fourteen hidden mansions and fourteen manifest ones. Moreover, by contemplating (*iʿtibār*) the lunar mansions, man may gain knowledge or evidence (*istidlāl*, *dalāʾil*) of cosmogonic and eschatological matters, since the changes in the moon's condition throughout the month indicate the creation of the universe, its growth and development, and, finally, its decay and demise.[97]

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[94] See above pp. 84–5; and see the table in al-Sijistānī, *al-Yanābīʿ* 15.

[95] See above, pp. 94–6.

[96] See p. 89.

[97] See Ibn Masarra, *Khawāṣṣ al-ḥurūf* 135–6 ("*Wa-qālū ayḍan inna hādhihi l-aḥruf al-madhkūra ʿalā ʿadad manāzil al-qamar wa-in iʿtabarta manāzil al-qamar tajidhā kadhālika arbaʿa ʿashar minhā ẓāhira wa-arbaʿa ʿashar minhā bāṭina wa-kadhālika tajidu ayyām al-shahr fī muwāfaqat al-qamar lahā fī ziyādatihi wa-nuqṣānihi wa-idhā qarrabta baʿḍ hādhihi l-dalāʾil ilā baʿḍ wa-amʿanta l-naẓar min jihat al-iʿtibār istadlalta min dhālika ʿalā muddat al-dunyā wa-kadhālika in naẓarta ilā l-qamar waqt istihlālihi wa-ntiqālihi ilā l-manāzil wa-qaṭʿihi lil-burūj intahayta min dhālika ilā kayfiyyat mabdaʾ al-ashyāʾ wa-khurūjihā min al-imkān wa-ziyādatihā wa-numuwwihā wa-kamālihā wa-baʿda dhālika naqṣihā wa-nḥiṭāṭihā wa-qabḍ al-rūḥ ʿanhā wa-rujūʿihi min al-asfal ilā l-aʿlā wa-stiqrārihi ʿinda aṣlihi wa-mawḍiʿ mabdaʾihi thumma iʿādatihā tāra ukhrā wa-qabḍ al-rūḥ wa-qiyām al-ashyāʾ bihi kamā badaʾahā awwal marra*"). See also ibid. 143.

Like the moon at the end of the month, the demise of the world at the end of time constitutes a return to the beginning:

> When the [universal] soul, turning towards the [universal] intellect, will stop reinforcing (*imdād*) this body [of the world] with the benefits that it derived (*istafādathu*) from the light of the intellect—then the whole affair will come to an end, the knowledge of everything will return to it/Him [the universal intellect, or God] and the world will be destroyed and will cease to exist.[98]

To this intricate network of parallel worlds—the letters, the lunar mansions and the universe as a whole—Ibn Masarra adds the microcosm, i.e., man. The human rational/speaking soul (*al-nafs al-nāṭiqa*) corresponds to the moon, whereas the human intellect corresponds to the sun. Just as the moon draws (*yastamiddu*) its light from the sun, so too the rational/speaking soul draws its light from the intellect. The knowledge produced from this light is expressed by means of the twenty-eight letters of the Arabic alphabet, which, as mentioned above, correspond to the lunar mansions. "This proves", Ibn Masarra concludes, "that the small world [the microcosm] is part of the big world [the macrocosm]".[99] The letters, then, parallel the lunar mansions; the lunar mansions indicate cosmogonic and eschatological processes; and, finally, man's intellect and soul parallel the sun and the moon, and, by implication, the universal intellect and soul.

The terms *imdād*, *istimdād* and *istifāda* (or their derivatives) are quite typical of Ismāʿīlī Neoplatonic writings; their origins are found in the early Arabic Neoplatonic tradition which evolved in the 9th century.[100] The comparison between the universal intellect and soul, on the one hand, and the sun and moon, on the other, appears already in Plotinus's *Enneads* and resurfaces in Ismāʿīlī Neoplatonic literature. Similarly, in the myth

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[98] Ibid. 142 ("[…] *Wa-dhālika idhā tarakat al-nafs al-imdād li-hādhā l-jism bi-mā stafādathu min nūr al-ʿaql wa-aqbalat ʿalā l-ʿaql inqabaḍa l-amr kulluhu wa-rajaʿa ʿilm kull shayʾ ilayhi wa-fasuda l-ʿālam wa-tamma amr al-dunyā*"). The perception of the end of time as a return to the source or to the beginning appears already in the Quran; see, for example, Q 10:4, 34; 21:104; 30:11; 36:79. This perception is quite prominent in Ismāʿīlī thought, and merits a separate discussion.

[99] Ibn Masarra, *Khawāṣṣ al-ḥurūf* 142–3 ("*Wa-kadhālika jaʿala taʿālā smuhu al-nafs al-nāṭiqa ka-l-qamar wa-jaʿala l-ʿaql ka-l-shams fa-hādhihi l-nafs al-nāṭiqa l-latī fī l-insān tastamiddu min nūr al-ʿaql kamā yastamiddu l-qamar min ḍiyāʾ al-shams wa-yaẓharu dhālika l-ʿilm al-ladhī stafādathu bi-thamāniya wa-ʿishrīna ḥarfan ʿalā ʿadad manāzil al-qamar wa-kadhālika yuʿabbiru l-insān ʿammā fī ḍamīrihi bi-thamāniya wa-ʿishrīna ḥarfan wa-fī hādhā dalīl ʿalā anna l-ʿālam al-ṣaghīr juzʾ min al-ʿālam al-kabīr* […]").

[100] See above p. 49 n. 59; see also below pp. 153–4 and the references in the following note.

of *Kūnī-Qadar*, *Kūnī* corresponds to the sun whereas *Qadar* corresponds to the moon.[101] The eschatological scenario described by Ibn Masarra, in accordance with Neoplatonic cosmology—the universal soul detaches itself from the world and returns to its source, the universal intellect—appears also in the Epistles of the Ikhwān, where it is termed "the bigger resurrection" (*al-qiyāma l-kubrā*), as opposed to "the smaller resurrection" (*al-qiyāma l-ṣughrā*) which is man's death. This conception is based on the notion of parallel worlds: since the world is "a big human being" (*insān kabīr*), its demise occurs in the same manner as that of any man—its soul disengages from its body.[102] Furthermore, the correspondence between the letters, the lunar mansions, the moon-sun and the soul-intellect is also found in the Epistles of the Ikhwān, in a wording very similar to that of Ibn Masarra's. The Ikhwān state that the spiritual powers (*rūḥāniyyāt*) of the seven planets are similar to the seven spiritual faculties of man, that is, the five senses, the speaking faculty (*al-quwwa l-nāṭiqa*) and the faculty of the intellect (*al-quwwa l-ʿāqila*). More precisely, the five senses resemble the five planets, whereas the faculties of speech and intellect resemble the moon and the sun respectively:

> This is because the moon receives its light from the sun, as it moves through its twenty-eight mansions. Equally, the speaking [faculty] receives from the faculty of the intellect the meanings of the existents and the true essences behind the objects of sight. It then provides information concerning the latter by means of the twenty-eight letters of the alphabet.

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[101] For Plotinus see *Enneads* v, 208–11 (= Ennead v, 6, 4); cf. Badawī (ed.), *al-Shaykh al-yūnānī* 186 (on this Neoplatonic source see Rosenthal, Aš-Šhayḫ al-Yûnânî and Adamson, *Arabic Plotinus* 7); and see also Altmann and Stern, *Isaac Israeli* 160 n. 1. For Ismāʿīlī literature, see, for example, Stern, Earliest cosmological doctrines 14; Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ, *Rasāʾil* ii, 462; al-Sijistānī, *Tuḥfat al-mustajībīn* 149–50; al-Kirmānī, *al-Riyāḍ* 63. Certain motifs in the myth of *Kūnī-Qadar* bear a resemblance to Ibn Masarra's speculations analyzed above. For example, the sun and the moon are perceived as the *ẓāhir* indicating the *bāṭin*, i.e. the hypostases *Kūnī* and *Qadar*. From the *ẓāhir*, one may gain knowledge or evidence (*istidlāl*) concerning the *bāṭin*. Moreover, according to the Ismāʿīlī myth, *Kūnī* reinforces *Qadar* with "[spiritual] substance" (*mādda*—from the same root as *imdād*). This is quite similar to the description of the relationship between the sun/intellect and the moon/soul in the writings of Ibn Masarra and the Ismāʿīlī Neoplatonists. For the use of the terms *imdād*, *istimdād* and *istifāda* with reference to the sun and the moon, see also Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ, *al-Jāmiʿa* i, 533–4; al-Kirmānī, *Rāḥat al-ʿaql* 188-9; al-Ḥāmidī, *Kanz al-walad* 181.

[102] See, for example, Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ, *Rasāʾil* ii, 49-50, 88, iii, 333–4, 354–5. Note that in the latter passage, the Ikhwān quote from Q 21:104, which belongs to the same group of verses referred to by Ibn Masarra (see above in nn. 97–8). Similar to Ibn Masarra, the Ikhwān also employ in this passage the derivatives of the terms *iqbāl ʿalā* ("turning towards"), *ifāda* and *istifāda*, in order to describe the relationship between the universal intellect and soul.

This is quite similar to Ibn Masarra's speculations on the correspondence between the rational/speaking soul and the intellect, on the one hand, and the moon and the sun, on the other. Both the Ikhwān and Ibn Masarra emphasize the importance of the twenty-eight letters of the Arabic alphabet and their correspondence with the lunar mansions.[103]

Like Ibn Masarra, the Ikhwān explain the enigmatic *fawātiḥ* by referring to the lunar mansions, and they too stress the importance of human "contemplation" (*iʿtibār*).[104] According to the Ikhwān,

> whoever wants to know the secret of these letters at the beginning of the *sūra*s—why they are fourteen out of the sum total of twenty-eight letters—must contemplate (*yaʿtabira*) the existent things whose number is twenty-eight, for he will find that they are divided into two groups wherever they are found. Among these: the number of the joints in both hands of a human being is twenty-eight—fourteen in the right hand and fourteen in the left hand. Their number corresponds to that of the twenty-eight vertebrae of the human back bone: fourteen [are located] in the lower part of the spine and fourteen in the upper part.

Similarly, the twenty-eight letters of the Arabic language—"the most perfect and eloquent language"—are divided into two groups of fourteen letters each: one group consists of the letters with which the definite article *lam* is contracted and one group consists of the letters with which this

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[103] Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ, *Rasāʾil* iv, 232–3 ("*Wa-l-qiwā l-khams tushbihu l-kawākib al-khamsa wa-hātāni l-quwwatāni aʿnī l-nāṭiqa wa-l-ʿāqila mushābihatāni lil-shams wa-l-qamar wa-dhālika anna l-qamar min al-shams yaʾkhudhu nūrahu bi-jarayānihi fī manāzilihi l-thamānī wa-l-ʿishrīna kadhālika l-nāṭiqa min al-quwwa l-ʿāqila taʾkhudhu maʿānī l-mawjūdāt wa-ḥaqāʾiq al-marʾiyyāt fa-tukhbiru ʿanhā bi-thamāniya wa-ʿishrīna ḥarfan min ḥurūf al-muʿjam*"). Note that in ibid. ii, 464–5, and Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ, *al-Jāmiʿa* i, 585–8, the term *al-quwwa l-ʿāqila* is replaced by *al-ʿaql*, and the verb *fa-tukhbiru* is replaced by the verb *fa-tuʿabbiru*—in a wording very similar to that found in Ibn Masarra's work (see above n. 99). According to Wolfson, the term "the speaking faculty", as referring to one of man's mental faculties ("the inner senses", *al-ḥawāss al-bāṭina*), is typically Ikhwānian; see Wolfson, Internal senses 77–82; see also Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ, *Rasāʾil* ii, 414–5, iii, 195, 244–6, iv, 57; Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ, *al-Jāmiʿa* i, 506–10, ii, 29. In addition to Wolfson's philological explanations of this term, I would also propose to view it as related to *nuṭq* ("speaking", "rationality"), an important concept in the Ismāʿīlī tradition. In Ismāʿīlī thought, the *nāṭiq* is assigned the role of formulating the *sharīʿa*. Hence, *nuṭq* signifies both the rational-intellectual activity of the prophet (in accordance with the Aristotelian definition of man as a rational animal) and the prophet's ability to express Divine truths in human language, in the form of the *sharīʿa*. *Nuṭq* is likewise connected to the idea of God's creative speech—a central notion in Ismāʿīlī thought (see above chapter 1). Accordingly, the prophetic speech is perceived as paralleling the Divine speech; see, for example, *al-Jāmiʿa* i, 507–8 ("[…] *Wa-huwa l-nuṭq al-ilāhī ʿalā l-ḥaqīqa* […]"). Finally, note that Ibn Masarra too employs the term *al-quwwa l-nāṭiqa*, see *Khawāṣṣ al-ḥurūf* 153–4.

[104] For a more detailed examination of the term *iʿtibār*, see below pp. 212–29.

letter is not contracted; or, alternatively, one group consists of the letters that have diacritical points and one group consists of the letters that lack diacritical points.[105] The lunar mansions are likewise divided into two groups of fourteen mansions each: fourteen "in the northern signs of the zodiac" and fourteen "in the southern ones". Hence, all existent things whose number is twenty-eight are divided into two groups of fourteen each.

> This is the reason why out of the sum total of twenty-eight letters, He [Allah] has presented [at the beginning of twenty-nine Quranic *sūra*s] fourteen letters and not the other fourteen, given that to the former a different rule applies than to the latter. These fourteen [= the *fawātiḥ*] are a concealed secret, the knowledge of which is not fit for every one—only for the unique ones from among Allah's servants, the sincere ones.

The correspondence between man's anatomy, the letters of the Arabic alphabet and the lunar mansions is not accidental: the Ikhwān claim that by establishing twenty-eight letters, the "wise philosopher" who invented the Arabic script had in fact emulated the wisdom of the Creator.[106] Thus, the twenty-eight letters of the Arabic alphabet, and the fourteen *fawātiḥ* in particular, are the key to understanding God's creation. Both the Ikhwān and Ibn Masarra are of the opinion that an in-depth contemplation of these letters and of the corresponding microcosmic-macrocosmic systems inevitably leads one to a full understanding of the universe.

However, there is an essential difference between the Ikhwānian perception of the *fawātiḥ* and that of Ibn Masarra. In contradistinction to

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[105] Note that the Ikhwān enumerate fifteen letters with diacritical points and thirteen without.

[106] See Ikhwān al-Ṣafā', *Rasā'il* iii, 380–2 ("*Wa-hākadhā yanbaghī li-man yurīdu an yaʿrifa sirr hādhihi l-ḥurūf al-latī hiya fī awā'il al-suwar lima kāna minhā arabaʿa ʿashar min jumlat thamāniya wa-ʿishrīna ḥarfan an yaʿtabira l-mawjūdāt al-latī ʿadaduhā thamāniya wa-ʿishrūna fa-innahu yajiduhā tanqasimu qismayni ḥaythu mā wajada fa-min dhālika thamāniya wa-ʿishrūna ʿadad mafāṣil al-yadayni lil-insān fa-innahā fī l-yad al-yumnā arbaʿa ʿashar wa-arbaʿa ʿashar fī l-yad al-yusrā wa-inna ʿadadahā muṭābiq li-ʿadad thamānin wa-ʿishrīna kharaza hiya fī ʿamūd ẓahr al-insān minhā arbaʿ ʿashra fī asfal al-ṣulb wa-arbaʿ ʿashra fī aʿlāhu*"; "*Wa-hākadhā ḥukm al-ḥakīm al-wāḍiʿ lil-khaṭṭ al-ʿarabī fa-innahu qtafā fī waḍʿihi l-khaṭṭ al-ʿarabī ḥikmat al-bārī fa-innahu kāna ḥakīman faylasūfan* […] *wa-min al-latī ʿadaduhā thamāniya wa-ʿishrūna hiya manāzil al-qamar fī l-falak fa-inna ʿadadahā thamāniya wa-ʿishrūna minhā fī l-burūj al-shimāliyya arbaʿa ʿashar wa-fī l-burūj al-janūbiyya arbaʿa ʿashar* […] *fa-li-hādhihi l-ʿilla awrada min jumlat al-thamāniya wa-l-ʿishrīna ḥarfan ḥurūf al-jummal arbaʿa ʿashar ḥarfan wa-lam yūrid al-arbaʿa ʿashar al-ukhrā li-anna li-hādhihi ḥukman laysa li-dhālika wa-hiya l-sirr al-maktūm al-ladhī lā yaṣluḥu an yaʿlamahu kull aḥad illā l-khawāṣṣ min ʿibād allāh al-mukhliṣīna*"); see also ibid. i, 217, iii, 143–4; and al-Daylamī, *Qawāʿid ʿaqā'id āl Muḥammad* 68; Canteins, Hidden sciences 453–4, 456–8.

the latter, the Ikhwān do not view the letters (including the *fawātiḥ*) as building blocks of reality. Rather, the letters are the product of a human invention, albeit a Divinely-inspired invention which corresponds to the harmonious structure of the universe. Ibn Masarra's perception of the letters as building blocks of creation is shared by Ibn al-ʿArabī, who likewise links the *fawātiḥ* to the lunar mansions. According to Ibn al-ʿArabī,

> He [God] has set the number of [lunar] mansions at twenty-eight owing to the letters of the merciful breath. We only say this because people believe that the number of the twenty-eight letters was determined in accordance with the [lunar] mansions. However, in our opinion, the opposite is true: it is in accordance with these letters that the number of mansions was determined.[107]

It seems that Ibn al-ʿArabī is criticizing the Ikhwānian view on this matter: the Arabic language and its letters are not a product of a human invention, designed according to the structure of the universe; on the contrary: the structure of the universe was designed in accordance with the twenty-eight cosmogonic-cosmological letters! From this perspective, both Ibn Masarra and Ibn al-ʿArabī are closer to Ismāʿīlī mythical thought than to the more scientific outlook expressed in the Epistles of the Ikhwān and in the Jābirian corpus.

The Letters and the Friends of God

As we shall see in chapter 3 of this study, the idea of *walāya* ("friendship with God") and the image of the *awliyāʾ* ("the friends of God") are central themes—perhaps the most central ones—in Ismāʿīlī literature and in the writings of Ibn al-ʿArabī. The Ismāʿīlī authors and Ibn al-ʿArabī perceive the letters of the alphabet as signs indicating the friends of God; the letters thus serve them as a means of emphasizing the high status of the *awliyāʾ* and elucidating their important role in human religiosity and in the spiritual wellbeing of the universe at large. Moreover, the letters themselves are viewed as a spiritual means of communication between the friends of

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[107] Ibn al-ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt* ii, 432 (chapter 198, the beginning of *faṣl* 20: "*Wa-jaʿalahā thamāniya wa-ʿishrīna manzila min ajli ḥurūf al-nafas al-raḥmānī wa-innamā qulnā dhālika li-anna l-nās yatakhayyalūna anna l-ḥurūf al-thamāniya wa-l-ʿishrīna min al-manāzil ḥukm hādhā l-ʿadad lahā wa-ʿindanā bi-l-ʿaks bal ʿan hādhihi l-ḥurūf kāna ḥukm ʿadad al-manāzil*"). On the *fawātiḥ* and the lunar mansions see also ibid. i, 102 (chapter 2, *faṣl* 1, = ʿUthmān Yaḥyā's edition i, 266–7); and see also ibid. 378 (chapter 62, = iv, 395–6).

God and the upper, Divine worlds, ultimately linking the *awliyāʾ* to the creative word of God, the *kalima*.

The Letters as Signs Indicating the Friends of God

The notion of the letters as signs alluding to the friends of God is quite characteristic of Ismāʿīlī literature. A few examples will suffice to illustrate this point. According to *Kitāb al-kashf*,[108] the first series of seven cosmogonic letters

> indicates the seven *nuṭaqāʾ*. The other seven [cosmogonic] letters indicate the seven *imām*s, since these letters include [all other] letters and thus complete them, and the *imām*s likewise are responsible for completing the affairs of the *nuṭaqāʾ*-messengers, may Allāh's prayers be upon them all.[109]

Similarly, in *al-ʿĀlim wa-l-ghulām*,[110] the twelve signs of the zodiac and the seven heavens as well as the twelve regions of the world and the seven seas indicate both the cosmogonic letters and the hierarchy of the friends of God—the seven *nuṭaqāʾ*, the seven *imām*s, the twelve *nuqabāʾ* and the twelve *ḥujaj*.

Al-Sijistānī also views the letters as signs indicating the friends of God. In his *Kitāb al-yanābīʿ*,[111] various letters are said to indicate the universal intellect and soul and their terrestrial equivalents—the *nāṭiq* and the *asās*. In one passage in this work, al-Sijistānī explains that according to the numerical order of the Arabic alphabet,[112] the letter *kāf* (of the Divine fiat *kun*) is preceded by the letter *yāʾ*, while the letter *nūn* (of *kun*) is followed by the letter *sīn*. The numerical value of *yāʾ* (10) and *sīn* (60) is seventy—a number which corresponds to the seven *atimmāʾ* (i.e. the seven *imām*s, literally: "those who complete", singular: *mutimm*). However, according to the standard order of the Arabic alphabet, *kāf* is preceded by *qāf* and *nūn* is followed by *wāw*. The letter *qāf* equals a hundred, which corresponds to the number one, and *wāw* equals six—altogether seven. This number indicates the seven *khulafāʾ* ("deputies" or "successors", singular: *khalīfa*), that

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108 See above pp. 81–2.

109 Jaʿfar b. Manṣūr al-Yaman, *al-kashf* 50 ("*Fa-l-sabʿa l-ūlā min al-ḥurūf dalāla ʿalā l-nuṭaqāʾ al-sabʿa wa-l-sabʿa l-ākhira min al-ḥurūf dalāla ʿalā l-aʾimma l-sabʿa li-annahā jāmiʿa li-tamām al-ḥurūf wa-l-aʾimma qāʾimūna bi-tamām umūr al-rusul al-nuṭaqāʾ ṣalawāt allāh ʿalayhim ajmaʿīna").

110 See above pp. 81, 102.

111 See above pp. 84–5.

112 *Ḥurūf al-jummal*, which broadly corresponds to the order of the Hebrew alphabet.

is, the Fāṭimī Caliphs, who come after the *atimmāʾ*.[113] In his work entitled *al-Iftikhār*, al-Sijistānī writes that the four letters *kūnī* correspond to the universal soul, which is responsible for establishing the religious leadership in each historical cycle (*dawr*): the *nāṭiq*, his *asās*, the *imām* and the latter's *ḥujja*. These four figures are thus indicated by the four letters of *kūnī*.[114] Similar speculations appear in other Ismāʿīlī works as well.[115]

Ibn al-ʿArabī too links the letters of the Arabic alphabet to the hierarchy of the friends of God. However, Ibn al-ʿArabī views the letters not only as signs indicating the friends of God but also as live entities which populate a world of their own. In fact, the world of letters has its own *awliyāʾ* hierarchy: "Among [the letters] there is a pole [*quṭb*, the highest-ranking friend of God], just as there is one among us—the *alif* [...]". Below the level of the *alif*-pole are the weak letters *wāw* and *yāʾ*, which are considered to be the two *imām*s; then come the four "pegs" (*awtād*)—the *alif*, *wāw*, *yāʾ* and *nūn*, which signify the case endings (*ʿalāmāt al-iʿrāb*); and, finally, the seven "substitutes" (*abdāl*, singular: *badal*)—the *alif* which signifies the dual in the nominative (ـان), the *wāw* which signifies the plural in the nominative (ـون), the *yāʾ* signifying the plural and the dual in the accusative and genitive (ـين), the *nūn* signifying the plural form of the verb (ـون) and the *tāʾ*, the *kāf* and the *hāʾ* of the pronouns. Ibn al-ʿArabī defines the pronouns as "substitutes" since they replace other letters which indicate explicit names.[116] Ibn al-ʿArabī's discussion is somewhat more sophisticated and complex than the Ismāʿīlī speculations on the letters and the hierarchy of the *awliyāʾ*. Elaborating on the phonetic and grammatical aspects of the letters, Ibn al-ʿArabī draws a fuller and more interesting comparison between the world of letters and the hierarchy of the friends of God. This comparison gives life and vitality to the world of letters, and,

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[113] See al-Sijistānī, *al-Yanābīʿ* 18–9. On the Fāṭimī concept of *khulafāʾ* and its espousal by al-Sijistānī, see Daftary, *Ismāʿīlīs* 164–6, 208, 226–8; Walker, *Early philosophical Shiism* 21.

[114] See al-Sijistānī, *al-Iftikhār* 124–5.

[115] See, for example, Ibn Ḥawshab (Manṣūr al-Yaman), *al-Rushd wa-l-hidāya* 189–90, 197–202, 207–8, 211; Halm, *Kosmologie* 44–8; al-Ḥāmidī, *Kanz al-walad* 27–8; see also al-Daylamī, *Qawāʿid ʿaqāʾid āl Muḥammad* 52–5, 67–71.

[116] See Ibn al-ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt* i, 123 (chapter 2, *faṣl* 1, = ʿUthmān Yaḥyā's edition i, 335–6: "[...] *Fa-minhum al-quṭb kamā minnā wa-huwa l-alif* [...]"; "*Wa-l-imāmāni l-wāw wa-l-yāʾ al-muʿtallatāni l-ladhāni humā ḥarfā l-madd wa-l-līn lā l-ṣaḥīḥatāni wa-l-awtād arbaʿa l-alif wa-l-wāw wa-l-yāʾ wa-l-nūn al-ladhīna hum ʿalāmāt al-iʿrāb wa-l-abdāl sabʿa l-alif wa-l-wāw wa-l-yāʾ wa-l-nūn wa-tāʾ al-ḍamīr wa-kāfuhu wa-hāʾuhu fa-l-alif alif rajulāni wa-l-wāw wāw al-ʿumarūna wa-l-yāʾ yāʾ al-ʿumarīna/al-ʿumarayni wa-l-nūn nūn yafʿalūna*"). On the *quṭb*, the two *imām*s, the four *awtād* and the seven *abdāl*, see below p. 130 n. 25.

at the same time, enriches our understanding of the status and functions of the *awliyā'*.[117]

The Neoplatonic aspect of the linkage between the letters and the friends of God is of special interest for the current discussion. In Ismā'īlī literature and in the writings of Ibn Masarra and Ibn al-'Arabī, the universal intellect (or the first intellect) is at times perceived as corresponding to the letter *alif*.[118] In the Ismā'īlī Neoplatonic tradition, the *nāṭiq*—the highest-ranking friend of God—is the terrestrial equivalent of the universal intellect; the latter functions as the *nāṭiq*'s spiritual source. Hence, there is a tripartite correspondence between the first letter of the alphabet (*alif*), the first created being (the universal intellect), and its representative on earth—the most eminent human being, "the speaker prophet".[119] This tripartite correspondence is also found in the Epistles of Ikhwān al-Ṣafā'. However, the Ikhwān often replace the figure of the *nāṭiq* with the figure of the ideal human being, i.e. any man (not necessarily a prophet or *imām*) who fully realizes his rational/speaking soul (*al-nafs al-nāṭiqa*).

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[117] On the letters as indicating the hierarchy of the friends of God, see also Ibn al-'Arabī, *al-Mabādi'* 108–11; Ibn al-'Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt* i, 237–8 (chapter 22, = 'Uthmān Yaḥyā's edition iii, 147–8).

[118] To be more exact, in Ismā'īlī sources, the intellect corresponds to the *alif*, whereas in the writings of Ibn masarra and Ibn al-'Arabī, who do not consider the *alif* and *hamza* as one letter, the intellect corresponds to the *hamza*. See al-Sijistānī, *al-Yanābī'* 9; al-Ḥāmidī, *Kanz al-walad* 27; al-Daylamī, *Qawā'id 'aqā'id āl Muḥammad* 55; Ibn al-'Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt* i, 105 (chapter 2, *faṣl* 1, = 'Uthmān Yaḥyā's edition i, 277), ii, 415 (chapter 198, *faṣl* 11). On the *alif* and *hamza*, see ibid. ii, 385 (the beginning of chapter 198: "[…] *Kāna l-nafas bi-l-ḥarf al-hāwī khāṣṣatan wa-mā huwa 'indanā min al-ḥurūf* […]"); Ibn al-'Arabī, *Kitāb al-mīm* 4 ("[…] *Wa-'indanā l-alif laysat min al-ḥurūf wa-'inda jābir bni ḥayyān anna l-alif niṣf ḥarf wa-l-hamza l-niṣf al-ākhar fa-l-alif wa-l-hamza ḥarf wa-qad bayyannā hādhā kathīran fī ghayr hādhā l-mawḍi'*"). As regards Ibn Masarra, see *Khawāṣṣ al-ḥurūf* 140 ("[…] *Wa-dhālika anna l-hā' ishāra ilā l-dhāt wa-hiya khārija min al-ṣadr wa-talīhā l-hamza wa-hiya ishāra ilā l-azaliyya* [read: *al-irāda*] […] *fa-idhā naṭaqta bi-l-hamza* [*wa-*]*akhadhta bihā makhraj al-'adl wa-huwa l-wasaṭ ḥadatha min dhālika l-alif al-ladhī huwa mithāl al-takwīn ay khaṭṭ al-'ālam bi-jumlatihi wa-kānat lil-alif fī nafsihā thalāth marātib nafs nāṭiqa wa-nafs ḥayawāniyya wa-nafs nabātiyya fa-qīla inna l-hamza hiya l-'aql wa-hiya l-irāda wa-inna l-alif hiya l-nafs al-nāṭiqa wa-l-wāw hiya l-nafs al-ḥayawāniyya wa-l-yā' hiya l-nabātiyya* […]"). According to the first opinion mentioned by Ibn Masarra, the *hamza* alludes to the Divine will, whereas the *alif* is the *mithāl* (i.e., the universal intellect, see above n. 38). According to the second opinion, the *hamza* is the universal intellect and will, whereas the *alif* is the rational/speaking soul. In other passages, Ibn Masarra identifies the *alif* with the *mithāl* and the Divine will (see *Khawāṣṣ al-ḥurūf* 136–7, 166). One may conclude that according to Ibn Masarra: 1. The *hamza* and *alif* are not the same letter; 2. At times the *alif* is identified with the universal intellect and at other times the *hamza*; 3. The *alif* is also linked to the rational/speaking soul.

[119] On the relationship between the universal intellect and the *nāṭiq*, see below pp. 151–6. See also Ibn Ḥawshab (Manṣūr al-Yaman), *al-Rushd wa-l-hidāya* 190, 198 (where the *alif* is said to indicate the *nāṭiq*); and see also al-Daylamī, *Qawā'id 'aqā'id āl Muḥammad* 68.

Man's supreme status in creation and the connection between him and his higher, spiritual source is symbolized by the letter *alif*:

> The first letter is the straight line which is the *alif* (ا), and the second [letter] is the *bā'* (ب). Facing it in the upper world is the preceding one which is the [universal] intellect, and the following one which is the [universal] soul [...]

According to the Ikhwān,

> the human form is like the straight line, whereas the animal form is like the curved line, for the plants and animals are situated below the level of man.[120]

In a similar vein, according to Ibn al-ʿArabī, the pole—the ideal human being—corresponds to the letter *alif*, and the universal intellect corresponds to the *hamza*.[121] Ibn Masarra too links the intellect with the letter *alif* and the figure of man. According to him, the rational/speaking soul, which corresponds to the *alif*, derives from the intellect, which likewise corresponds to the *alif*, or, alternatively, to the *hamza*.[122] Both the Ikhwān and Ibn Masarra see a resemblance between the graphic shape of the *alif* and the physical form of man: like the *alif* and in contradistinction to the plants and animals, man stands erect, hence his supreme status in creation.[123]

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[120] See Ikhwān al-Ṣafā', *Rasā'il* iii, 144 ("*Fa-awwal al-ḥurūf huwa l-khaṭṭ al-mustaqīm al-ladhī huwa l-alif wa-l-thānī l-bā' wa-bi-izā'ihi fī l-ʿālam al-ʿulwī l-sābiq wa-huwa l-ʿaql wa-l-tāmm* [read: *wa-l-tālī*] *huwa l-nafs* [...]"), 145 ("[...] *Wa-ṣūrat al-insān shibh al-khaṭṭ al-mustaqīm wa-ṣūrat al-ḥayawānāt shibh al-khaṭṭ al-muqawwas wa-l-nabāt wa-l-ḥayawān murattabāni taḥt al-insān* [...]"). On the correspondence between the rational/speaking soul and the universal intellect, see below pp. 154–6.

[121] See Ibn al-ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt* i, 123 (chapter 2, *faṣl* 1, = ʿUthmān Yaḥyā's edition i, 335), ii, 415 (chapter 198, *faṣl* 11). On the letter *alif* as indicating both man, in his capacity as "God's vicegerent on earth" (*khalīfa*), and the universal intellect, see Ibn al-ʿArabī, *al-Mabādi'* 49–52.

[122] See the references above in n. 118. On the rational/speaking soul as deriving from the intellect, see *Khawāṣṣ al-ḥurūf* 142–3.

[123] See Ikhwān al-Ṣafā', *Rasā'il* iii, 144–5; Ikhwān al-Ṣafā', *al-Jāmiʿa* i, 241, 358, 385, 496–7, ii, 13; Ibn Masarra, *Khawāṣṣ al-ḥurūf* 140; see also Ibn al-ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt* i, 176 (chapter 7, = ʿUthmān Yaḥyā's edition ii, 252), ii, 385 (chapter 198, on the difference between *alif*, *wāw* and *yā'*). Note also the term *al-qāma l-alifiyya* ("[he who possesses] the *alif*-like posture") in al-Ḥāmidī, *Kanz al-walad* 55, 102, 105, 117, 148, 153, 155, 159, 185, 190, 262, 275, 298–300, 310. Speculations on the graphic shape of the *alif* and its correspondence with man's upright posture are also found in early Sufi sources (see Böwering, Sulamī's treatise 355, 357, 364; see also Lory, *La Science* 45–6). However, these speculations lack the philosophical-Neoplatonic aspect which is so central to the Ismāʿīlī and Andalusī writings discussed here.

The Letters as a Means of Communication between the Upper Worlds and the Friends of God

In certain early Ismāʿīlī works, the seven cosmogonic letters of *kūnī-qadar* are perceived as the ontological root of the prophets and the *imām*s and as the source for their spiritual power and knowledge. For instance, according to *Kitāb al-fatarāt* ("The Book of Intervals")—presumably compiled in Fāṭimī North Africa, around the middle of the 4th/10th century, or during the third quarter of that century—the letters *kūnī-qadar* are the source of the *nuṭaqāʾ*, the *awṣiyāʾ* (the "legatees" of the *nuṭaqāʾ*, the "foundations"), the *imām*s and the heads of the subordinate *daʿwa* organization.[124] After Allāh had created *Kūnī* (four letters, كوني) and *Qadar* (three letters, قدر), the letters of the seven *nuṭaqāʾ* emanated from them:

> The letter of Adam, then the letter of Noah, then the letter of Abraham, then the letter of Moses, then the letter of Jesus, then the letter of Muḥammad and, finally, the letter of the *qāʾim* [= the messianic figure].[125]

An additional series of seven letters was then created from *Kūnī* and *Qadar*—the letters of the six *awṣiyāʾ* and the *ḥujja* of the *qāʾim*; next, six more letters were created for each series of *imām*s following each *nāṭiq*; and subsequently, the letters of the *ḥujaj* (plural of *ḥujja*) and of the remaining ranks of the *daʿwa* hierarchy were then created. Finally, from *Kūnī* and *Qadar* emerged "the letters of all created beings—males and females, young ones and elders—who will live in this world until the day of resurrection".[126]

The mythic notion of "the seven supreme letters" (*al-ḥurūf al-ʿulwiyya l-sabʿa*) was also espoused by the Ismāʿīlī Neoplatonic authors Abū Ḥātim

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[124] On the Ismāʿīlī *daʿwa*, see below p. 129 n. 21.

[125] On the *qāʾim* see Daftary, *Ismāʿīlīs*, index, s.v. "Qāʾim".

[126] "*Fa-lammā abdaʿa llāh al-qalam wa-khalaqa l-lawḥ jarat minhumā ḥurūf al-nuṭaqāʾ ḥarf ādam thumma ḥarf nūḥ thumma ḥarf ibrāhīm thumma ḥarf mūsā thumma ḥarf ʿīsā thumma ḥarf muḥammad thumma ḥarf al-qāʾim* [...] *thumma ḥadatha minhumā sabʿa aḥruf ḥarf waṣī ādam wa-ḥarf waṣī nūḥ* [...] *wa-ḥarf waṣī muḥammad wa-ḥarf ḥujjat al-qāʾim ṣalawāt allāh ʿalayhim thumma ḥadatha minhumā sitta aḥruf li-aʾimmat ādam thumma sitta ḥurūf li-aʾimmat nūḥ* [...] *thumma ḥadatha sitta wa-tisʿūna ḥarfan li-ḥujaj muḥammad wa-aʾimmatihi wa-arbaʿa wa-ʿishrūna ḥarfan li-ḥujaj dhawī maṣaṣihim wa-maʾdhūnihim wa-duʿātihim* [...] *thumma ḥadatha minhumā baʿd ḥurūf jamīʿ al-khalq wa-mā yakūnu fī l-dunyā min al-dhukūr wa-l-ināth min al-ṣighār wa-l-kibār ilā yawm al-qiyāma*"; see Halm, *Kosmologie* 62–4, 219–20. On the dating of this work and its attribution to Jaʿfar b. Manṣūr al-Yaman (on whom see above p. 43), see ibid. 31, 62, 136–7, 172. See also the passage from *Kitāb khazāʾin al-adilla* ("The Book of the Treasures of Proofs") in ibid. 215–6, where it is stated that every one of the seven *nuṭaqāʾ* "draws his [spiritual] substance (*istimdād māddatihi*)" from his supreme letter.

al-Rāzī and Abū Yaʿqūb al-Sijistānī (and presumably by al-Nasafī as well), who adapted it to their Neoplatonic philosophy. According to al-Rāzī and al-Sijistānī, these seven letters—i.e., the letters *kūnī-qadar*—constitute a spiritual flow which emanates from the creative word of God (the *kalima*) and reaches, via the universal intellect and soul, the seven *nuṭaqāʾ*. Each *nāṭiq* receives one letter which is reflected in his prophecy and in the *sharīʿa* formulated by him. The *imām*s likewise benefit from the letter which is specific to their historical cycle, since the letter which is granted to the *nāṭiq* and constitutes his share (*naṣīb, ḥaẓẓ*) of God's creative word is also distributed among his heirs. Thus, the presence of the Divine word among human beings is permanently insured. On the other hand, as history progresses, the spiritual power of the *nāṭiq*s and their heirs increases, for in every historical cycle, one more Divine letter is added to the 'spiritual reservoir' of mankind. This process reaches its climax in the final cycle with the advent of the seventh *nāṭiq*, the *qāʾim*, who receives the last letter and thereby completes the series of seven Divine letters. It is then that the end of time occurs.[127]

The Neoplatonic interpretation of the motif of "the seven supreme letters" may be linked to another idea attributed to al-Sijistānī, according to which the seven *nuṭaqāʾ* form different parts (*ajzāʾ*) of the universal soul. The transition from one *nāṭiq* to the next entails a shift from one part of the universal soul to another, while the seventh *nāṭiq* comprises all the preceding parts. This conception is clearly cyclical: first, in accordance with the Ismāʿīlī worldview, the last and seventh *imām* of each historical cycle becomes the *nāṭiq* of the next cycle. Second, in the last and seventh cycle, human history returns to its point of origin. This process corresponds to the vertical return of the various levels of creation to their Divine source. The eschatological climax is reached when the universal soul unites with the universal intellect situated above it.[128]

Such a cyclical worldview, in which sacred history is perceived as the continuous unfolding and manifestation of God's word through a sequence

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[127] See Jaʿfar b. Manṣūr al-Yaman, *Sarāʾir wa-asrār al-nuṭaqāʾ* 21; al-Sijistānī, *al-Iftikhār* 123–37, 143–4, 223; al-Sijistānī, *al-Yanābīʿ* 11, 14, 18, 71; al-Sijistānī, *Tuḥfat al-mustajībīn* 146, 148, 151, 153; al-Rāzī, *al-Iṣlāḥ* 91–2, 199, 201–2, 204–7, 210–1, 253, 256, 318; al-Kirmānī, *al-Riyāḍ* 204 (perhaps read *ḥaẓẓ* instead of *khaṭṭ*); see also Halm, *Kosmologie* 53–66, 215–6; Walker, Cosmic hierarchies 26–7.

[128] See al-Ḥāmidī, *Kanz al-walad* 234, 248–9, 253, 258–64, where the author quotes from al-Sijistānī's lost work, *Kitāb al-bishāra/al-bishārāt*, "The Book of Good Tiding/s"; on this work see Walker, *Early philosophical Shiism* 20. On the cyclical-eschatological perception of history described here, see also Ebstein, Secrecy 322–6.

of prophets and their heirs, is also reflected in the mystical thought of Ibn al-ʿArabī. In his important and well-known work *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam* ("The Ring-Gems of the Wisdoms"), Ibn al-ʿArabī portrays human sacred history as comprising of twenty-seven prophets—the first one being Adam and the last one Muḥammad. The spiritual uniqueness and heritage of every prophet are defined as a *kalima*, that is, as a particular embodiment of God's word.[129] In addition, each of the twenty-seven prophets is assigned a specific Divine wisdom (*ḥikma*) which reflects a certain spiritual aspect unique to him. For instance, the chapter dealing with Adam is entitled "The Ring-Gem of the Divine Wisdom in Adam's Word" (*faṣṣ ḥikma ilāhiyya fī kalima ādamiyya*). Moreover, as is clear from the title of the work, the prophets are perceived as precious gems set on a ring or a signet whose shape is naturally round. These precious gems are the Divine words embodied in the twenty-seven prophets.[130] The number twenty-seven is of course quite meaningful: the Arabic alphabet includes twenty-eight letters, hence the connection between God's word, the letters and the prophets.[131] Who, then, embodies the twenty-eighth letter, the last gem in the circular ring of sacred history? It is conceivable that Ibn al-ʿArabī viewed himself—"the seal of the Muḥammadan friendship with God"—as the one who is meant to complete this ring, bringing history back to its point of origin.[132]

However, in contradistinction to the Ismāʿīlī perception,[133] in Ibn al-ʿArabī's view, the true protagonist of the Divine-human drama is man in

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[129] The link between the prophets and the Divine word is also connected to Ibn al-ʿArabī's perception of created beings in general as the words of God. See above pp. 53–7; see also *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam* 142 ("*Fa-l-mawjūdāt kulluhā kalimāt allāh al-latī lā tanfadu fa-innahā ʿan kun wa-kun kalimat allāh*").

[130] See also *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam* 58: "The ring-gem of every wisdom is the word to which it is ascribed" ("*Fa-faṣṣ kull ḥikma l-kalima l-latī tunsabu ilayhā*"). On the historical continuity between the different prophets and their heirs, see, for example, ibid. 175: "[…] Allāh called him [John] *yaḥyā* [literally: "he lives/will live"], that is, the memory of Zachary will remain alive through him […] Adam's memory remained alive through Seth, the memory of Noah remained alive through Shem and thus the [remaining] prophets […]" ("[…] *Fa-inna llāh sammāhu yaḥyā ay yaḥyā bihi dhikr zakariyyā* […] *fa-inna ādam ḥayiya dhikruhu bi-shīth wa-nūḥan ḥayiya dhikruhu bi-sām wa-kadhālika l-anbiyāʾ* […]"). See also above p. 64 n. 114. Note that in the Ismāʿīlī tradition, Seth and Shem are considered the legatees (*awṣiyāʾ*) or the *ḥujaj* of Adam and Noah respectively; see Halm, *Kosmologie* 18–37; Daftary, *Ismāʿīlīs* 132.

[131] On the correspondence between the twenty-eight letters of the alphabet and the twenty-eight Divine words that comprise creation, see also Ibn al-ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt* ii, 389 (chapter 198).

[132] On the seal of the friends of God see above p. 64 n. 114.

[133] But not the Ikhwānian one; see below pp. 179–88.

general, not just the prophets and their heirs, the friends of God. The latter are historical expressions or manifestations of the figure of the perfect man, who embodies the Divine word and its twenty-eight letters. In one passage, Ibn al-ʿArabī explains that the letter *wāw* is the last letter in the Arabic alphabet in terms of its articulation point, and therefore includes the magical powers of all preceding letters. Similarly, the perfect man

> has the power of every existent in the world. He has all the levels and consequently is the only one who was given the form [i.e., he was the only one who was created according to God's form]. He unites the Divine true essences, which are the [Divine] names, with the true essences of the world, for he is the last existent: the merciful breath reached his existence only after it had gathered with it the power of the levels of the whole world [...]

Man, according to Ibn al-ʿArabī,

> is the most perfect existent, just like the *wāw* is the most perfect letter [...] everything other than man is created except for man, who is both a created being and a God [khalq wa-ḥaqq]. The perfect man is truly the truth by means of which—that is, because of which—the world was created [...][134]

As explained above,[135] according to Ibn al-ʿArabī, "the breath of the All-Merciful" is identical to "the truth by means of which the world was created", and consequently, the creative word of God is the ontological root of the perfect man. The latter, in his capacity as an intermediary between God and creation, truly embodies the Divine word and its letters.

Common Techniques

The hermeneutical techniques employed by Ibn Masarra, Ibn al-ʿArabī and the Ismāʿīlī authors in their discussions of the letters are diverse and

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[134] See Ibn al-ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt* ii, 390 (chapter 198, "[...] *Fa-fī l-insān quwwat kull mawjūd fī l-ʿālam fa-lahu jamīʿ al-marātib wa-li-hādhā khtuṣṣa waḥdahu bi-l-ṣūra fa-jamaʿa bayna l-ḥaqāʾiq al-ilāhiyya wa-hiya l-asmāʾ wa-bayna ḥaqāʾiq al-ʿālam fa-innahu ākhir mawjūd fa-mā ntahā li-wujūdihi l-nafas al-raḥmānī ḥattā jāʾa maʿahu bi-quwwat marātib al-ʿālam kullihi* [...]"; "[...] *Fa-kāna l-insān akmal al-mawjūdāt wa-l-wāw akmal al-ḥurūf wa-kadhā hiya fī l-ʿamal ʿinda man yaʿrifu l-ʿamal bi-l-ḥurūf fa-kull mā siwā l-insān khalq illā l-insān fa-innahu khalq wa-ḥaqq fa-l-insān al-kāmil huwa ʿalā l-ḥaqīqa l-ḥaqq al-makhlūq bihi ay al-makhlūq bi-sababihi l-ʿālam* [...] *fa-l-ghāya huwa l-amr al-makhlūq bi-sababihi mā taqaddama min asbāb ẓuhūrihi wa-huwa l-insān al-kāmil*"). On the perfect man see below chapter 4.

[135] See above p. 55.

numerous. A full survey of them would fall beyond the scope of this study. I will therefore present only two techniques which are common to Ismāʿīlī literature and to the writings of Ibn Masarra and Ibn al-ʿArabī.

The first hermeneutical technique concerns the names of the letters, and is found in Gnostic writings and in other Non-Islamic sources as well.[136] According to *Kitāb al-kashf*,[137] after creating the first series of seven cosmogonic letters, God articulated their names, and, as a result, sixteen letters came into being. In addition, following the Divine pronunciation of the names of the letters *sīn* and *shīn* (s/sh, i, n, y, a, ʾ, n, u, n), which designate the *kursī* (footstool) and the *ʿarsh* (throne) respectively, the *nūn* was produced, and from the latter (n, u, n), the *wāw* appeared. Hence, the Divine articulation of the letters' names is perceived as an essential element in the process of creation. From a hermeneutical point of view, this technique enables *Kitāb al-kashf* to maintain the centrality of the number seven, and, at the same time, to include all the twenty-eight letters of the Arabic alphabet in its cosmogonic narrative.[138] Al-Sijistānī too employs a similar hermeneutical technique. In his work *al-Iftikhār*, al-Sijistānī explains that from "the seven supreme letters" (= *kūnī-qadar*), five additional letters (*alif*, *fāʾ*, *lām*, *mīm* and *yāʾ*) were produced (or "born", *yataw-waladu*), in the following manner: ***kāf***, ***wāw***, ***nūn***, ***yāʾ***, ***qāf***, ***dāl***, ***rāʾ*** → ***alif***, ***fāʾ***, ***lām*** → ***mīm*** → ***yāʾ***. These five letters correspond to the five *usus* (singular *asās*), i.e. the legatees of the prophets Noah, Abraham, Moses, Jesus and Muḥammad. In the same manner, from each one of "the seven supreme letters", six additional letters are produced (with the exception of the *nūn*, from which seven letters are produced); these constitute the "share" (*qisma*) of the six *imām*s who follow each and every *nāṭiq*.[139]

The names of the letters likewise figure in Ibn al-ʿArabī's writings. For example, the first classification of the Arabic letters at the beginning of the second chapter of the *Futūḥāt* deals with the simple letters (*basāʾiṭ*

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[136] The names of the letters play a significant role in the cosmogonic speculations of Marcus the Valentinian; see Halm, *Kosmologie* 49–50; Weiss, *A conceptual examination* 47. Similarly, speculations on the names of the letters also appear in the Jewish *Ōtiyōt de-rabbī ʿakīvā* and in the Christian *The Mysteries of the Greek Letters*; see ibid. 55–6, 88, 270; see also Dornseiff, *Alphabet* 26–8.

[137] See above pp. 81–2.

[138] Note that the letter *hāʾ* is not included in the various groups of letters referred to by *Kitāb al-kashf*, since, according to *Kitāb al-kashf*, this letter designates Allāh.

[139] See al-Sijistānī, *al-Iftikhār* 128–30, and the editor's commentary on pp. 337–8. See also al-Daylamī, *Qawāʿid ʿaqāʾid āl Muḥammad* 69–70.

al-ḥurūf), i.e. the letters that comprise the names of the alphabetical letters. In this classification, the simple letters correspond to the four natures, whereas in another classification presented in the second chapter of the *Futūḥāt*, the alphabetical letters correspond to the four elements. Thus, the letters of the alphabet are comprised of simple letters just as the elements are comprised of the natures.[140]

The second hermeneutical technique, common to Ibn Massara, Ibn al-ʿArabī and the Ismāʿīlī authors, concerns the graphical shape of the letters. To be sure, references to the graphical shape of the letters are also found in Sufi literature[141] as well as in non-Islamic sources.[142] However, one theme in particular is unique to Ismāʿīlī literature and to the writings of Ibn Massara and Ibn al-ʿArabī: the shape of the letters *kāf* and *nūn*—the letters comprising *kun* (كُن), the Divine fiat "be!". The graphical difference between the *kāf* and the *nūn*—the former turns upward (ك), whereas the latter turns downward (ن)—forms the basis for the speculations on this matter. Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ explain that the *kun* is composed of two letters, since

> the *kāf* is attached to the upper side, which is the first face [*al-wajh al-awwal* = the sun], whereas the *nūn* descends to the lower side, which is the second face [*al-wajh al-thānī* = the moon]. The [word *kun*] has two sides: one which draws and one which reinforces. In the same way, the second face draws from the first [face] which has perfect lights and shines brightly, until it [the second face] becomes full [...] then it begins to reinforce [with light, or spiritual substance] those who are situated below it in the world of generation and corruption.[143]

According to the Ikhwān, the location of the moon between the sun and the sub-lunar world corresponds to that of the universal soul which is situated between the universal intellect and the lower, corporeal worlds. Both the universal soul and moon receive the Divine flow which emanates from above, and then channel this flow downwards to the worlds situated

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[140] See above nn. 71, 81; and see also Ibn al-ʿArabī, *al-Mabādiʾ* 76–97, 149.

[141] See the reference to Böwering above in n. 123.

[142] For speculations on the graphical shapes of the letters in Greek sources, Rabbinical literature of the Talmudic era and in the Christian *The Mysteries of the Greek Letters*, see Weiss, *A conceptual examination* 232–80; see also Dornseiff, *Alphabet* 20–5, 30.

[143] See Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ, *al-Jāmiʿa* i, 533 ("*Fa-li-dhālika ṣārat kalimat kun mabniyya ʿalā ḥarfayni fa-l-kāf muttaṣila bi-l-ʿuluww wa-huwa l-wajh al-awwal wa-l-nūn munḥaṭṭa ilā asfal wa-huwa l-wajh al-thānī wa-hiya dhāt ṭarafayni ṭaraf yastamiddu wa-ṭaraf yumiddu kadhālika l-wajh al-thānī yastamiddu min al-awwal al-tāmma anwāruhu al-muḍīʾ ishrāquhu ḥattā yamtaliʾa* [...] *thumma yabdaʾu yumiddu man dūnahu fī ʿālam al-kawn wa-l-fasād* [...]"; cf. Tāmir's edition v, 133–4).

below them. This state of cosmological affairs is reflected in the graphical shape of the *kāf* and *nūn*. Similarly, Ibn Masarra views the graphical shape of these two letters as indicating cosmogonic-cosmological matters:

> When it [the *kūn*] came into existence, the *nūn* was the lower one, for it is the end of motion and being, whereas the *kāf* was the upper one, for it is the place where the movement begins and the command [appears].[144]

Ibn al-ʿArabī likewise links the *nūn* to the lower aspect of reality, to "the realm of man" (*al-ḥaḍra l-insāniyya*). Graphically speaking, the *nūn* has a wide 'stomach' written below the line (ن), and therefore it is "lower" (*sufliyya*), like creation. However, according to Ibn al-ʿArabī, a more sophisticated graphical analysis reveals that the *nūn* contains three hidden letters which belong to "the Divine realm" (*al-ḥaḍra l-ilāhiyya*): *alif*, *zāy* and *lām*. These three letters comprise the word *azal*, i.e., God's "eternity" with respect to the past or His "ancientness". These graphical speculations allow Ibn al-ʿArabī to discuss the mutual relationship between man and God, or between the manifest aspect of reality (creation) and its hidden aspect (the Creator). Similar speculations on the *nūn* of *kun* are found in Ibn al-ʿArabī's *Kitāb al-mīm wa-l-wāw wa-l-nūn*. In addition, in one passage in the second chapter of the *Futūḥāt*, Ibn al-ʿArabī states that the *alif*, which is graphically hidden in the *nūn*, signifies the Divine command (*al-amr*), the *kun*.[145] Finally, in his *Kitāb al-yāʾ*, Ibn al-ʿArabī links the *kāf* of *kun* to the Creator and its *nūn* to creation.[146]

Additional hermeneutical techniques employed by Ibn Masarra, Ibn al-ʿArabī and the Ismāʿīlī authors are also found in other Islamic sources, including Sufi ones.[147] However, to the best of my knowledge, both

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[144] Ibn Masarra, *Khawāṣṣ al-ḥurūf* 161–2 ("*Wa-lammā qāma kāna l-nūr* [*read: al-nūn*] *asfal wa-huwa nihāyat al-ḥaraka wa-l-kawn wa-ṣāra l-kāf aʿlā wa-huwa mawḍiʿ mundafaʿ al-ḥaraka wa-l-amr*"). For a discussion of the letters *kāf* and *nūn* in a cosmogonic context, see also al-Sijistānī, *al-Yanābiʿ* 91; for other speculations on the graphical shapes of letters, see ibid. 9–10, 92.

[145] See Ibn al-ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt* i, 96 (chapter 2, *faṣl* 1, = ʿUthmān Yaḥyā's edition i, 237–41), 122 ("maʿrifat alif al-lām", = i, 331); see also ibid. 103 (= i, 270–1), 154 (chapter 5, "waṣl: qawluhu l-raḥmān [. . .]", = ii, 159–60); Ibn al-ʿArabī, *Kitāb al-mīm* 12; and see also Gril, Science 148–9. Cf. the analysis of the *nūn* in Ibn Ḥawshab (Manṣūr al-Yaman), *al-Rushd wa-l-hidāya* 190.

[146] Ibn al-ʿArabī, *Kitāb al-yāʾ* 8. For other references to the graphical shapes of the letters, see, for example, Ibn al-ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt* i, 98–9 (chapter 2, *faṣl* 1, = ʿUthmān Yaḥyā's edition i, 249–50), 111 (the poems on the letters *khā*ʾ and *qāf*, = i, 301–2), 120 ("maʿrifat lām alif", = i, 325–7); Ibn al-ʿArabī, *al-Mabādiʾ* 129–40; Ibn al-ʿArabī, *Kitāb al-mīm* 5–6, 10; Ibn al-ʿArabī, *Kitāb al-yāʾ* 11.

[147] For instance, the hermeneutical technique which views the letters as acronyms or abbreviations of words appears in early Islamic interpretations of the *fawātiḥ* and in Sufi

techniques analyzed here, and especially the specific contexts in which they are employed (cosmogonic-cosmological speculations inspired by Neoplatonic philosophy, and the motif of *kun*) are unique to Ismāʿīlī literature and to the writings of Ibn Masarra and Ibn al-ʿArabī.

Conclusion: Letter Speculations in Islam—between Sufism and the Shiʿi-Ismāʿīlī Tradition

Two main conclusions may be drawn on the basis of the discussion in this chapter. First, in order to fully understand the various conceptions of Ibn Masarra and Ibn al-ʿArabī regarding the letters of the Arabic alphabet, one must refer, *inter alia*, to Ismāʿīlī sources. Several crucial aspects—the centrality of letter speculations to their thought; the perception of letters as building blocks of creation, and the combination of mythic motifs with Neoplatonic schemes; the linkage of the letters to the four natures; the connection between the letters and the notion of parallel worlds; the letters and the friends of God; and the hermeneutical techniques employed by our authors in the specific contexts analyzed above—these aspects all point to a deep affinity between the Ismāʿīlī tradition and the thought of Ibn Masarra and Ibn al-ʿArabī. Second, from a typological perspective, the letter speculations that are found in Ismāʿīlī sources and in the writings of Ibn Masarra and Ibn al-ʿArabī are significantly different from those reflected in classical Sufi works that were compiled prior to Ibn al-ʿArabī's time. This difference is mainly apparent in cosmogonic-cosmological discussions and in the perception of the letters as building blocks of reality, two elements which are shared by Ibn Masarra, Ibn al-ʿArabī and the Ismāʿīlī authors. Hence, despite various Sufi influences on Ibn al-ʿArabī as regards 'the science of the letters',[148] and notwithstanding his profound originality, his discussions of the letters and those of Ibn Masarra should be viewed as closer in nature to the Ismāʿīlī type of letter speculations than to the Sufi type.[149]

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works as well. See al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmiʿ al-bayān* i, 130–2 (on Q 2:1); Böwering, Sulamī's treatise 356–65; Nwyia, Le Tafsīr mystique 188–9, 230; Ibn Masarra, *Khawāṣṣ al-ḥurūf* 141–2, 145–6, 151, 153–4, 158–9, 161; Ibn al-ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt* i, 115 (on the letter *ṣād*, = 'Uthmān Yaḥyā's edition i, 313); Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ, *Rasāʾil* iii, 379; al-Sijistānī, *al-Yanābīʿ* 14–5, 91–2.

[148] See Gril, Science 136, 139–42. On the letter speculations of al-Ḥallāj, which probably influenced Ibn al-ʿArabī's thought, see Böwering, Sulamī's treatise 350–5.

[149] See also Corbin, *History* 76; and cf. Gril, Science 146.

Certainly, Ismāʿīlī letter speculations have a rich 'pre-history', deriving from various pre-Islamic traditions and especially from the early Shiʿi world as it developed in the 8th and 9th centuries. In Islamic literature, and particularly in Shiʿi sources, 'the science of the letters' is often ascribed to the Shiʿi *imām*s, especially to Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq. Although the latter, no doubt, contributed much to the development of esotericism and mysticism in Islam, it seems to me that there is no conclusive evidence as to his actual role in the history of letter speculations in Islam. For instance, the *ḥadīth* in al-Rāzī's *al-Zīna* analyzed above is attributed in Ismāʿīlī sources to Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq, whereas in Twelver sources it is ascribed to ʿAlī l-Riḍā.[150] Moreover, one should bear in mind that the esoteric knowledge contained in the Jābirian corpus is also attributed to Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq, the alleged teacher of Jābir b. Ḥayyān. One may conclude that in the early Shiʿi-Ismāʿīlī world, the tendency was to attribute the various occult sciences, namely alchemy and the science of letters, to Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq, perhaps in an attempt to legitimize these 'unorthodox' practices.[151] Nonetheless, it is clear that letter speculations—notably of the mythic, cosmognoic-cosmological kind—were indeed prevalent among early Shiʿi circles.[152] 'The science of the letters' was later taken on and developed by the Ismāʿīlī authors, much

[150] See above n. 26.

[151] Note that Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq and various other *imām*s (notably ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib) are said to have possessed the knowledge of *jafr*, that is, divination or predicting the future by means of the letters and their numerical value. In my opinion, the relation between *jafr* and letter speculations of the type described in this chapter has yet to be defined in a satisfying manner; there is much confusion in modern scholarship regarding this issue, and scholars seem to mix or confuse these two 'genres'. On *jafr* and Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq in the context dealt with here, see Ḥājjī Khalīfa, *Kashf al-ẓunūn* i, 591–2; Vajda, Les Lettres 119 n. 1; Kraus, *Jābir ibn Ḥayyān* ii, 262–6; Kraus, *Jābir ibn Ḥayyān* i, xxv–xxvii; Lory, *La Science* 40; Fahd, Djafr; Fahd, *La Divination* 216 n. 5, 219–30; Wasserstrom, Sefer yeṣira 16–20; Taylor, Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq; Massignon, *Passion* i, 201–3, ii, 80, iii, 92–9; Massignon, *Essay* 138–42; Nwyia, Le Tafsīr mystique; Nwyia, *Exégèse* 156–207; Böwering, Major sources, especially pp. 52–6; Amir-Moezzi, *Divine guide* 95, 107, 113, 211 n. 522, 217 n. 577; Kohlberg, Authoritative scriptures 299-300; De Smet, Jaʿfar al-Ṣādeq.

[152] Mughīra b. Saʿīd (executed in 119/736) serves as a good example of this; see Wasserstrom, Moving finger, 16; Lory, *La Science* 49–50, 62–5. Letter speculations also figure prominently in the work entitled *Umm al-kitāb* ("The Mother of the Book"), the earliest layer of which probably originated in the 8th–9th centuries among *ghulāt* circles (on the *ghulāt*, see above p. 11 n. 38 of the Introduction). In this gnostic work, the knowledge related to the letters is attributed to the *imām* Muḥammad al-Bāqir. See Ivanow, Notes; Halm, *Kosmologie* 142–68; Halm, *Die islamische Gnosis* 113–98; Daftary, Umm al-kitāb; Daftary, *Ismāʿīlīs* 93–5; Filippani-Ronconi, The soteriological cosmology; Radtke, Iranian and Gnostic elements; Kraus, *Jābir ibn Ḥayyān* ii, 263 n. 8; Madelung, Ismāʿīliyya 203, 206.

more so than by the Twelver scholars who lived and were active in the 10th century onwards.[153]

[153] From the 10th century (and especially from the second half of that century) onwards, under the rule of the Buwayhīs, a rational, theological and legal tendency developed among Twelver scholars, which was marked by an anti-mythic and anti-esoteric attitude. This attitude seems to have led to the suppression of letter speculations in the Twelver world, at least in comparison with the Ismāʿīlī world. Letter speculations resurface in the writings of Twelver scholars who lived in later periods such as Ḥaydar Āmulī (the 14th century). The latter was greatly influenced by Ibn al-ʿArabī's teachings, which were, in turn, close (as this study attempts to show) to the Ismāʿīlī tradition. The mutual influences in later generations between Sufi mysticism (especially as it was developed by Ibn al-ʿArabī) and Shiʿi-Ismāʿīlī mysticism, in the context of letter speculations, is likewise reflected in the movement of the *Ḥurūfiyya* ("Those who deal with letters"). On these matters see Corbin, Science; Corbin, *En Islam iranien* iii, 149–213; Amir-Moezzi, *Divine guide* 5–28, 130, 137–8; Daftary, *Ismāʿīlis* 420–2 and the references given there; Bausani, Ḥurūfiyya; Gril, Science 191 n. 63, 198 n. 148; Lory, *La Science* 50–1, 54–7; and the articles by Mir-Kasimov cited in the bibliography to this study.

CHAPTER THREE

THE FRIENDS OF GOD

Walāya or *wilāya*, "friendship with God", is one of the most important concepts in Islamic mysticism.[1] The religious phenomenon associated with this concept has its origins in the pre-Islamic heritage: in many respects, the figure of the Muslim *walī*, "friend of God", parallels that of the holy man or saint known from various Late-Antique traditions.[2] However, sainthood in Islam has several distinctive features that set it apart from similar phenomena in other religions. Two of these features in particular are worth mentioning: the one concerns the relationship between *walāya* and prophecy; the other pertains to the issue of Muḥammad's heirs or successors. According to the prevalent view in Islam, which can be found already in the Quran,[3] Muḥammad is "the seal of the prophets" (*khātam al-nabiyyīn*), that is to say, he is the last prophet sent by God to mankind. Naturally, such a strict view, which excludes the possibility of prophetic missions in the generations following Muḥammad's death, does not tally with the basic human need for charismatic religious figures who can function as mediators between man and God. The notion of *walāya* provided Islamic mysticism with an ideal solution to this problem: on the one hand, the *awliyā'*, "the friends of God", are perceived as mediators between man and the Divine, much like the prophets themselves; on the other hand, the *awliyā'* are not considered to be prophets in the true sense of the word. As the famous *ḥadīth* states, "the learned ones are the heirs of the prophets"

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[1] On *walāya*/*wilāya* in general, see Radtke, Walī; Radtke, Saint; Izzi Dien and Walker, Wilāya; Landolt, Walāyah; Corbin, *En Islam iranien* iv, index, s.v. "*walâyat*"; Amir-Moezzi, Notes; Amir-Moezzi, *Divine guide* 159 n. 151; Al-Geyoushi, Al-Tirmidhī's theory 17–8; Chodkiewicz, *Seal of the saints* 17–46; Elmore, *Islamic sainthood* 109–62; Gramlich, *Wunder* 58–60; Karamustafa, *Walāya* 64–70; Cornell, *Realm*, especially pp. xvii–xliv (in the Introduction); Fenton, Hierarchy and the references given there in notes 5–9. On the veneration of saints in Islam, see also Goldziher, *Muslim studies* ii, 253–341; Chodkiewicz, *Seal of the saints* 7–15. On the question of the correct pronunciation of this term—*walāya* or *wilāya*—see the studies by Chodkiewicz, Landolt and Cornell referred to in this note.

[2] On the holy man or saint of Late Antiquity, see the references to the studies of Peter Brown given in the bibliography; see also Elm, Introduction; and the discussions and references in Bitton-Ashkelony, *Encountering the sacred* 14–7 n. 58–62, 66–70; Harvey, *Asceticism* 4–21 (the Introduction).

[3] See Q 33:40.

(*al-ʿulamāʾ warathat al-anbiyāʾ*). Whereas according to a widespread opinion, "the learned ones" mentioned in this tradition are none other than the religious scholars who are responsible for interpreting the canonical texts and ruling on religious-legal matters, both the Shiʿi tradition and Sunni mysticism maintain that the friends of God, who possess Divine knowledge, are the true heirs of the prophets.[4] Yet who are these friends of God? The answer to this question embodies the diverging opinions of the Shiʿis and the Sunni mystics.

Indeed, the concept of friendship with God and the figure of the friends of God are the main axis around which both the Shiʿi tradition and Sunni mysticism revolve.[5] In the Shiʿi tradition, ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib (Muḥammad's cousin and son-in-law) and his descendants are defined as *awliyāʾ*, and are also called *aʾimma* (singular *imām*), "leaders".[6] In contradistinction, Sunni mysticism holds that any believer—regardless of his physical lineage—may become a friend of God. This depends upon his personal virtues, his ethical, religious and mystical accomplishments, and, above all, upon his election by God. In both the Shiʿi tradition and Sunni mysticism, the discussions of *walāya* and the *awliyāʾ* are based on the Quran and on early *ḥadīth*s which treat of those chosen individuals who, due to their high spiritual degree and proximity to God, are superior to the majority of mankind. Shiʿi speculations on *walāya* and the *awliyāʾ* presumably began in the 2nd/8th century, mainly in the circles of the *imām*s Muḥammad al-Bāqir and Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq. On the Sunni side, speculations on these issues began, as far as we know, only in the 3rd/9th century, and are found in the teachings of Sunni mystics such as Sahl al-Tustarī (died in 283/896), al-Junayd (died in 298/910), and especially al-Ḥakīm al-Tirmidhī.[7] It follows, therefore, that one cannot discuss the concept of *walāya* in Islamic mysticism without referring to its development in the Shiʿi tradition.

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[4] See Amir-Moezzi, *Divine guide*, index, s.v. "mîrâth" and "wârith, waratha"; Corbin, *En Islam iranien* i, 251–71; Chodkiewicz, *Seal of the saints* 74–88.

[5] See, concerning Sufism, the pertinent words of Chodkiewicz (*Seal of the saints* 13): "Sufism and sainthood are inseparable. In the absence of saints there is no Sufism: it is born of their sainthood, nourished by it, and led to reproduce it".

[6] Note that in the Shiʿi parlance, the Shiʿi believers, i.e., the followers of the *imām*s, are also called *awliyāʾ*. In this sense, *walāya* should be translated as "loyalty" and "devotion [to the *imām*s]"; see the references to Amir-Moezzi's studies above in n. 1; and see also Kohlberg, Evolution.

[7] For the relevant traditions attributed to Muḥammad al-Bāqir and Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq, see the references to Amir-Moezzi's studies throughout this chapter. On al-Junayd in the context dealt with here, see Karamustafa, *Walāya*; and on al-Tustarī and al-Tirmidhī, see below pp. 129–32, 144–5.

In this chapter I will analyze several aspects of *walāya*, in an attempt to underscore certain affinities between the Ismāʿīlī tradition and the thought of Ibn al-ʿArabī. As I hope to show, awareness of the Ismāʿīlī discussions of *walāya* is important for a true comprehension and appreciation of Ibn al-ʿArabī's teachings on this subject.

The Hierarchy of the Friends of God

One of the most characteristic features of the discussions concerning *walāya* in Islamic mysticism is the hierarchal perception of the *awliyāʾ*'s world. According to this perception, the friends of God, who form a religious elite superior to all other human groups, are themselves positioned in varying degrees and ranks in accordance with their religious-spiritual virtues and their proximity to God. The notion of a hierarchy of righteous men is already found in several pre-Islamic religious traditions, and is likewise reflected in various early *ḥadīth*s.[8] These *ḥadīth*s, in turn, served as a source of inspiration for the Shiʿi as well as the Sunni-mystical treatment of *walāya*.

From the Ḥadīth *to Ibn al-ʿArabī*

In various *ḥadīth*s, whose origins most likely go back to the first two centuries of Islam, the righteous believers are portrayed as forming a hierarchal 'society' of their own. A fine example of this notion can be found in the introduction to the well-known work by Abū Nuʿaym Aḥmad b. ʿAbdallāh al-Iṣfahānī (lived in the 10th–11th centuries), entitled *Ḥilyat al-awliyāʾ* ("The Ornament of the Friends of God"). This work is relatively late, but its introduction contains different traditions in which early motifs are found.[9] In one such tradition, attributed to the Prophet Muḥammad, it is stated that

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[8] For example, the idea expressed in several *ḥadīth*s, and, later on, in various mystical teachings (see the discussion below), according to which the continuing existence of the world depends upon a fixed number of righteous men who live in every generation, is already found in Rabbinical literature of the Talmudic era. See *The Babylonian Talmud*, *Yomā* 38:b and *Ḥagīgah* 12:b; Ginzberg, *Legends* i, 250–3, v, 239 n. 164; Schwarzbaum, Lamed vav tsadīqīm (in Hebrew); Scholem, Lamed vav tsadīqīm (in Hebrew); Scholem, *Elements* 219–20, 227 (in Hebrew); Liebes, Ha-mashīaḥ shel ha-zohar, especially pp. 118–28 (in Hebrew); Sviri, Emergence. For a general comparison in this matter between Jewish and Islamic mysticism, see Fenton, Hierarchy.

[9] On the hierarchy of the *awliyāʾ* as an early theme in Islam, see also Massignon, *Essay* 92; Chodkiewicz, *Seal of the saints* 89-92; Chabbi, Abdāl; cf. Radtke and O'Kane, *Concept of sainthood* 7; Radtke, Concept of Wilāya 483, 494–5.

> Allāh, powerful and mighty is He, has among mankind three hundred [men] whose hearts are like the heart of Adam, peace be upon him; forty whose hearts are like the heart of Moses, peace be upon him; seven whose hearts are like the heart of Abraham, peace be upon him; five whose hearts are like the heart of Gabriel, peace be upon him; three whose hearts are like the heart of Michael, peace be upon him; and one whose heart is like the heart of Isrāfīl, peace be upon him.

According to this tradition, the number of those who belong to each category remains fixed at all times: when Isrāfīl's equivalent (the "one") dies, he is substituted by one of the three who are positioned below him (*abdala llāh ʿazza wa-jalla makānahu min al-thalātha*); when one of the three dies, he is replaced by one of the five, and so on. The tradition further defines the role of those who belong to this hierarchal system:

> Through them [i.e., as a result of their prayers and supplications], Allāh grants life and brings about death, He makes the rain come down, He causes the plants to grow and averts disasters.[10]

In other, similar traditions, the classification of the friends of God is less sophisticated, and only a small number of hierarchal degrees are enumerated. For instance, in another *ḥadīth* quoted in the introduction to *Ḥilyat al-awliyāʾ*, it is said that

> the best among my nation (*khiyār ummatī*), in every generation, are five hundred, while the substitutes (*abdāl*) are forty. Neither number is [ever] reduced: whenever someone [from among the forty] dies, Allāh, powerful and mighty is He, replaces him with one of the five hundred (*abdala llāh ʿazza wa-jalla min al-khamsimiʾa makānahu* […])[11]

In other sources, the number of categories or ranks, the number of those who belong to them, and the terminology used to designate them all vary from one tradition to the other. Thus, in various traditions, one may find

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[10] See al-Iṣfahānī, *Ḥilyat al-awliyāʾ* i, 9 ("*Inna li-llāh ʿazza wa-jalla fī l-khalq thalāthamiʾa qulūbuhum ʿalā qalb ādam ʿalayhi l-salām wa-li-llāh taʿālā fī l-khalq arbaʿūna qulūbuhum ʿalā qalb mūsā ʿalayhi l-salām wa-li-llāh taʿālā fī l-khalq sabʿa qulūbuhum ʿalā qalb ibrāhīm ʿalayhi l-salām wa-li-llāh taʿālā fī l-khalq khamsa qulūbuhum ʿalā qalb jibrīl ʿalayhi l-salām wa-li-llāh taʿālā fī l-khalq thalātha qulūbuhum ʿalā qalb mikāʾīl ʿalayhi l-salām wa-li-llāh taʿālā fī l-khalq wāḥid qalbuhu ʿalā qalb isrāfīl ʿalayhi l-salām fa-idhā māta l-wāḥid abdala llāh ʿazza wa-jalla makānahu min al-thalātha wa-idhā māta min al-thalātha abdala llāh taʿālā makānahu min al-khamsa* […] *fihim* [read: *fa-bihim*] *yuḥyī wa-yumītu wa-yumṭiru wa-yunbitu wa-yadfaʿu l-balāʾ* […]"). See also al-Suyūṭī, *al-Khabar al-dāll* 58–60.

[11] Al-Iṣfahānī, *Ḥilyat al-awliyāʾ* i, 8 ("*Khiyār ummatī fī kull qarn khamsumiʾa wa-l-abdāl arbaʿūna fa-lā l-khamsumiʾa yanquṣūna wa-lā l-arbaʿūna kullamā māta rajul abdala llāh ʿazza wa-jalla min al-khamsimiʾa makānahu wa-adkhala min al-arbaʿīna makānahum* […]").

different terms such as *awliyāʾ*, *abdāl* or *budalāʾ*, *ʿibād* ("God's servants"), *khiyār, khawāṣṣ* ("the unique ones"), *aḥibbāʾ* ("the beloved ones"), *atqiyāʾ* ("the God-fearing ones"), *akhfiyāʾ* ("the hidden ones"), *abriyāʾ* ("the innocent ones") and more. Often, no name is given at all, and only the number of the righteous ones, their traits and their spiritual-religious functions are mentioned.[12]

The term *abdāl* or *budalāʾ*, "substitutes", which is quite common in the *ḥadīth*s referred to here, merits special attention. In several traditions, in *ḥadīth* exegesis and in Sufi literature, various explanations for this term are provided. According to one widespread opinion, the *abdāl* or *budalāʾ* are called thus because their number remains fixed at all times: when one of them dies, he is substituted by someone else who belongs to a lower rank in the hierarchy of the friends of God.[13] However, the original meaning of this term may have been related to the role of the *awliyāʾ* in the post-prophetic age: the friends of God are conceived of as substitutes for the prophets, as their successors in their function as mediators between man and God.[14] One *ḥadīth* explains that

> when prophecy disappeared—and the [prophets], after all, were the pegs of the earth [*awtād al-arḍ*, i.e., the pegs on which the earth rests]—Allāh replaced them [*akhlafa llāh makānahum*, or, according to another version: *abdala llāh taʿālā makānahum*] with forty men from among the nation of Muḥammad, may Allāh's blessing and prayers be upon him, who are called 'the substitutes'. Not one among them dies before Allāh, powerful and mighty is He, establishes in his place someone who succeeds him. They are the pegs of the earth: the hearts of thirty of them share the certitude of Abraham [...]

On the basis of the names provided in its list of transmitters (the *isnād*), one may conclude that this *ḥadīth* was produced during the first half of the 8th century, or perhaps even earlier than that.[15]

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[12] For the relevant traditions, see Ibn Abī l-Dunyā, *al-Awliyāʾ* 9–49; al-Tirmidhī, *Nawādir al-uṣūl* i, 383–6 (*aṣl* 51), 567–70 (*aṣl* 103), 618–23 (*aṣl* 123), ii, 41–52 (*aṣl* 162); al-Iṣfahānī, *Ḥilyat al-awliyāʾ* i, 4–17; Ibn ʿAsākir, *Taʾrīkh madīnat dimashq* i, 289–304; al-Yāfiʿī, *Rawḍ al-rayāḥīn* 11–36 ("al-faṣl al-awwal min al-muqaddima"); al-Suyūṭī, *al-Khabar al-dāll* 41–78; see also Ibn al-ʿArabī, *Ḥilyat al-abdāl*, the editor's Introduction 6–7.

[13] See, for example, Ibn Durayd, *Jamharat al-lugha* 300; and see also the references given in the previous note. On the *abdāl* or *budalāʾ*, see also Goldziher, Abdāl; Chabbi, Abdāl; Flügel, Schaʿrânî 38–40; Blochet, Études 49–111; Moosa, *Extremist Shiites* 110–9; Cook, *Studies* 154–5, 161–2 (see especially n. 121), 164, 205; Chodkiewicz, *Seal of the saints* 103–4; Sviri, Emergence; Sviri, Self 196.

[14] See also Flügel, Schaʿrânî 40.

[15] See Ibn Abī l-Dunyā, *al-Awliyāʾ* 27 ("*Lammā dhahabat al-nubuwwa wa-kānū awtād al-arḍ akhlafa llāh makānahum arbaʿīna rajulan min ummat muḥammad ṣallā llāh ʿalayhi*

The early theme of an *awliyāʾ* hierarchy was further developed, albeit in different ways, in both the Shiʿi tradition and Sunni mysticism. The identity of the *awliyā*, who are responsible for safeguarding the prophetic heritage, is perhaps the main bone of contention between the Shiʿis and the Sunni mystics. As mentioned above, whereas according to Sunni mysticism, all Muslims can potentially belong to the *awliyāʾ* hierarchy, the Shiʿis maintain that only ʿAlī and his biological descendants enjoy this privilege. This is why in various Shiʿi sources, the *abdāl* are identified with the *imām*s and/or with their close followers.[16]

Shiʿi and Sunni-mystical speculations on the hierarchy of the *awliyāʾ* began gaining momentum during the 9th century. In the Shiʿi world, such speculations are particularly characteristic of the so-called *ghulāt* and the various Ismāʿīlī factions.[17] Hierarchal schemes of the *awliyāʾ*s world figure in the Jābirian corpus as well as in the Epistles of Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ. In the former, the hierarchy of the friends of God includes fifty-five "figures" (*ashkhāṣ*), headed by the prophet and the *imām*. Various appellations given to these figures—*najīb* ("noble"), *naqīb* ("chief"), etc.—originate in the *Ḥadīth* literature discussed above, and, consequently, are also found in Sunni mystical sources. Other appellations—such as *sābiq* and *tālī* ("the preceding one" and "the following one"), *asās* ("foundation"), *bāb* ("gate"), *yatīm* ("orphan"), *nāṭiq* and *ṣāmit* ("the speaker" and "the silent one")—are

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wa-sallama yuqālu lahum al-abdāl lā yamūtu l-rajul minhum ḥattā yunshiʾa llāh ʿazza wa-jalla makānahu ākhar yakhlufuhu wa-hum awtād al-arḍ qulūb thalāthīna minhum ʿalā mithli yaqīn ibrāhīm […]"; Sufyān b. ʿUyayna on the authority of Abū l-Zinād); cf. al-Tirmidhī, *Nawādir al-uṣūl* i, 383 (on the authority of Abū l-Dardāʾ). In the version quoted by al-Tirmidhī, the phrase *akhlafa llāh makānahum* is replaced by *abdala llāh taʿālā makānahum*, and it is also stated that the *abdāl* are "the deputies/successors of the prophets" (*khulafāʾ min al-anbiyāʾ*). See also al-Suyūṭī, *al-Khabar al-dāll* 17 (the editors' Introduction), 63–4, 67–8, 70; al-Majlisī, *Biḥār al-anwār* xxvii, 48. On Sufyān b. ʿUyayna (107/725–196/811), see Spectorsky, Sufyān b. ʿUyayna; on Abū l-Zinād (died circa 130/748, at the age of approximately 66), see Ibn Ḥajar al-ʿAsqalānī, *Tahdhīb al-tahdhīb* v, 182–3; and on Abū l-Dardāʾ (died around 32/652), who, according to the prevalent opinion, was a *ṣaḥābī*, see Jeffery, Abū al-Dardāʾ.

[16] See, for example, Ibn Ḥawshab, *al-Rushd wa-l-hidāya* 200; Jaʿfar b. Manṣūr al-Yaman, *al-Kashf* 133; *al-Haft wa-l-aẓilla* 116–7; al-Ḥāmidī, *Kanz al-walad* 208; al-Majlisī, *Biḥār al-anwār* xxvii, 48, xxxiv 212–3. According to several early traditions, the *abdāl* reside in Umayyad Syria, and appear during the eschatological events as a pro-Shiʿi group in support of the *mahdī* ("the rightly guided one", i.e., the messianic figure). See the reference to Cook's study above in n. 13; see also Moosa, *Extremist Shiites* 112–3; al-Suyūṭī, *al-Khabar al-dāll* 45–51, 64; al-Majlisī, *Biḥār al-anwār* liii, 83–4.

[17] See Amir-Moezzi, *Divine guide* 235 n. 715; Kraus, *Jābir ibn Ḥayyān* i, liii; Halm, *Kosmologie* 153–6, 158, 160. On the hierarchy of the *awliyāʾ* in Nuṣayrī texts and in *Umm al-kitāb*, see Kraus, Les Dignitaires 85 n. 1–2, 5–6, 86 n. 1, 5–6; Bar-Asher and Kofsky, *Nuṣayrī-ʿAlawī religion*, index, s.v. "*bāb*" and "*yatīm*". On the term *ghulāt*, see above p. 11 n. 38.

distinctly Shiʿi-Ismāʿīlī.[18] In the Epistles of Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ, different hierarchies of righteous men are found alongside the hierarchy of the seven *nuṭaqāʾ* and their followers, familiar from Ismāʿīlī literature.[19] One such hierarchy comprises of four thousand *muʾminūn*, *tāʾibūn* and *mukhliṣūn* ("[true] believers", "those who have repented", "sincere believers"), who, in turn, include four hundred *zāhidūn, ʿārifūn* and *muḥaqqiqūn* ("ascetics", "those who possess Divine knowledge", "those who have arrived at the truth"). These four hundred have among them forty *ṣāliḥūn* ("righteous ones") who adhere to "the religion of Abraham" (*millat ibrāhīm*) and who further include four *abdāl*. The Ikhwān explain that when a certain person belonging to one of these categories passes away, he is replaced by someone from an inferior category. The main elements in this scheme are obviously derived from the *Ḥadīth* literature, which, as mentioned above, is common to Sunni mysticism as well. However, the emphasis which the Ikhwān place on the number four (4-40-400-4000) is unique to the Ikhwānian worldview, influenced as it is by the Pythagorean tradition.[20] In addition to the Jābirian corpus and the Ikhwān's Epistles, the hierarchal notion described here plays a central role in most (if not in all) the Ismāʿīlī writings dating from the 10th century onwards. The hierarchy of God's friends—the prophets, their legatees (*awṣiyāʾ*), the *imām*s, and the various ranks of the *daʿwa* organization which is responsible for propagating the Ismāʿīlī teachings and calling or summoning people to the Ismāʿīlī cause—is the main focus of many medieval Ismāʿīlī works.[21]

In the Sunni world, speculations on the hierarchy of the friends of God appear in the teachings of various Sufi masters who lived during the 9th–10th centuries, such as Dhū l-Nūn al-Miṣrī (died circa 246/861), Sahl al-Tustarī, Abū Bakr Muḥammad b. ʿAlī l-Kattānī (died in 322/933), and above all, in the writings of al-Ḥakīm al-Tirmidhī.[22] In these speculations, various motifs from the aforementioned *Ḥadīth* literature are combined

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[18] See Kraus, *Jābir ibn Ḥayyān* i, liii–liv; Kraus, Les dignitaires; Lory, *Alchimie* 70–89. On the Jābirian corpus see above pp. 30–2.

[19] On the seven *nuṭaqāʾ* and their followers, see Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ, *al-Jāmiʿa* i, 629–30, 669–73, ii, 138–54, 212. On the term *nāṭiq*, see above p. 49 n. 60.

[20] See Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ, *Rasāʾil* i, 376–7, ii, 375. Regarding the Pythagorean influence on the Ikhwān, see below p. 194 n. 26.

[21] See Daftary, *Ismāʿīlīs*, index, s.v. "daʿwa" and "hierarchy"; Madelung, Imamat; Halm, *Kosmologie* 18–37; Halm, *Fatimids* 56–70; Hamdani, Evolution; Madelung, Ismāʿīliyya 203b. On the importance of the *daʿwa* organization for the Ismāʿīlī worldview, see also Walker, *Early philosophical Shiism* 29, 129.

[22] Dhū l-Nūn: see al-Iṣfahānī, *Ḥilyat al-awliyāʾ* i, 12–5. Sahl al-Tustarī: Böwering, *Mystical vision* 231–41. Al-Kattānī: al-Suyūṭī, *al-Khabar al-dāll* 69. Al-Tirmidhī: Al-Geyoushi,

with Sufi or Sunni-mystical conceptions.[23] At times, the Sunni discussions of the *awliyāʾ* hierarchy exhibit Shiʿi themes, or themes that are typical of the Shiʿi discourse on the *imām*s and their superior status.[24] From the 9th–10th centuries onwards, and up to Ibn al-ʿArabī's time, the hierarchy of the friends of God in Sunni-mystical sources remained more or less the same. Thus, the hierarchy described in the famous work by Abū l-Ḥasan ʿAlī b. ʿUthmān al-Hujwīrī (the 11th century), *Kashf al-maḥjūb* ("The Unveiling of the Veiled"), is not much different from the hierarchies that figure in the teachings of al-Kattānī and Ibn al-ʿArabī. Notwithstanding the differences in details between the various hierarchal schemes of these mystics—namely, in the names of the categories and in the number of persons belonging to them—their general outlines are essentially the same.[25]

Despite the resemblances in these matters between Ibn al-ʿArabī's teachings and those of his predecessors, many themes concerning the

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Al-Tirmidhī's theory; Radtke, Concept of Wilāya; Radtke, A forerunner; Sviri, Emergence; Takeshita, *Ibn ʿArabī's theory* 131–5.

[23] For instance, according to Sahl al-Tustarī, the *abdāl* are thus named because they substitute or replace their mystical states (*aḥwāl*), that is, they constantly pass from one state to another (a mystical level known in Sufi parlance as *talwīn*, "variegation"). In contradistinction, the *awtād* ("Pegs") enjoy mystical stability and are therefore positioned in a higher rank (*tamkīn*, "steadiness"). See Böwering, *Mystical vision* 237.

[24] See, for instance, al-Iṣfahānī, *Ḥilyat al-awliyāʾ* i, 12–3: according to Dhū l-Nūn, the *abdāl* are "Allāh's proofs/arguments against His created beings" (*ḥujaj allāh taʿāla ʿalā khalqihi*); on the Shiʿi term *ḥujja* see above p. 66 n. 118. Similarly, Sahl al-Tustarī is said to have claimed for himself the title of *ḥujjat allāh*, thus positioning himself above all other men; see Böwering, *Mystical vision* 63–7, 237; Elmore, *Islamic sainthood* 137. Al-Tirmidhī too defines the *walī*, *ṣiddīq* ("the truly veracious") and *khatm al-awliyāʾ* ("the seal of the friends of God") as *ḥujjat allāh*. Finally, the term *muḥaddathūn* ("those with whom the angels converse"), which, in al-Tirmidhī's writings, designates one of the highest ranks in the hierarchy of the friends of God, is likewise an important Shiʿi term. See Al-Geyoushi, Al-Tirmidhī's theory 24–5; Takeshita, *Ibn ʿArabī's theory* 134–5, 148. On the term *muḥaddathūn*, especially in Shiʿi sources, see Kohlberg, Term 'Muḥaddath'; Amir-Moezzi, *Divine guide* 70–1; and in Ibn al-ʿArabī's works, see *al-Futūḥāt* ii, 23–4, 78–9, 85 (chapter 73, = ʿUthmān Yaḥyā's edition xi, 374–8, xii, 320–9, 335–50); see also Friedmann, *Prophecy continuous*, index, s.v. "*muḥaddathūn*".

[25] Al-Kattānī: three hundred *nuqabāʾ* ("chiefs"), seventy *nujabāʾ* ("noble ones"), forty *budalāʾ*, seven *akhyār* ("excellent ones"), four *ʿumud*/*ʿamad* ("the poles [of the tent]", "columns") and one *ghawth* ("succor"; see al-Suyūṭī, *al-Khabar al-dāll* 69). Al-Hujwīrī: three hundred *akhyār*, forty *abdāl*, seven *abrār* ("pious ones"), four *awtād*, three *nuqabāʾ* and one *quṭb* ("pole", "axis") or *ghawth* (see al-Hujwīri, *Kashf al-maḥjūb*, Nicholson's translation 214; Blochet, Études 529–31). Ibn al-ʿArabī: forty *Rajabiyyūn* ("the men of the month of Rajab"), one *ḥawārī* (the *ḥawāriyyūn* are Jesus's apostles in the Quran), eight *nujabāʾ* and twelve *nuqabāʾ* (sic, in this order), seven *abdāl*, four *awtād*, two *imām*s and one *quṭb* or *ghawth* (see Chodkiewicz, *Seal of the saints* 89-115; Corbin, *Creative imagination* 45 n. 15). See also Böwering, *Mystical vision* 237: according to Sahl al-Tustarī, there are one thousand and five hundred *ṣiddiqūn*, who include forty *budalāʾ* and seven *awtād*.

hierarchy of the *awliyā'* in Ibn al-ʿArabī's writings have no parallels in earlier Sufi sources, or, for that matter, in the works of al-Ḥakīm al-Tirmidhī, the 9th century Sunni mystic from whom Ibn al-ʿArabī derived many of his notions regarding *walāya* and the *awliyā'*. For example, in chapter seventy three of Ibn al-ʿArabī's *Futūḥāt*—the main chapter in this *magnum opus* dedicated to the hierarchy of the *awliyā'*—there are many additional categories and classifications of righteous men that are not found in earlier Sunni-mystical works.[26] Moreover, several of the conceptual contexts in which Ibn al-ʿArabī discusses the hierarchy of the *awliyā'* point to different sources of inspiration, other than the Sufi tradition. These contexts include the notion of parallel worlds; the perception of the whole universe as a hierarchal system; the Neoplatonic context; and the connection between the letters of the alphabet and the hierarchy of the friends of God. These contexts are all found in Ismāʿīlī literature.[27] One should also bear in mind that the concept of *walāya* and the hierarchy of the *awliyā'* occupy a central place in the writings of al-Ḥakīm al-Tirmidhī, much more so than in classical Sufi works written between the 9th century and the rise of Ibn al-ʿArabī. In contradistinction to these works, al-Tirmidhī's teachings on *walāya* form part of a general theosophical system, in which the Divine world as well as cosmogonic and cosmological issues are all treated together—much like Ismāʿīlī literature and the writings of Ibn al-ʿArabī, who, contrary to most classical Sufi authors in the east, was indeed inspired by al-Tirmidhī.[28] From this perspective, both al-Tirmidhī and Ibn al-ʿArabī are typologically closer to the Ismāʿīlī tradition than to the Sufi one. The fact that from the 9th to the 12th century, the Sufi world in the East generally chose to ignore the teachings of al-Tirmidhī, and the fact that it was Ibn al-ʿArabī in the West who renewed the Sunni-mystical interest in al-Tirmidhī, testify to the essential difference between classical Sufism and the mystical thought of Ibn al-ʿArabī. This difference is perhaps due to the Ismāʿīlī impact on the Andalusī intellectual world, the world from which Ibn al-ʿArabī emerged.

The affinities between Ibn al-ʿArabī and the Ismāʿīlī tradition, in the context dealt with here, did not go unnoticed by various scholars in

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[26] See the references to Chodkiewicz in the previous note; see also Takeshita, *Ibn ʿArabī's theory* 128–31.

[27] See the discussions below in this chapter; see also above pp. 108–16.

[28] On these matters, see al-Hujwīrī, *Kashf al-maḥjūb*, Nicholson's translation 210; Al-Geyoushi, Al-Tirmidhī's theory 18, 59–61; Chodkiewicz, *Seal of the saints*, index, s.v. "Tirmidhī, (al-Ḥakīm)"; Radtke, A forerunner; Radtke, Concept of Wilāya 487, 496; Radtke, Walī; Radtke and O'Kane, *Concept of sainthood* 5–9.

medieval as well as in modern times. Henry Corbin, for instance—much like Ibn Khaldūn, hundreds of years before him—viewed the hierarchy of the *awliyāʾ* as essentially a Shiʿi-Ismāʿīlī notion. Other scholars, such as Michel Chodkiewicz, have rejected this view as being too 'pro-Shiʿi'.[29] However, it is perhaps possible to find a middle way between these opposing opinions, one that would acknowledge, on the one hand, the importance of the Shiʿi-Ismāʿīlī world in the formation of the hierarchal notion in Islam, and, on the other, would not view Sunni mysticism as an unoriginal tradition, utterly influenced by Shiʿi-Ismāʿīlī thought. As is clear from the discussion in this chapter, various sources all played their part in the development of the hierarchal idea in Islam—the pre-Islamic heritage, early Islamic *ḥadīth*s, eastern, classical Sufi writings, the works of al-Tirmidhī and, last but not least, the Shiʿi-Ismāʿīlī tradition. Ibn al-ʿArabī may be regarded as the climactic point in this process, as the confluence of all these diverse trends and traditions. To be sure, Ibn al-ʿArabī was not only influenced by these different sources, but was also extremely innovative in the way in which he blended them together into a new theory of *walāya* and *awliyāʾ*. This theory was to influence both Sunni and Shiʿi mystics in subsequent generations.[30]

The Hierarchy of the Awliyāʾ *and the Notion of Parallel Worlds*

The notion of parallel worlds is one of the most prominent themes in Ismāʿīlī literature. According to the Ismāʿīlī worldview, the hierarchy of the *awliyāʾ*—comprising of the *nuṭaqāʾ, awṣiyāʾ, imām*s, and the various ranks of the *daʿwa* organization—corresponds to the universe at large. Whether this universe is described according to Neoplatonic philosophy or in accordance with a more mythic cosmology, the parallels drawn between the hierarchy of the *awliyāʾ* and that of the cosmos serve to enhance the supreme status of God's friends and to emphasize their central role as mediators between man and God. The *awliyāʾ* are perceived as embodying the figure of the perfect man, who encompasses

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[29] See Ibn Khaldūn, *al-Muqaddima* iii, 1108–9 (translated into English by Rosenthal, *Ibn Khaldûn* iii, 92–4); Corbin, *En Islam iranien* i, 92, 118–27; Corbin, *Creative imagination* 16, 45; Corbin, *History* 29; al-Shaybī, *al-Ṣila* i, 225–6, 229, 379–80, 407, 485–95; Chodkiewicz, *Seal of the saints* 98 n. 4, 137, 145 n. 47; and see also the discussions and references in de Jong, Al-Ḳuṭb; Chabbi, Abdāl; Schaeder, Islamische Lehre 240–1; Affifi, *Mystical philosophy* 89; Massignon, *Essay* 92; Elmore, *Islamic sainthood* 179–82. On Chodkiewicz and Corbin, see also above p. 20 n. 59.

[30] On this later influence, see Chodkiewicz, *Seal of the saints* 10, 15, 49 n. 4; Corbin, Science; Blochet, Études 49–111; and above p. 1 n. 2.

within himself all the different worlds, spiritual and corporeal alike. These notions are also shared by Ibn al-ʿArabī.

Ismāʿīlī writings contain many speculations on the correspondences between the hierarchy of the friends of God, the celestial bodies and the geographical structure of the sub-lunar world. The link between the friends of God and the geographical structure of the world is already drawn in early *ḥadīth*s, in which different groups of *awliyāʾ* are said to reside in specific regions of the Islamic world.[31] Like other motifs in early Islamic traditions which treat of the *awliyāʾ*, this motif too has its origins in pre-Islamic sources.[32] However, in Islam, detailed analogies between the *awliyāʾ* hierarchy, the celestial bodies and the geographical regions of the world are typically found in Ismāʿīlī writings. For instance, in the 10th century Ismāʿīlī work *al-ʿĀlim wa-l-ghulām*,[33] it is stated that the *imām* corresponds to the sun; the *ḥujja* ("proof") of the *imām* or his *bāb* ("gate") corresponds to the moon; and the *duʿāt* (the members of the *daʿwa* organization) correspond to the stars. In addition, the seven *nuṭaqāʾ* correspond to the seven heavens; the seven *imām*s correspond to the seven layers of the earth; the twelve supporters or *nuqabāʾ* ("chiefs") of each *nāṭiq* ("the speaker prophet") correspond to the twelve signs of the zodiac; and the twelve *ḥujaj* (plural of *ḥujja*) of every *imām* are in charge of the *daʿwa* in the twelve geographical regions of the world (the *jazāʾir*, plural of *jazīra*, literally: "island").[34] In a similar vein, al-Kirmānī (d. after 411/1020) explains that the seven *nuṭaqāʾ* parallel the seven celestial spheres of the seven planets, whereas the six *imām*s in each historical cycle parallel the six small spheres which belong to each one of the seven big spheres. To the aforementioned correspondences found in *al-ʿĀlim wa-l-ghulām*, al-Kirmānī adds the correspondences between the seven *awṣiyāʾ*/*usus* ("legatees"/"foundations") and the seven geographical districts of the world (*aqālīm*, plural of *iqlīm*).[35] Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ likewise

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[31] See, for example, Ibn Abī l-Dunyā, *al-Awliyāʾ* 30; Ibn Durayd, *Jamharat al-lugha* 300; al-Tirmidhī, *Nawādir al-uṣūl* i, 383, 385 (*aṣl* 51); Ibn ʿAsākir, *Taʾrīkh madīnat dimashq* i, 289–304; al-Yāfiʿī, *Rawḍ al-rayāḥīn* 18–9; al-Suyūṭī, *al-Khabar al-dāll* 45–54, 60–2, 67–9, 71; see also Kraus, *Jābir ibn Ḥayyān* ii, 222–3 (concerning Nuṣayrī literature).

[32] See, for example, *The Jerusalem Talmud*, *ʿAvōdah zarah* 9:a (chapter 2:1); Schwarzbaum, Lamed vav tsadīqīm 84–6, 93 (in Hebrew); Scholem, Lamed vav tsadīqīm 200 (in Hebrew); Fenton, Hierarchy 15.

[33] On this work see above p. 43.

[34] See Jaʿfar b. Manṣūr al-Yaman, *al-ʿĀlim wa-l-ghulām* 16–7. On the term *ḥujja*, see above p. 66 n. 118; on the term *jazīra*, see above p. 102 n. 93.

[35] See al-Kirmānī, *Rāḥat al-ʿaql* 187, 242–3, 423 (on al-Kirmānī see above pp. 40–1). On the seven *aqālīm* in medieval Arabic geography, see Miquel, Iḳlīm; Ibn al-ʿArabī, *Ḥilyat*

emphasize the correspondence between the seven planets and the twelve signs of the zodiac, the seven days of the week and the twelve months of the year, the seven *aqālīm* and the twelve *jazā'ir*, the seven spiritual faculties of man (= the five senses, the speaking faculty and the faculty of the intellect) and the twelve orifices in the human body, and, finally, the seven *nuṭaqā'* (termed *sab'a ashkhāṣ fāḍila*, "seven virtuous figures") and the twelve supporters of each *nāṭiq*.[36] Ismā'īlī literature abounds with such speculations. One should note the great importance attributed by the Ismā'īlī authors to the numbers seven and twelve.[37]

Very similar speculations are found in the works of Ibn al-'Arabī. According to the latter, the *quṭb* ("pole") corresponds to the sun; the four *awtād* ("pegs") correspond to the four corners of the *ka'ba*;[38] the seven *abdāl* correspond to the seven *aqālīm* or to the seven planets; the twelve *nuqabā'* correspond to the twelve signs of the zodiac; and the eight *nujabā'* ("noble ones") correspond to the eight planets and the eight celestial spheres which are situated below the ninth, encompassing sphere. Ibn al-'Arabī further explains that the seven *abdāl* are appointed by God to safeguard the seven *aqālīm*, and that they benefit from the spiritual powers (*rūḥāniyyāt*) emanating from the seven planets and seven heavens. The seven *abdāl* also derive their spiritual powers from the seven pre-Islamic prophets Adam, Jesus, Joseph, Idrīs, Aaron, Moses and Abraham, who are stationed in the seven heavens. In each day of the week, a different celestial sphere, planet and prophet exercise their particular spiritual influence on one of the seven *abdāl*.[39] Obviously, the connection between

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al-abdāl, the editor's Introduction 8–9.

[36] Ikhwān al-Ṣafā', *Rasā'il* iv, 232–3; Ikhwān al-Ṣafā', *al-Jāmi'a* i, 624–34, ii, 260–4, 585–8; cf. al-Ḥāmidī, *Kanz al-walad* 276; al-Sijistānī, *Tuḥfat al-mustajībīn* 153.

[37] On the importance of these numbers in cosmological-astrological speculations in Ismā'īlī literature as well as in the Babylonian, Persian, Greek, Hellenistic, and Gnostic traditions, see Halm, *Kosmologie* 91-100; see also Dornseiff, *Alphabet* 32–5, 57–60, 81–91; Blochet, Études 51 n. 1, 85 n. 4; Schaeder, Islamische Lehre 204–5, 218. The cosmological importance of the numbers seven and twelve is also evident in the Jewish mystical work *Sefer yetsīrah*; see Liebes, *Ars poetica* 16–22, 76–7, 209–11 (in Hebrew); Weiss, *A conceptual examination* 196, 199–201 (in Hebrew); and see also Fenton, Hierarchy 15–6, 32 n. 36.

[38] This motif also figures in Ismā'īlī literature; see, for instance, Ibn Ḥawshab, *al-Rushd wa-l-hidāya* 203 (where the four senior *nuqabā'* are said to correspond to the four corners of the *ka'ba*); al-Qāḍī l-Nu'mān, *al-Mudhhiba* 70 (Abraham, Ishmael, Muḥammad and the *qā'im* correspond to the four corners of the *ka'ba*).

[39] See Ibn al-'Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt* i, 37 ("Khuṭbat al-kitāb", = 'Uthmān Yaḥyā's edition i, 52–3), 208–10 (chapter 15, = 'Uthmān Yaḥyā's edition ii, 376–84), 237–8 (chapter 22, = iii, 147–8), ii, 9–11 (chapter 73, = xi, 274–83); Ibn al-'Arabī, *Ḥilyat al-abdāl*, the editor's Intro-

the seven prophets and the seven heavens is based on the famous tradition concerning Muḥammad's ascension to the heavens (the *miʿrāj*). According to various *ḥadīth*s, contained in the canonical compilations and in other sources as well, Muḥammad encountered a different prophet in each one of the seven heavens which he visited. However, the link between the friends of God, the seven *aqālīm*, the heavens, the planets and the days of the week is typically Ismāʿīlī.[40] Moreover, Ibn al-ʿArabī defines the fourth celestial sphere, i.e., the sphere of the sun, as the "millstone" (*raḥā*) and "pole" (*quṭb*) of all the other celestial spheres, and as "the heart of the world and the heart of the heavens". "The station of Idrīs's spiritual power" (*maqām rūḥāniyyat idrīs*) is located within this fourth sphere. In addition to being a prophet, Idrīs himself is a pole, that is, the one who stands at the summit of the *awliyāʾ* hierarchy.[41] Now, the concept of *rūḥāniyyāt* (plural of *rūḥāniyya*) and the connection between this concept and the seven planets; the significance of the sun; the correspondence between the sun, the human heart and the highest-ranking friend of God; and the link between *rūḥāniyyāt* and Idrīs, who is identified with Hermes—these themes are also found in the Epistles of Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ.[42]

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duction 8–13; Blochet, Études 51–2, 58 n. 2; Corbin, *Creative imagination* 45 n. 15; Chodkiewicz, *Seal of the saints* 93, 97, 100 n. 22, 106.

[40] For the correspondence between the *nuṭaqāʾ*, the seven days of the week and the seven planets, see, for example, al-Sijistānī, *al-Iftikhār* 143–5; al-Qāḍī l-Nuʿmān, *al-Mudhhiba* 44; see also Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ, *Rasāʾil* iii, 315–20; and Marquet, Imamat 75–9.

[41] See Ibn al-ʿArabī, *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam* 75 ("*Wa-aʿlā l-amkina l-makān al-ladhī tadūru ʿalayhi raḥā ʿālam al-aflāk wa-huwa falak al-shams wa-fihi maqām rūḥāniyyat idrīs ʿalayhi l-salām* [...] *fa-min ḥaythu huwa quṭb al-aflāk huwa rafīʿ al-makān*"); idem, *al-Futūḥāt* ii, 437 (chapter 198, *faṣl* 24: "[...] *Al-samāʾ al-rābiʿa wa-hiya qalb al-ʿālam wa-qalb al-samawāt* [...] *wa-askana fihā quṭb al-arwāḥ al-insāniyya wa-huwa idrīs ʿalayhi l-salām*"); and see also Chodkiewicz, *Seal of the saints* 94. On the *quṭb* see above n. 25. Note that in various Arabic sources influenced by the Hermetic tradition, including Shiʿi-Ismāʿīlī works such as the Epistles of Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ, Idrīs-Enoch is identified with Hermes; see the references above in p. 32 n. 94 and in the following note.

[42] See Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ, *Rasāʾil* ii, 145, 477, iv, 214–5, 443, 445; Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ, *al-Jāmiʿa* i, 519–20, ii, 111–20, 254–9 (where the *qāʾim* is said to parallel the sun and the heart); see also Marquet, Imamat 66, 94 n. 61, 109, 111; Marquet, *La philosophie des Iḫwân aṣ-Ṣafâ: l'Imâm et la société* 137. On the significance of the sun in the Epistles of the Ikhwān, and on the Platonic, Neoplatonic and Hermetic roots of this motif, see De Smet, Le Soleil. On the sun as the center, the heart and the pole, see also al-Kirmānī, *Rāḥat al-ʿaql* 156. On the connection between the heart and the friends of God, see ibid. 160–1, 295–6, 343–4, 415; al-Ḥāmidī, *Kanz al-walad* 254, 257; cf. Ibn al-ʿArabī, *ʿAnqāʾ mughrib* 62; and Krinis, *Idea* 119–20 (in Hebrew). For a discussion of the term *rūḥāniyyāt* and its origins in Hellenistic theurgy and magic—including pagan Neoplatonism—see Pines, On the term Ruḥaniyot (in Hebrew).

The Universal and Divine Aspects of the Hierarchal Worldview

In the Ismāʿīlī tradition and in the thought of Ibn al-ʿArabī, the universe at large—rather than the world of the *awliyāʾ* alone—is conceived of as a hierarchal system. This universal aspect of the hierarchal worldview is reflected in the important Ismāʿīlī term *ḥudūd* ("boundaries", singular: *ḥadd*), which signifies both the spiritual entities in the upper worlds—namely, *Kūnī-Qadar* and the other celestial beings in Ismāʿīlī mythical writings, or the universal intellect and soul in Ismāʿīlī Neoplatonism—as well as their equivalents in the lower, corporeal world, i.e., the *nuṭaqāʾ*, *awṣiyāʾ*, *imām*s and the various ranks of the *daʿwa* organization. *Ḥadd* literally means "definition", "border"; according to the Ismāʿīlī perception, created beings, by their very nature and in contradistinction to God, are defined and delimited. Hence, every created being has its own *ḥadd*—its ontological boundaries and its vertical rank in the universal hierarchy.[43] Neoplatonic philosophy, which gained much popularity in the Ismāʿīlī world from the 10th century onwards, served to reinforce this universal aspect of the hierarchal worldview, since according to Neoplatonic cosmology, the different echelons of the universe all emanate from "the One" in a hierarchal-vertical manner. Another term which signifies both the human-social and the universal aspects of the hierarchal perception is *martaba* ("level", plural: *marātib*), a fundamental concept in Ismāʿīlī literature as well as in Ibn al-ʿArabī's writings. In Ismāʿīlī works, the terms *ḥudūd* and *marātib* belong to the same semantic field and are often synonymous.[44]

Numerous examples of the Ismāʿīlī usage of the term *martaba* and its derivatives can be found in the Epistles of Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ. According to the Ikhwān, the universal intellect is hierarchically situated (*murattab*) below God's command (*amr allāh*), or, more precisely, it is encircled or encompassed by the Divine command. Similarly, the universal soul is hierarchically situated below the universal intellect or is encircled by

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[43] See Halm, *Kosmologie*, index, s.v. "ḥadd, ḥudūd" and "-ḥudūd al-ǧusmānīya, ar-rūḥānīya"; Daftary, *Ismāʿīlīs*, index, s.v. "ḥudūd"; De Smet, Mīzān 251 n. 10; Corbin, Divine epiphany; Hamdani, Evolution 87. See also Stern, Earliest cosmological doctrines 8–9; and Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ, *al-Jāmiʿa* i, 24 ("[…] *Wa-kull yantahī ilā ḥadd lahu maḥdūd* […]").

[44] See, for example, Ibn Ḥawshab, *al-Rushd wa-l-hidāya* 189, 198; Jaʿfar b. Manṣūr al-Yaman, *al-Kashf* 117, 125, 131–4, 143–4, 149, 155–6; Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ, *al-Jāmiʿa* i, 624–5; al-Sijistānī, *Tuḥfat al-mustajībīn* 152–3; al-Sijistānī, *al-Iftikhār* 94, 127, 130, 148, 170; al-Kirmānī, *Rāḥat al-ʿaql* 205–15, 223–6; al-Ḥāmidī, *Kanz al-walad* 163–204; Lewis, An Ismaili interpretation 700, 701. The Ismāʿīlī authors and Ibn al-ʿArabī also employ the term *rutba* (plural: *rutab*), which seems to be identical in meaning to the term *martaba*.

it. Each of the remaining cosmic beings, spiritual and corporeal alike, is equally positioned in its proper hierarchal level—below the preceding being or encircled by it. This universal hierarchy corresponds to the numbers from one to ten: God corresponds to the number one; the universal intellect corresponds to the number two; the universal soul corresponds to the number three; prime matter (*al-hayūlā*) corresponds to the number four; and so on. The sub-lunar world too is structured in a hierarchal fashion: the *martaba* of the minerals is situated below the *martaba* of the plants; the *martaba* of the plants is situated below the *martaba* of the animals; the *martaba* of the animals is situated below the *martaba* of man; and the latter is situated below the *martaba* of the angels. Each one of these *marātib* is further subdivided into additional levels. For example, according to one classification of the Ikhwān, the human level is divided into the following categories: the simple men; the craftsmen and artisans; the rulers; the kings; and, finally, at the uppermost level, the prophets, their heirs and their followers. The differences between these diverse human classes correspond to the differences between inanimate beings, plants, animals, human beings and angels. The levels of the various souls in the sub-lunar world—from the vegetative soul, to the simple human soul, to the prophet's soul—correspond to the hierarchy of the numbers mentioned above.[45]

Similar speculations appear in the writings of Ibn Masarra and Ibn al-ʿArabī. Both share the Ismāʿīlī-Ikhwānian worldview which perceives human society and the universe at large as hierarchal systems.[46] Moreover, Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ and Ibn al-ʿArabī maintain that the hierarchal structure of creation originates in the Divine world itself—more precisely, in its manifest and creative aspect, i.e., in the Divine word and command

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[45] See Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ, *Rasāʾil* i, 311–3, 318–31, ii, 150–1, 166–72, iii, 127, 129, 178–82, 224–9, 246, 348–9, 353, 359, 368–9, 371, 377, iv, 76, 169–77, 199–201, 212–31, 237–8, 276–82, 374–81; Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ, *al-Jāmiʿa* ii, 16–8. On the hierarchal worldview of the Ikhwān, see also Marquet, Imamat, esp. pp. 103–39; Marquet, *La philosophie des Ihwan al-Safa: de Dieu à l'homme* 393–8; Netton, *Muslim Neoplatonists* 33, 35–7; Nasr, *An introduction* 44–74. On the hierarchal worldview in other Ismāʿīlī sources, see Corbin, Divine epiphany; Walker, *Early philosophical Shiism*, index, s.v. "hierarchy"; Walker, Cosmic hierarchies; Hamdani, Evolution.

[46] For Ibn Masarra, see, for example, Ibn Masarra, *Khawāṣṣ al-ḥurūf* 146–50; Ibn Masarra, *al-Iʿtibār* 183, 185 (where the term *ḥudūd* is used in a cosmological context similar to that which is found in Ismāʿīlī literature). For Ibn al-ʿArabī, see the discussion below and Chittick, *Self-disclosure* 289. The writings of yet another Andalusī author—the Jewish Judah Ha-Levi (d. 1141; see above p. 74)—likewise exhibit a hierarchal worldview which is quite similar to that of the Ismāʿīlī tradition; see Pines, Shīʿite terms 178–92, 203, 217; Krinis, *Idea* 66–7, 101–21; and see also Berman, Judaeo-Arabic thought 41–2.

(*kalima*, *amr*). As explained above,[47] the Ikhwān identify this hypostasis, located between God and the universal intellect, with the Divine knowledge, which functions as the source for the universal hierarchy or the various levels (*marātib*) of the cosmos. Divine knowledge is also the ontological root of mankind's religious leadership and is defined as the goal of creation. It seems that according to the Ikhwān, during the first stages of creation, the hierarchal structure of human society and of the universe at large exists in a state of mere potentiality, as a Divine 'plan' waiting to be executed. This 'plan' emanates from the hypostasis of Divine knowledge down to the universal intellect, and from the intellect it reaches the universal soul which is responsible for implementing it in the lower, corporeal worlds.[48] Similarly, Ibn al-ʿArabī views *nafas al-raḥmān*—"the breath of the All-Merciful", located above the universal intellect—as the source of the different levels of the universe (*marātib*) and as the Divine root of the perfect man, the goal of creation. According to Ibn al-ʿArabī, all created beings exist eternally as the objects of God's knowledge, as "immutable entities" (*aʿyān thābita*) which are organized in a hierarchal order even before they are brought into existence.[49] The letters that emanate from "the breath of the All-Merciful", and which function as the building blocks of creation, are likewise divided into hierarchal levels (*marātib*).[50] Finally, the Divine names—which, in Ibn al-ʿArabī's thought, bring about the creation of the world—are hierarchically organized according to their varying ranks (*marātib*, *rutab*): some are "lords" (*arbāb*), some are "gatekeepers" (*sadana*), others are "leaders" (*aʾimma*) and so on. This hierarchy in the Divine world is the source of the hierarchy in creation.[51]

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[47] See above pp. 45–51.

[48] See Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ, *Rasāʾil* iii, 88-9 ("[…] *Fa-awwal dhālika l-tartīb al-awwal al-murattab kāna fī l-nafs awwalan bi-l-quwwa wa-l-umūr al-ʿaqliyya l-maʿqūla wa-hiya ṣūrat aʿyān basāʾiṭ al-murakkabāt wa-l-mawjūdāt bi-l-tartīb*"); see also ibid. i, 404 ("[…] *Al-ashyāʾ kulluhā aʿyān ghayriyyāt murattaba fī l-wujūd ka-tartīb al-ʿadad* […]"), iii, 236 ("*Fa-qad bāna bi-hādhā l-mithāl anna l-mawjūdāt kullahā ṣuwar ghayriyyāt wa-hiya aʿyān al-ashyāʾ wa-annahā mutatāliyāt fī l-ḥudūth wa-l-baqāʾ ka-tatālī l-ʿadad min al-wāḥid* […]"), 348–349, iv, 200–1, 203, 409; Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ, *al-Jāmiʿa* i, 24, 270–1, ii, 16–8, 312–3, 319; see also Marquet, Imamat 107; al-Sijistānī, *al-Iftikhār* 32–3.

[49] See Ibn al-ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt* ii, 279 (chapter 167), 394 (chapter 198, *faṣl* 1), iv, 212 (chapter 558, "ḥaḍrat al-khalq wa-l-amr": "[…] *Wa-innamā l-aʿyān al-mumkināt al-thābita fī ḥāl al-ʿadam murattaba kamā waqaʿat wa-taqaʿu fī l-wujūd tartīban zamāniyyan*"). In the last sentence quoted here from chapter 558, the use of the terms *aʿyān* and *tartīb* brings to mind the Ikhwānian phraseology; see the quotations in the previous note.

[50] See above p. 97.

[51] See, for example, Ibn al-ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt* i, 35 ("Khuṭbat al-kitāb", = ʿUthmān Yaḥyā's edition i, 42), 145–8 (chapter 4, = ʿUthmān Yaḥyā's edition ii, 119–31); Ibn al-ʿArabī, *Inshāʾ*

The Divine origin of the human and cosmic hierarchies may explain why both Ibn al-ʿArabī and the Ismāʿīlī authors attach such great importance to the observance of the hierarchal order: any deviation from this order is conceived of as a transgression against the Divine will itself. Accordingly, Ismāʿīlī tradition views Iblīs's disobedience of the Divine command to bow down before Adam (see Q 2:34) as a rejection of the Divinely-ordained hierarchy in the world. In a similar vein, Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ interpret Adam's sin as a premature and illicit attempt to obtain for himself a higher rank in the religious hierarchy.[52] In fact, acknowledging the hierarchal structure of the universe and of human society forms the crux of the Ismāʿīlī faith itself. In the Ismāʿīlī worldview, every created being—in the spiritual and corporeal worlds alike—is, on the one hand, superior to those beings that are situated below it (*fāḍil*), and, on the other hand, inferior to those located above it (*mafḍūl*). As a result, the primary religious obligation of man is to acquire knowledge of the various hierarchal levels found above and beneath him and to accept his own proper rank in this hierarchy.[53] Moreover, acknowledging the human and universal hierarchies is the basis for the belief in the unity of God (*tawḥid*), and, in effect, is equal to it; the propagation of this notion among men is the main

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al-dawāʾir 32–8; Ibn al-ʿArabī, *ʿAnqāʾ mughrib* 33–6; Ibn al-ʿArabī, *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam* 153. The hierarchal perception described here is especially evident in Ibn al-ʿArabī's myth of the Divine creative names; see Elmore, Four texts; see also Chittick, *Sufi path* 47–58. On the term *martaba* in Ibn al-ʿArabī's writings, see also ibid. index, s.v. "martaba"; and Chodkiewicz, *Seal of the saints* 89.

[52] See Stern, Earliest cosmological doctrines 10, 11–4; Jaʿfar b. Manṣūr al-Yaman, *Sarāʾir wa-asrār al-nuṭaqāʾ* 21; Ebstein, Secrecy 322–6. Note that in Twelver sources, Adam's sin is often interpreted as a denial of *walāya* and of the *imāms*' high status; see De Smet, Adam 189; Amir-Moezzi, Notes 734; Amir-Moezzi, La Préexistence 118 n. 34; Amir-Moezzi, *Divine guide* 163 n. 184; Kohlberg, Some Shīʿī views 55–7; Bar-Asher, *Scripture* 134–5, 185. The Ismāʿīlī-Ṭayyibī author Ibrāhīm al-Ḥāmidī (on whom see above p. 70) describes the emergence of the world of the ten intellects along similar lines: the third intellect, having refused to acknowledge the superior rank of the preceding intellect, falls down to the bottom of the Divine world and is henceforth situated below the other nine intellects. The restoration of the Divine world to its initial state becomes the responsibility of the Ismāʿīlī believers themselves: through their faith and religious deeds, and especially through their acknowledgement of the various *ḥudūd*, the fallen intellect (= the tenth intellect) is able to eventually return to its original rank in the Divine hierarchy. See al-Ḥāmidī, *Kanz al-walad* 66–133, 157 ff., 295–297; Daftary, *Ismāʿīlīs* 269–276. On the Gnostic roots of this myth, see Halm, *Kosmologie* 75–90, 117-8.

[53] On the principal of *tafḍīl*/*tafāḍul*, see, for example, Jaʿfar b. Manṣūr al-Yaman, *al-ʿĀlim wa-l-ghulām* 8–9, 16, 79–81; Jaʿfar b. Manṣūr al-Yaman, *al-Kashf* 142–4; al-Qāḍī l-Nuʿmān, *Daʿāʾim al-islām* 9–11; al-Sijistānī, *al-Iftikhār* 140–1; al-Kirmānī, *Rāḥat al-ʿaql* 299, 434.

objective of the Ismāʿīlī *daʿwa*.[54] To be sure, acknowledging the high status of the *imām*s and maintaining loyalty to them (*walāya*) are also perceived by the Twelver Shiʿis as the most important religious duty incumbent on man and as a prerequisite for spiritual salvation. The principal of *tafḍīl*/*tafāḍul*, rooted in the Quran,[55] is likewise shared by the Twelver authors, who hold that the prophets and *imām*s stand above all other human beings.[56] However, in the Ismāʿīlī tradition, this hierarchal notion receives an unprecedented emphasis and is also extended to the universe at large, very often in the framework of Neoplatonic cosmology.

Man's obligation to observe the Divinely-ordained hierarchy in the world is also evident in Ibn al-ʿArabī's writings. Like the Ismāʿīlī authors, Ibn al-ʿArabī too views the universe in general and human society in particular as hierarchically structured: "the whole world", he states, "[comprises of] those who are superior (*fāḍil*) and those who are inferior (*mafḍūl*)".[57] In referring to the spiritual influence of certain geographical spaces and holy sites on the mystic, Ibn al-ʿArabī explains that

> in the same way that spiritual stations differ in their superiority over one another (*tatafāḍalu*), so too physical stations differ in their superiority over one another; otherwise, would not a clod of clay be similar to a stone? This is indeed the case with one who is subject to a mystical state. However, the perfect one who has reached stability distinguishes between the two just as God has distinguished between them [...] For the wise one who has arrived [at the Truth] is he who grants everything what it deserves (*fa-l-ḥakīm al-wāṣil man aʿṭā kull dhī ḥaqq ḥaqqahu*).[58]

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[54] See, for instance, Stern, Earliest cosmological doctrines 11; al-Sijistānī, *Tuḥfat al-mustajībīn* 154; al-Qāḍī l-Nuʿmān, *al-Mudhhiba* 60; al-Kirmānī, *Rāḥat al-ʿaql* 15, 18, 25, 103–4, 121, 134–5, 143, 186; al-Kirmānī, *al-Riyāḍ* 49, 83, 159–60; al-Ḥāmidī, *Kanz al-walad* 23–4, 26, 29, 75, 163, 279; Marquet, Imamat 60, 92–4.

[55] See, for instance, Q 2:47, 253; 4:34, 95; 16:71; 17:55.

[56] See Bar-Asher, *Scripture* 196–9; Krinis, *Idea* 102–3, 115–6 (in Hebrew).

[57] Ibn al-ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt* iii, 443 (chapter 373: "[...] *Fa-l-ʿālam kulluhu fāḍil mafḍūl*"); see also ibid. ii, 23 (chapter 73, on the *aḥbāb*, = ʿUthmān Yaḥyā's edition xi, 369; and see also ʿUthmān Yaḥyā's edition, chapter 54, iv, 263–6), 254 (chapter 158); Ibn al-ʿArabī, *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam* 132; Chittick, *Sufi path* 12–4, 47–52, 336, 363.

[58] See Ibn al-ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt* i, 146 (chapter 4: "*Fa-kamā tatafāḍalu l-manāzil al-rūḥāniyya kadhālika tatafāḍalu l-manāzil al-jismāniyya wa-illā fa-hal al-durr* [*read: al-madar*] *mithlu l-ḥajar illā ʿinda ṣāḥīb al-ḥāl wa-ammā l-mukammal/l-mukmal ṣāḥib al-maqām fa-innahu yumayyizu baynahumā kamā mayyaza baynahumā l-ḥaqq* [...] *fa-l-ḥakīm al-wāṣil man aʿṭā kull dhī ḥaqq ḥaqqahu* [...]", = ʿUthmān Yaḥyā's edition ii, 120, where المدر ("a clod of clay") appears instead of الدر ("pearls")). See also Ibn al-ʿArabī, *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam* 219 ("*Fa-tamayyazat al-aʿyān bi-l-marātib fa-aʿṭā kull dhī ḥaqq ḥaqqahu kull ʿārif*"; on *aʿyān* and *marātib* see above nn. 48–9). On *ḥakīm* ("wise one"), *ḥukamāʾ* ("wise ones") and *ḥikma* ("wisdom") in the writings of Ibn al-ʿArabī, see Rosenthal, Ibn ʿArabī 13–6 and the discussion below.

Whereas the ordinary mystic, who is subjected to varying mystical states, views the hierarchal structure of reality as a mere illusion, the perfect mystic, who has attained mystical stability, acknowledges both the hierarchal nature of creation and the Divine unity which permeates it. He is thus able to grant every created being "what it deserves"; that is, he is able to acknowledge its proper rank in the universal and human hierarchies. According to Ibn al-ʿArabī, this correct mystical vision of reality is characteristic of the attitude of the *malāmiyya*, "those who adhere to the path of blame".[59] The latter, who are superior even to the Sufis, are

> the wise ones who skillfully place every matter in its proper place (*waḍaʿū l-umūr mawāḍiʿahā*). They confirm the [cosmic] means in their spaces, and remove them from the places whence they should be removed. They do not neglect anything in the hierarchal order which Allāh has established among His created beings [...]

Acknowledging the hierarchy in the universe is thus essential for understanding the true nature of Divine creation. Conversely, focusing exclusively on the hierarchal structure of the world while disregarding the Divine presence, which bestows unity on all created phenomena, likewise leads to a distorted perception of reality.[60]

The expressions "to grant everything what it deserves" and "to place every matter in its proper place" and the principal reflected in them are recurring themes in the writings of Ibn al-ʿArabī.[61] Although these

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[59] On the *malāmiyya* or *malāmatiyya* see Sviri, Ḥakīm Tirmidhī.

[60] See Ibn al-ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt* ii, 19 (chapter 73: *"Fa-minhum raḍiya llāh ʿanhum al-malāmiyya* [...] *wa-hum al-ḥukamāʾ al-ladhīna waḍaʿū l-umūr mawāḍiʿahā wa-aḥkamūhā wa-aqarrū l-asbāb fī amākinihā wa-nafawhā fī l-mawāḍiʿ al-latī yanbaghī an tunfā ʿanhā wa-lā akhallū bi-shayʾ mimmā rattabahu llāh fī khalqihi ʿalā ḥasab mā rattabūhu* [...] *fa-innahu man rafaʿa l-sabab fī l-mawḍiʿ al-ladhī waḍaʿahu fihi wāḍiʿuhu wa-huwa l-ḥaqq faqad safuha wāḍiʿahu wa-jahila qadrahu wa-man iʿtamada ʿalayhi fa-qad ashraka wa-alḥada wa-ilā arḍ al-ṭabīʿa akhlada fa-l-malāmatiyya qarrarat al-asbāb wa-lam taʿtamid ʿalayhā"*, = ʿUthmān Yaḥyā's edition xi, 340–1). See also ibid. i, 308–9 (chapter 42, = ʿUthmān Yaḥyā's edition iv, 57–61), iii, 36 (chapter 309, *"Qad aʿlamahum allāh bi-l-mawāṭin wa-mā tastaḥiqquhu min al-aʿmāl wa-l-aḥwāl wa-hum yuʿāmilūna kull mawṭin bi-mā yastaḥiqquhu* [...]"; "[...] *Yaḍaʿūna l-asbāb mawāḍiʿahā wa-yaʿrifūna ḥikmatahā* [...]"), 37 ("*Wa-ʿlam anna l-ḥakīm min al-ʿibād huwa l-ladhī yunazzilu kull shayʾ manzilatahu wa-lā yataʿaddā bihi martabatahu wa-yuʿṭī kull dhī ḥaqq ḥaqqahu* [...]"); see also Chodkiewicz, *Seal of the saints* 110. The expression in the last sentence quoted here from chapter 309 of the *Futūḥāt*, *wa-lā yataʿaddā bihi martabatahu*, or similar expressions, are quite typical of Ismāʿīlī phraseology; see, for example, Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ, *Rasāʾil* iv, 200, 203; al-Sijistānī, *Tuḥfat al-mustajībīn* 146. See also Ibn al-ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt* ii, 13 (chapter 73, = ʿUthmān Yaḥyā's edition xi, 305); and Ibn Masarra, *al-Iʿtibār* 183.

[61] See also Chittick, *Sufi path* 174–9.

expressions are based on certain *ḥadīth*s,[62] the distinct context in which Ibn al-ʿArabī employs them—that is, man's obligation to acknowledge the proper hierarchal rank of every created being in the universe—is absent from these *ḥadīth*s. This context is rather found in Ismāʿīlī literature, above all in the Epistles of Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ. The latter explain that Adam was given complete dominion over all existents in nature so that he may benefit from them and "place every one of them in its proper place, giving it the share it deserves (*wa-yaḍaʿa kull shayʾ minhā fī mawḍiʿihi wa-yuwaffiyahu qisṭahu*). In this way, the harmonious order is observed and perfection is attained". Like Ibn al-ʿArabī, the Ikhwān perceive the "placing of every matter in its proper place" as characteristic of the wise man (*al-ḥakīm*), who in so doing emulates Divine creation and Divine wisdom. For instance, the Ikhwān claim that in contradistinction to various schools in the history of human thought who preferred a certain number to all other numbers in their religious-philosophical system, the Pythagoreans attached importance to all the numbers from one to ten. These numbers correspond to the hierarchal structure of the universe:

> The wise Pythagoreans granted everything what it deserves (*fa-aʿṭaw kull dhī ḥaqq ḥaqqahu*), for they said: existents are [organized] according to the nature of the numbers [...] This is the approach of our brothers, may Allāh support them, who maintain that things should be placed in their proper places and organized in their proper hierarchal ranks, in accordance with the natural course and the Divine harmonious order.[63]

The Shiʿi-Ismāʿīlī perspective is clearly evident in *Kitāb al-kashf*, where the Sunnis are criticized for "placing the [Divine] names and miraculous

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[62] See al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ* i, 457–8 (Kitāb al-ṣawm / bāb man aqsama ʿalā akhīhi li-yufṭira fī l-taṭawwuʿ, *ḥadīth* 1968), iv, 102 (Kitāb al-adab / bāb ṣunʿ al-ṭaʿām wa-l-takalluf lil-ḍayf, *ḥadīth* 6139); Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal, *al-Musnad* ii, 203–4 (Musnad al-zubayr b. al-ʿAwwām, *ḥadīth* 1434), xiii, 456–7 (Ḥadīth ʿamr b. khārija, *ḥadīth*s 17594, 17596–17597); al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmiʿ al-bayān* vi, 241 (on Q 9:75–77); al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyāʾ ʿulūm al-dīn* i, 51 (a tradition attributed to Jesus).

[63] See Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ, *Rasāʾil* iii, 141 ("[...] *Wa-yaḍaʿa kull shayʾ minhā fī mawḍiʿihi wa-yuwaffiyahu qisṭahu min ḥifẓ al-niẓām wa-bulūgh al-tamām*"), 199–200 ("*Fa-ammā l-ḥukamāʾ al-fīthāghūriyyūna fa-aʿṭaw kull dhī ḥaqq ḥaqqahu idh qālū inna l-mawjūdāt bi-ḥasab ṭabīʿat al-ʿadad* [...] *wa-hādhā madhhab ikhwāninā ayyadahum allāh wa-bi-ḥasab raʾyihim fī waḍʿ al-ashyāʾ mawāḍiʿahā wa-tartībihim ḥaqq marātibihā ʿalā l-majrā l-ṭabīʿī wa-l-niẓām al-ilāhī*"). See also ibid. iv, 204, 237, 462; Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ, *al-Jāmiʿa* i, 115–7, 136, 138, 140–1, 143–4, 471–2, 529, ii, 333. Note that according to the Ikhwān, "placing everything in its proper place" also means to keep Divine truths secret, since by disclosing Divine secrets to the uninitiated, one "places them in their improper places" (see Ebstein, Secrecy 322–6). This esoteric aspect is based on a tradition which is attributed to Jesus; see the reference to al-Ghazālī above in n. 62.

signs (*āyāt*) in their improper places"—in other words, they do not acknowledge the proper rank of the *imām*s in the human-social hierarchy. Finally, al-Sijistānī states that the *nāṭiq* and the *asās* ("foundation", the prophet's legatee) have the intellectual-spiritual ability to "place everything in its proper place".[64]

The Divine Origin of the Friends of God and their Supreme Source

In the Shiʿi tradition and in Sunni mysticism, the ability of the *awliyāʾ* to function as mediators between God and man is due to their unique relationship with the Divine world. This relationship is not restricted to the framework of human history, but is rather conceived of as having existed even before creation. Consequently, the friends of God are distinct from the ordinary human beings in their very essence, deriving as they do from the Divine world itself.

This notion is found in various early *ḥadīth*s where it is expressed in a rather mythical language. These *ḥadīth*s form the basis for both the Shiʿi and Sunni-mystical discussions concerning the Divine roots of the *awliyāʾ*, though the mythical treatment of this theme is particularly evident in Shiʿi sources. In the Ismāʿīlī tradition, the relationship between the *awliyāʾ* and the upper, Divine realm was interpreted in a unique way, in accordance with Neoplatonic philosophy. A very similar interpretation, likewise inspired by Neoplatonism, is found in the writings of Ibn al-ʿArabī.

The Mythical Foundation in the Ḥadīth

In various traditions contained in *Ḥadīth* literature, the Prophet Muḥammad is presented as the terrestrial-historical manifestation of a primordial being, or a being that had already existed before the creation of the world. This being is typically described as a light (*nūr muḥammad*, "the light of Muḥammad") which was formed by God—according to several traditions, from the Divine light itself—and was then passed on from Adam, via his chosen descendants and the prophets known from

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[64] See Jaʿfar b. Manṣūr al-Yaman, *Kitāb al-kashf* 45 ("[…] *Yakhūḍūna fī asmāʾihi wa-āyātihi bi-ghayr ʿilm fa-yaḍaʿūnahā fī ghayr mawḍiʿihā wa-yanḥarifūna ʿanhā wa-dhālika anna llāh amarahum an yattakhidhū aqwāman awliyāʾ wa-aʾimma l-ladhīna aʿṭāhum allāh min al-faḍl* […]"); al-Sijistānī, *al-Yanābīʿ* 71, 95; al-Sijistānī, *al-Iftikhār* 119. For the hierarchal-cosmological aspect of the two expressions discussed here, see also al-Kirmānī, *Rāḥat al-ʿaql* 110–1.

sacred human history, to Muḥammad. The passage of the Divine-prophetic light from father to son, and from one generation to the next, is portrayed as a physical process which involves the transmission of the male semen into the female womb.[65] In a number of traditions, Muḥammad, in his existence prior to creation, is depicted as a cosmogonic and cosmological being—a "pearl", in the mythic wording of several *ḥadīth*s—from which all other prophets, or all other existents, were created.[66] In Shiʿi literature, these themes are also ascribed to ʿAlī, his wife Fāṭima and their descendants, the *imām*s. Thus, various Shiʿi *ḥadīth*s maintain that these figures were produced from the Divine light itself, directly or through the light of Muḥammad. Prior to creation, Muḥammad, ʿAlī, Fāṭima and the *imām*s were "spirits" (*arwāḥ*), "shadows" (*aẓilla*) or "silhouettes" of light (*ashbāḥ*). These beings are further linked to the Divine throne (*ʿarsh*): they are said to have circumambulated the throne before Adam was created, or to have had their names inscribed on it. Certain traditions state that from the light of Muḥammad and his family, the whole world was created. The Divine light was then transmitted from one prophet to the next and from one *imām* to the following one, either by physical means (semen) or in a spiritual manner (*waṣiyya*, "legacy").[67] It is noteworthy that in certain Sunni *ḥadīth*s, the three "rightly guided" Caliphs who ruled after Muḥammad—Abū Bakr, ʿUmar and ʿUthmān—are likewise perceived as having Divine primordial roots. For example, one tradition states that their names are written on the Divine throne. These traditions were most likely formed in response to the Shiʿi speculations on the Divine primordial origins of the *imām*s.[68]

The concept of *nūr muḥammad* seems to have been adopted and developed by the 9th century Sufi master Sahl al-Tustarī. According to the teachings attributed to the latter, the light of Muḥammad was created by God from the Divine light itself, prior to the creation of the world. Muḥammad's light is not only the cosmogonic root of all existents, but

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[65] See Rubin, Pre-Existence 67–104.

[66] See ibid. 95, 97–8, 111–7. The motif of *nūr muḥammad* has its roots in diverse pre-Islamic sources—most significantly, in the Zoroastrian, Manichean, and Gnostic traditions; see the discussions and references in Goldziher, Neuplatonische und gnostische Elemente 324–44; Schaeder, Islamische Lehre 204–5, 212–5, 217–8, 239; Rubin, Pre-Existence 98 n. 84, 100 n. 98, 105 n. 5; Rubin, Nūr Muḥammadī; Chodkiewicz, *Seal of the saints* 64–5; Schimmel, *And Muhammad is His messenger* 130 and n. 34; Zoran, Magic 54 and n. 164 (in Hebrew).

[67] See Rubin, Pre-Existence 65–7, 98–114; Amir-Moezzi, *Divine guide* 29–59; Amir-Moezzi, La Préexistence.

[68] See Rubin, Pre-Existence 107, 113.

is also the spiritual source of the prophets and friends of God. Accordingly, the relationship between God and Muḥammad prior to creation is described by al-Tustarī in Sufi terminology: *mukāshafa* ("mystical unveiling"), *mushāhada* ("mystical vision"), *maḥabba* ("love") and so forth. Another concept in the teachings attributed to al-Tustarī which is closely linked to that of *nūr muḥammad* is *qalb muḥammad* ("the heart of Muḥammad"). "The heart of Muḥammad", containing all the Divine truths which were revealed to Muḥammad before creation, is the archetype and source of prophecy and friendship with God.[69] The Divine roots of the prophets and the friends of God, and the events that took place before creation, occupy an important place in the teachings attributed to al-Tustarī. Their mythic formulation seems to set al-Tustarī apart from other 9th century Sufi masters.[70] Although al-Tustarī was apparently inspired by the early *ḥadīth*s treating of *nūr muḥammad*, his preoccupation with this theme can be understood as a Sunni-mystical response to the Shiʿi speculations on the Divine roots of the *imām*s.

References to the primordial being of Muḥammad are also found in the teachings of both al-Ḥakīm al-Tirmidhī and the well-known al-Ḥallāj (executed in 309/922).[71] However, there is no doubt that in the history of Sunni mysticism, the motif of *nūr muḥammad* was developed in the most elaborate and profound way by Ibn al-ʿArabī. In the writings of the latter, the mythic theme of *nūr muḥammad* is reflected in the concept of *al-ḥaqīqa l-muḥammadiyya*, "the true essence of Muḥammad". According to Ibn al-ʿArabī, *al-ḥaqīqa l-muḥammadiyya* was, in effect, the first being to emerge out of the Divine light; from *al-ḥaqīqa l-muḥammadiyya* and by means of it, all other beings were created. *Al-Ḥaqīqa l-muḥammadiyya* likewise functions as the spiritual source of all the prophets and the friends of God throughout history, and is thus the root of "the perfect man" (*al-insān al-kāmil*).[72] These notions are clearly derived from the aforementioned

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[69] See Böwering, *Mystical vision* 145–65, 231–2, 238–9; Rubin, Pre-Existence 113–4.

[70] See the statements of ʿUmar b. Wāṣil, al-Tustarī's disciple, quoted in Böwering, *Mystical vision* 148–9. In addition, compare the speculations on *nūr muḥammad* which are attributed to al-Tustarī to al-Ghazālī's conservative interpretation of the *ḥadīth* "I [Muḥammad] was already a prophet when Adam was still between water and clay [i.e., when the creation of Adam had not yet been completed]" ("*Kuntu nabiyyan wa-ādam bayna l-mā' wa-l-ṭīn*"), in Chodkiewicz, *Seal of the saints* 61 n. 3; see also Rubin, Nūr Muḥammadī.

[71] See Radtke, Concept of Wilāya 491; Chodkiewicz, *Seal of the saints* 66; Schimmel, *And Muhammad is His messenger* 125–6; Takeshita, *Ibn ʿArabī's theory* 145–6.

[72] See Chodkiewicz, *Seal of the saints* 60–73. Regarding the influence of Ibn al-ʿArabī's concept of *al-ḥaqīqa l-muḥammadiyya* on subsequent generations of Muslim mystics, see Schimmel, *And Muhammad is His messenger* 127, 129, 132–4, 137–8.

*ḥadīth*s dealing with *nūr muḥammad*,[73] and perhaps also from the teachings attributed to al-Tustarī. However, other elements in Ibn al-ʿArabī's treatment of the *awliyāʾ*'s Divine roots—namely, the connection he draws between the *awliyāʾ* and God's names, and the Neoplatonic context of his speculations—point to additional sources of inspiration, that is, the Shiʿi-Ismāʿīlī tradition.[74]

The Awliyāʾ *and the Names of God*

In early Shiʿi traditions which are found in both Twelver and Ismāʿīlī sources, the *imām*s are perceived as the names of God. This notion, which was analyzed by Amir-Moezzi,[75] is based on two main principles. According to the first principle, which is shared by Islamic theology in general, God's hidden essence cannot be attained by man; it is only through His names and attributes, as revealed in the Quran and in the *Ḥadīth*, that man may gain knowledge of God. According to the second principle, which is unique to the Shiʿi worldview, worshipping God can only be accomplished by worshipping the *imām*s (*ʿibāda*)—in other words, by knowing or acknowledging them (*maʿrifa*), by maintaining devotion to and loyalty towards them (*walāya*), and by loving them (*maḥabba*).[76] Hence the radical correspondence drawn in Shiʿi literature between the *imām*s and God's names: God can only be known by His names—that is, by means of the *imām*s, through whom the Divine, hidden essence becomes manifested in creation.

Several traditions reflecting this perception are found in *Kitāb al-kashf*. In one tradition, which is attributed to the *imām* Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq and which likewise appears in Twelver sources, it is stated that

> Allāh created veils from the light of His face, and gave each one of these a name from among His names. He is 'the Praised One' (*al-ḥamd*)—and it is with this name that His Prophet [Muḥammad], peace be upon him, is named; He is 'the Supreme One' (*al-ʿalī*)—and the leader of the believers is ʿAlī; 'He has the most beautiful names' [*wa-lahu l-asmāʾ al-ḥusnā*; see, for example, Q 20:8; 59:24]—from here He derived the name of al-Ḥasan and

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[73] See, for example, the mythic motif of the cosmogonic pearl in Ibn al-ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt* i, 37 ("Khuṭbat al-kitāb", = ʿUthmān Yaḥyā's edition i, 48–9).

[74] On the affinity between the Shiʿi-Ismāʿīlī tradition and Ibn al-ʿArabī's thought as regards *al-ḥaqīqa l-muḥammadiyya*, see al-Shaybī, *al-Ṣila* i, 405–6, 478–85; Nasr, Shiʿism 111 and n. 17.

[75] See the references below in n. 78.

[76] See, for example, Ibn Bābawayhi, *al-Tawḥīd* 152 ("*Bi-ʿibādatinā ʿubida llāh wa-lawlā naḥnu mā ʿubida llāh*"); see also Amir-Moezzi, Remarques 97 and n. 35.

> al-Ḥusayn; and 'He is the creator (*fāṭir*) of the heavens and the earth' [see, for example, Q 6:14]—from here he derived the name of Fāṭima. Having created them, He placed them on the right side of the throne.

According to this tradition, the members of the Prophet's family (*ahl al-bayt*) originate in the Divine world itself: they are created from the very light of God's face; they are directly linked to God's names, thus forming a veil between the Divine essence and creation; and they are situated on the right side of God's throne. The tradition quoted here goes on to explain that the names which God had revealed to Adam, and which granted him superiority over the angels (see Q 2:30–34), are none other than God's names, in other words, the names of the *imām*s. This is the reason why Iblīs, who refused to bow down before Adam, is perceived as the prototype for the Shiʿa's enemies throughout history: these enemies deny the Divine origin of the *imām*s and their supreme status.[77] Another tradition in *Kitāb al-kashf* states that every messenger and *imām*, in every generation, is

> the name of Allāh, by means of which Allāh is invoked in that particular generation. Allāh, powerful and mighty is He, said: 'Allāh has the most beautiful names, so invoke Him by means of them [Q 7:180]', that is to say, Allāh has the *imām*s, who guide [men] towards the right path, and the messengers whom He has chosen. Therefore, seek His proximity by obeying them [...] For they are His gates and the means by which His created beings [reach] Him.

The *nuṭaqāʾ* and the *imām*s are thus a veil which, on the one hand, stands between the Divine essence and creation, and, on the other, functions as a gate and a means of access to God. The friends of God are the mediators *par excellence* between God and man—not only in terms of their religious mission in the framework of human history, but also in terms of their ontological nature, a human-Divine nature which bridges the gap between the Creator and the created.[78]

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[77] Jaʿfar b. Manṣūr al-Yaman, *al-Kashf* 35 ("*Wa-ʿan abī ʿbdillāh ʿalayhi l-salām annahu qāla inna llāh khalaqa ḥujuban min nūr wajhihi wa-sammā kull wāḥid minhum isman min asmāʾihi fa-huwa l-ḥamd musammā bihi nabiyyuhu ʿalayhi l-salām wa-huwa l-ʿalī wa-amīr al-muʾminīna ʿalī wa-lahu l-asmāʾ al-ḥusnā shtaqqa minhā sma al-ḥasan wa-l-ḥusayn wa-huwa fāṭir al-samawāt wa-l-arḍ ishtaqqa minhā sma fāṭima fa-lammā khalaqahum aqāmahum ʿan yamīn al-ʿarsh*"), 36–37.

[78] Jaʿfar b. Manṣūr al-Yaman, *al-Kashf* 108 ("[...] *Wa-taqaddasat asmāʾuhu* [...] *bayān qawlihi fī l-asmāʾ annahum al-hudāt ilayhi wa-l-dalāla ʿalayhi min al-nuṭaqāʾ wa-l-aʾimma ʿalayhim al-salām*"), 109 ("*Fa-kull qāʾim fī ʿaṣrihi huwa smu llāh al-ladhī yudʿā bihi fī dhālika l-ʿaṣr kamā qāla llāh ʿazza wa-jalla wa-li-llāh al-asmāʾ al-ḥusnā fa-dʿūhu bihā yaʿnī li-llāh

In a certain sense, God needs His friends in order to reveal Himself to the created beings. "Were it not for Allāh", Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq is reported to have said, "we would not have been known; and were it not for us [the *imām*s], Allāh would not have been known".[79] This idea brings to mind Ibn al-ʿArabī's notion of the reciprocal relationship between God and creation and especially between God and the perfect man: on the one hand, the universe and the perfect man are created by God, and therefore, their existence is dependent upon Him; on the other hand, God needs creation and the perfect man in order to be known, in order to reveal Himself. This mutual dependence is best expressed in the tradition of "the hidden treasure" (*kanz*), of which Ibn al-ʿArabī is particularly fond. In this *ḥadīth*, God states that

> I was a hidden and unknown treasure, yet I wished to be known. So I created the created beings: I made myself known to them, and they came to know me.[80]

Moreover, as in the Shiʿi-Ismāʿīlī tradition, in Ibn al-ʿArabī's thought too the friends of God correspond to His names; more precisely, it is by means of God's friends and in their very beings that the Divine names and attributes are manifested. This is particularly true of the perfect man, who, according to Ibn al-ʿArabī, manifests all of God's names and attributes in a perfect and well-balanced manner. Like the Shiʿi *imām*, Ibn al-ʿArabī's perfect man functions as a veil which separates the Divine essence from creation, and, at the same time, mediates between the two. The entity of the perfect man, in Ibn al-ʿArabī's own words,

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al-aʾimma l-hudāt wa-l-rusul al-ladhīna khtārahum wa-taqarrabū ilayhi bi-ṭāʿatihim wa-ṭlubū marḍātahu wa-mā ʿindahu bihim fa-hum abwābuhu wa-asbāb khalqihi ilayhi"), 118, 149–50; see also Jaʿfar b. Manṣūr al-Yaman, *Sarāʾir wa-asrār al-nuṭaqāʾ* 22–3; al-Qāḍī l-Nuʿmān, *al-Mudhhiba* 28–38; al-Ḥāmidī, *Kanz al-walad* 5, 25, 173, 205–10, 220–1; al-Rāzī, *al-Iṣlāḥ* 282; al-Daylamī, *Qawāʿid ʿaqāʾid āl Muḥammad* 11, 55; Madelung, Fatimids 52. For similar traditions and themes in Twelver sources, see Rubin, Pre-Existence 99, 107, 113 and n. 9; Amir-Moezzi, Remarques 89–90, 94–8, 105–8; Amir-Moezzi, La Préexistence 111–2, 126–7; Amir-Moezzi, Notes 730–2; Amir-Moezzi, *Divine guide* 30–1, 44-6; Kohlberg, Some Shiʿī views 55. On Fāṭima in the context dealt with here, see also Halm, *Kosmologie* 151. On God's names as a veil which hides His essence and, at the same time, serves as the only means of attaining knowledge of the Divine, see also Stern, Earliest cosmological doctrines 7, 10–11.

[79] Ibn Bābawayhi, *al-Tawḥīd* 290 ("*Lawlā llāh mā ʿurifnā wa-lawlā naḥnu mā ʿurifa llāh*"); see also Amir-Moezzi, Remarques 97 n. 33.

[80] See, for example, Ibn al-ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt* ii, 229 (chapter 146: "*Kuntu kanzan lam uʿraf fa-aḥbabtu an uʿrafa fa-khalaqtu l-khalq wa-taʿarraftu ilayhim fa-ʿarafūnī*"); see also Chittick, *Sufi path* 391 n. 14.

> was the aim of Allāh [in creating] the world. He is the true vicegerent, he is the locus in which the Divine names are manifested and he comprises within himself the true essences of the whole world [...]
>
> Within this noble compendium [of the macrocosm], that is, within the perfect man, [God] has brought into existence all the Divine names as well as the true essences of that which is found outside of him in the big world [...][81]

These notions of Ibn al-ʿArabī are quite unique and radical in comparison with other mystical-Sufi teachings that were developed prior to Ibn al-ʿArabī's time. Although in Sufi thought the mystic is indeed required to emulate the attributes of God (*al-takhalluq bi-akhlāq allāh*), nevertheless, this is mostly an ethical-spiritual obligation, not an ontological statement concerning the essential nature of God's friends; the latter are not perceived as an indispensable means for the Divine self-manifestation in creation.[82]

In contradistinction to the Shiʿi-Ismāʿīlī perception, Ibn al-ʿArabī views the perfect man in general—regardless of his physical genealogy—as an ontological embodiment of God's names. Ibn al-ʿArabī also sees in the created universe as a whole a locus of manifestation for the Divine names.[83] Ibn al-ʿArabī's outlook is thus both universal (all of creation) and humanistic (the perfect man in general).[84] The Shiʿi-Ismāʿīlī worldview, on the other hand, is less universal and more sectarian: the *imām*s alone correspond to God's names, and, consequently, only their followers, the Shiʿi believers, enjoy a special relationship with the Divine world.

However, a universal-humanistic approach, similar to that of Ibn al-ʿArabī, can be detected in the Epistles of Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ. To be sure, the Ikhwān seem to have espoused the Shiʿi-Ismāʿīlī idea of a correspondence between the Divine names and the friends of God. This idea is interpreted

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[81] See Ibn al-ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt* i, 176 (chapter 7, = ʿUthmān Yaḥyā's edition ii, 252: "[...] *ʿAlimnā qaṭʿan anna l-insān huwa l-ʿayn al-maqṣūda li-llāh min al-ʿālam wa-annahu l-khalīfa ḥaqqan wa-annahu maḥall ẓuhūr al-asmāʾ al-ilāhiyya wa-huwa l-jāmiʿ li-ḥaqāʾiq al-ʿālam kullihi* [...]"); Ibn al-ʿArabī, *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam* 199 ("*Fa-awjada fī hādhā l-mukhtaṣar al-sharīf al-ladhī huwa l-insān al-kāmil jamīʿ al-asmāʾ al-ilāhiyya wa-ḥaqāʾiq mā kharaja ʿanhu fī l-ʿālam al-kabīr al-munfaṣil* [...]"). See also Ibn al-ʿArabī, *ʿAnqāʾ mughrib* 41 ("[...] *Fa-anta ṣifātī fihim wa-asmāʾī* [...]"); Chittick, *Sufi path* 27–30, 366–72, 375–6; Chittick, *Imaginal worlds* 20–3, 28–9, 36–7, 146–9. On the perfect man as a veil, see *al-Futūḥāt* ii, 348 (chapter 178); Chittick, *Sufi path* 329.

[82] Compare, for instance, Ibn al-ʿArabī's view in this context with that of al-Ghazālī in Takeshita, *Ibn ʿArabī's theory* 31–9, 170–1.

[83] See Chittick, *Sufi path* 8–11, 16, 33–58, 94–6; Chittick, *Imaginal worlds* 32–3; Elmore, Four texts.

[84] On the terms 'universal' and 'humanistic' see below chapter 4, especially pp. 179–88.

by the Ikhwān in the framework of Neoplatonic philosophy. According to the Ikhwān, "the complete words and the great names" (*kalimāt al-tamām wa-l-asmāʾ al-ʿiẓām*) were inscribed by the cosmic pen (*qalam*), i.e., the universal intellect, on the cosmic tablet (*lawḥ*), i.e., the universal soul. These "great names" are the names which Allāh taught to Adam, and "the complete words" are those by means of which Adam sought God's forgiveness after he had sinned (see Q 2:37).[85] In a similar vein, the Ikhwān state that the names of "the rational/speaking figures" (*al-ashkhāṣ al-nāṭiqa*), who are responsible for enunciating the Divine law (*nāmūs*), are written on "the preserved tablet" (*al-lawḥ al-maḥfūẓ*) in seven lines—a clear allusion to the seven *nuṭaqāʾ*, "the speaker prophets" known from the Ismāʿīlī tradition. The Ikhwān explain that these are "the great names" that God had taught to Adam and the angels, the names through which Adam's repentance was accepted. Furthermore, in terms of their ontological roots, these figures function as the source of creation—in the words of the Ikhwān, "these seven inscribed [names] contain the whole of creation"—and, consequently, they guarantee the continuing existence of all created beings.[86] Hence, the mythic Shiʿi-Ismāʿīlī idea, according to which the friends of God are but a terrestrial-historical manifestation of a Divine cosmogonic-cosmological being, is interpreted by the Ikhwān in a Neoplatonic-philosophical manner: the Divine roots of God's friends are located within the upper worlds of the universal intellect and soul.

As mentioned above, in the Epistles of the Ikhwān one may also identify a more universal approach, one which focuses on the universe at large

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[85] See Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ, *al-Jāmiʿa* i, 25 ("[*Fa-ʿarshuhu huwa*] *l-qalam al-jārī bi-amrihi fa-khaṭṭa fī l-lawḥ al-karīm suṭūr al-mashīʾa wa-aḥruf al-irāda wa-qawl al-ḥaqq wa-waʿd al-ṣidq wa-kalimāt al-tamām wa-l-asmāʾ al-ʿiẓām fa-talaqqā ādam min rabbihi kalimāt fa-tāba ʿalayhi wa-ʿallamahu l-asmāʾ kullahā*"; the addition in the square brackets is based on Tāmir's edition v, 12); see also ibid. 537–8 ("[…] *Al-kalimāt al-latī talaqqahā ādam yaqūlūna innahā kānat maktūba bi-nūr al-qudra fī lawḥ al-ʿarsh al-karīm wa-innahu ulhima qirāʾatahā wa-l-tawassul ilā rabbihi bihā wa-innahu saʾala l-iqāla baʿda l-tawba* […]"). For the correspondence between God's names and the friends of God, see also ibid. 651 ("*Wa-minhum ṭāʾifa qad alḥadat fī asmāʾ allāh wa-ʿadalat ʿan awliyāʾihi*"); for the identification of "the complete words" with God's friends, see ibid. 118. On Adam see above n. 52. Regarding the writing of the names on the tablet, cf. Ibn al-ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt* i, 37 ("Khuṭbat al-kitāb", = ʿUthmān Yaḥyā's edition i, 48: "[…] *Fa-kāna awwal ism katabahu dhālika l-qalam al-asmā dūna ghayrihi min al-asmāʾ innī urīdu an akhluqa min ajlika yā muḥammad al-ʿālam al-ladhī huwa mulkuka* […]"); and see also above pp. 51 n. 66, 57 n. 90.

[86] See Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ, *al-Jāmiʿa* ii, 312–3, 319–21 (see ibid. 321: "[…] *Al-asmāʾ al-ʿiẓām al-latī talaqqahā ādam wa-tawassala bihā wa-kānat al-wasīla baynahu wa-bayna llāh subḥānahu fī l-tawba ʿalayhi wa-hādhihi l-sabʿa l-masṭūra ḥāwiya li-jamīʿ al-khilqa wa-biḥasab amākinihā fī suṭūrihā yakūnu badʾuhā wa-ẓuhūruhā* […]"), 324–5.

rather than on the figures of the prophets and their heirs. In a discussion of theirs concerning the Divine attributes (*ṣifāt*), the Ikhwān emphasize the close links between all created beings and the attributes of God: "these attributes", the Ikhwān explain,

> are found among His existents. They are inscribed on His earth and in His heavens; they are His miraculous signs that are written 'in the horizons and in the souls' [see Q 41:53].[87]

Since the universal intellect was created by God Himself, through His command and word (*amr Allāh*, *kalima*), it follows that the intellect and all the existents emanating from it have their share in the Divine attributes: they all have life (*ḥayāt*), power or ability (*qudra*), knowledge (*ʿilm*) and so forth. Naturally, the correspondence between the attributes of the created beings and those of God is relative and limited. Accordingly, the Ikhwān stress that God has attributes that are unique to Him, such as His eternal existence without beginning (*qadīm azalī*) or His act of creation *ex nihilo* (*mubdiʿ*). In addition, the attributes of the created beings are partial (*juzʾiyya*) and include opposing qualities—for instance, life and death, knowledge and ignorance, power and inability. God, in contradistinction, is beyond these opposites. Finally, the created beings differ from one another in respect of their attributes—the Prophet's knowledge, to give one example, is obviously not the same as that of the common man—whereas God's attributes are unqualified and absolute. Nevertheless, the Ikhwān clearly maintain that all created beings share, to some extent, the Divine attributes.[88]

The Neoplatonic Context

In the Ismāʿīlī tradition, the issue dealt with here, that is, the Divine origin of the friends of God, was also given a more philosophical interpretation, in the framework of Neoplatonic cosmology. According to Ismāʿīlī Neoplatonism, the worlds of the universal intellect and soul are the

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[87] See Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ, *Rasāʾil* iv, 210 ("[…] *Wa-lahu l-asmāʾ al-ḥusnā* […] *fa-hādhihi l-ṣifāt al-muḥayyira li-dhawī l-albāb wa-l-ʿuqūl fī maʿrifat al-bārī minhā subḥānahu bi-annahu lā yashrakuhu fihā aḥad siwāhu wa-fiʿlihi l-ladhī faʿalahu bi-dhātihi wa-awjadahu bi-kalimātihi mawjūda fī mawjūdātihi masṭūra fī arḍihi wa-samawātihi wa-hiya āyātuhu l-maktūba fī l-āfāq wa-l-anfus* […]"). On the concept of "the miraculous signs", see below pp. 212–29.

[88] See Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ, *Rasāʾil* iv, 206–10.

supreme source of the prophets and their heirs, functioning as a channel through which Divine powers and knowledge reach the religious leaders of mankind. Similarly, according to Ibn al-ʿArabī, the universal intellect is the spiritual source of the friends of God: the aforementioned *al-ḥaqīqa l-muḥammadiyya* (see above) is explicitly identified by Ibn al-ʿArabī with the universal intellect.[89] It is noteworthy that in addition to the various traditions which view Muḥammad's light as the first being created by God, there are other *ḥadīth*s which state that the first created entity was the [human] intellect (*ʿaql*) or the cosmic pen (*qalam*).[90] These traditions presumably inspired Ibn al-ʿArabī to identify his *al-ḥaqīqa l-muḥammadiyya* with the Neoplatonic universal intellect as well as with the Quranic pen. However, one should bear in mind that the identification of the universal intellect with the cosmic pen appears already in Ismāʿīlī literature.[91]

The affinity between the Ismāʿīlī Neoplatonists and Ibn al-ʿArabī in the context referred to here is particularly evident in their discussions of the relationship between the universal intellect and the highest-ranking friend of God—the *nāṭiq* ("speaker prophet") in the Ismāʿīlī tradition, and the *quṭb* ("pole") in Ibn al-ʿArabī's thought. According to the Ismāʿīlī Neoplatonic authors, the *nāṭiq* corresponds to the universal intellect, which

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[89] See, for example, Ibn al-ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt* i, 140 (chapter 3, = ʿUthmān Yaḥyā's edition ii, 97: "*Wa-kadhālika l-maʾmūl al-ibdāʿī l-ladhī huwa l-ḥaqīqa l-muḥammadiyya ʿindanā wa-l-ʿaql al-awwal ʿinda ghayrinā wa-huwa l-qalam al-aʿlā l-ladhī abdaʿahu llāh taʿālā min ghayr shay*ʾ […]"), 169 (chapter 6, = ʿUthmān Yaḥyā's edition ii, 227: "[…] *Ḥaqīqat muḥammad ṣallā llāh ʿalayhi wa-sallama l-musammāt bi-l-ʿaql* […]"), iii, 430 (chapter 371, *faṣl* 9: "[…] *Al-qalam al-ilāhī* […] *wa-huwa l-ʿaql al-awwal* […] *wa-huwa l-ḥaqīqa l-muḥammadiyya wa-l-ḥaqq al-makhlūq bihi wa-l-ʿadl ʿinda ahl al-laṭāʾif wa-l-ishārāt wa-huwa l-rūḥ al-qudusī l-kull ʿinda ahl al-kushūf wa-l-talwīḥāt*"); see also Affifi, *Mystical philosophy* 71, 74, 90, 186; Lory, *La Science* 117, 133. On the universal intellect (or *al-ḥaqīqa l-muḥammadiyya*) as *al-rūḥ al-qudusī l-kull* or *al-rūh al-kullī* ("the universal holy spirit" or "the universal spirit"), see also Ibn al-ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt* ii, 389 (chapter 198: "*Kadhālika naqūlu fī l-ʿaql al-awwal ʿaqlan li-maʿnan yukhālifu l-maʿnā l-ladhī li-ajlihi nusammīhi qalaman yukhālifu l-maʿnā l-ladhī li-ajlihi nusammīhi rūḥan yukhālifu l-maʿnā l-ladhī li-ajlihi nusammīhi qalban*"); Ibn al-ʿArabī, *ʿAnqāʾ mughrib* 40; Affifi, *Mystical philosophy* 75 and n. 3; Chittick, *Self-disclosure* 271–3. For the identification of the universal intellect with *rūḥ* or *rūḥ al-qudus* in Ismāʿīlī literature, see Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ, *Rasāʾil* iii, 238; Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ, *al-Jāmiʿa* ii, 9, 139; Walker, *Early philosophical Shiism* 117; Makārim, 'Al-amr al-ilāhī', 9. Note that the term *al-ʿaql al-awwal* ("the first intellect"), which Ibn al-ʿArabī often employs in order to signify the universal intellect, likewise appears in the writings of the Ikhwān with reference to the universal intellect; see *al-Jāmiʿa* i, 273, ii, 5, 139.

[90] See the discussions and references in Goldziher, Neuplatonische und gnostische Elemente 318–24; Rubin, Pre-Existence 115–6 and n. 23; Chodkiewicz, *Seal of the saints* 63 n. 13, 68 n. 28; Wensinck, *Muslim creed*, index, s.v. "Pen".

[91] See above p. 50 n. 64.

functions as the *nāṭiq*'s supreme spiritual source. Al-Sijistānī, for instance, declares that the *nāṭiq* is the "deputy" or "vicegerent" (*khalīfa*) of the universal intellect in the physical-corporeal world.[92] At times, the *asās* or *waṣī* (the "foundation" or "legatee" of the *nāṭiq*) and the *imām*s are said to correspond to the universal soul (or to the second intellect, according to al-Kirmānī's philosophical system). The connection between the universal intellect and the *nāṭiq* is signified in Ismāʿīlī literature by the term *taʾyīd* ("support")[93] and by the derivatives of the Arabic root m.d.d. *Mādda* (plural: *mawādd*) denotes "continuous increase" and "[spiritual] substance"; *imdād* ("increasing", "succoring", "reinforcing") is the active bestowal of this *mādda*, while *istimdād* ("requesting succor"; "drawing", "deriving") is the passive reception of it.[94] A typical example of the Ismāʿīlī use of these terms is found in Jaʿfar b. Manṣūr al-Yaman's *Sarāʾir wa-asrār al-nuṭaqāʾ* ("The Mysteries and Secrets of the Speaker-Prophets"). In this work, it is explained that in contradistinction to the common believers and the ordinary *daʿwa* members who are in constant need of human guides (= the prophets and their heirs),

> none of the *nuṭaqāʾ*, may Allāh's prayers and blessings be upon them, have ever received the *taʾyīd* from any human form, nor did the *mawādd* become attached to them by means of any physical being; they did not have any spiritual father or mother. The *taʾyīd* from the universal intellect and soul only became attached to them through the three [cosmic-angelic] means mentioned in the book [the Quran], the three spiritual boundaries [...] that is, through *al-Jadd*, *al-Fatḥ* and *al-Khayāl*, who are named Gabriel, Michael and Isrāfīl.[95]

According to this and other, similar passages, Divine powers and knowledge continuously flow throughout the universe. These spiritual powers

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[92] See the reference to Walker below in n. 96.

[93] See above pp. 64–72.

[94] On *imdād* see also above p. 49 n. 59.

[95] See Jaʿfar b. Manṣūr al-Yaman, *Sarāʾir wa-asrār al-nuṭaqāʾ* 22–6 (ibid. 24: "*Wa-inna jamīʿ al-nuṭaqāʾ ṣallā llāh ʿalayhim wa-sallama lam yaʾkhudhū l-taʾyīd min ṣūra basharīyya wa-lā ttaṣalat bihim al-mawādd min al-khilqa l-jasadāniyya wa-lā kāna lahum ab wa-lā umm fī l-ḥadd al-rūḥānī wa-innamā sabab ittiṣal al-taʾyīd bihim min al-ʿaql wa-l-nafs bi-l-wasāʾiṭ al-thalātha l-madhkūra fī l-kitāb wa-hum al-ḥudūd al-thalātha l-madhkūra fī l-kitāb wa-hum al-ḥudūd al-rūḥānīyya* [...] *wa-hum al-jadd wa-l-fatḥ wa-l-khayāl al-musammawna bi-isrāfīl wa-mikāʾīl wa-jibrāʾīl*"). On *al-Jadd*, *al-Fatḥ* and *al-Khayāl*, which are situated beneath the universal soul, see Halm, *Kosmologie* 67–74, 133–5; al-Sijistānī, *al-Iftikhār* 116–22. On *Sarāʾir wa-asrār al-nuṭaqāʾ* (comprising, in fact, of two separate works: *Sarāʾir al-nuṭaqāʾ* and *asrār al-nuṭaqāʾ*), see Daftary, *Ismaili literature* 122.

and knowledge emanate from the Divine world itself—more precisely, from God's command (*amr*) and creative word (*kalima*)—and, via the universal intellect and soul, as well as the three cosmic-angelic beings situated below them (*al-Jadd*, *al-Fatḥ* and *al-Khayāl*), they reach the *nāṭiq* in the sub-lunar world. The *nāṭiq* transfers these powers and knowledge to his legatee and to the *imām*s that follow; from the *imām*s, they pass down to the members of the Ismāʿīlī *daʿwa*, and from the latter they are transmitted to the common believers. Each link in this universal chain, or rather each level in this cosmic hierarchy, receives the Divine flow from the rank situated above it (*istimdād*) and transmits it to the rank located below it (*imdād*). Both the universal intellect and the *nāṭiq* play a key role in this cosmic process: the Divine flow depends on them both—that is, on the universal intellect in the spiritual world, and on the *nāṭiq* in the physical-corporeal one.[96]

In the Epistles of Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ, the same relationship is also envisaged between the universal intellect and man in general, that is, the perfect man who fully realizes his "human form" (*ṣūrat al-insān*) and his "rational/speaking soul" (*al-nafs al-nāṭiqa*). The human rational/speaking soul forms a part of the universal soul and of the universal intellect too (*nafs juzʾiyya*, *ʿaql juzʾī*). According to the Ikhwān, man's supreme status and his central role in creation as God's vicegerent on earth (*khalīfa*) derive from his special relationship with the universal intellect.[97]

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[96] On the relationship between the universal intellect and *nāṭiq*, and for various examples of the use of the root m.d.d. and its derivatives in Ismāʿīlī literature, see al-Sijistānī, *al-Yanābīʿ* 8–15, 57, 72, 75, 91, 94; al-Sijistānī, *al-Iftikhār* 77, 79, 152, 207, 209, 214; al-Kirmānī, *al-Riyāḍ* 60, 70–1, 82–3, 89–90, 95, 162; al-Kirmānī, *Rāḥat al-ʿaql* 64–8, 79, 94, 100, 102, 112, 123–4, 186, 188–9, 362, 378; al-Ḥāmidī, *Kanz al-walad* 5, 55, 57–8, 69, 157–8, 176, 181, 228, 230, 269, 279, 290; Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ, *Rasāʾil* i, 146–7, 312, iii, 185–6, 189–90, 296–7, iv, 136, 200–1, 209, 223–5, 330, 396; Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ, *al-Jāmiʿa* i, 528–37, 540–2, 625, 635–6, 658, ii, 5, 140, 148; Jaʿfar b. Manṣūr al-Yaman, *al-Kashf* 4, 55, 61, 165; al-Qāḍī l-Nuʿmān, *al-Mudhhiba* 28, 34, 49–50, 52–6, 60, 84; Stern, Earliest cosmological doctrines 10, 14–6; Halm, *Kosmologie* 215; al-Daylamī, *Qawāʿid ʿaqāʾid āl Muḥammad* 68; Lewis, An Ismaili interpretation 699, 702; see also Walker, *Early philosophical Shiism* 117 and n. 31; Marquet, *La philosophie des Iḫwân aṣ-Ṣafâ: l'Imâm et la société* 134–7; Pines, Shīʿite terms 176 n. 84; Pines, La Longue récension 12 n. 5; De Smet, Le Verbe-impératif 404 n. 51, 405 n. 53; De Smet, *Les Épîtres* 59–60.

[97] For the correspondence between "the human form" and the universal intellect, see Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ, *Rasāʾil* iii, 144–5. For the correspondence between "the rational/speaking soul" and the universal intellect, and for the expressions *nafs juzʾiyya* and *ʿaql juzʾī*, see Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ, *al-Jāmiʿa* ii, 12–3. Elsewhere, man's individual intellect is said to correspond to the universal intellect, whereas his soul is said to correspond to the universal soul; see ibid. 33–4. On the *nāṭiq* and his relationship with the universal intellect, see ibid. 248–9.

A similar humanistic approach is reflected in the writings of Ibn al-ʿArabī, who maintains that the *quṭb* corresponds to the universal intellect; the latter serves as the spiritual source from which the pole draws his *mādda*.[98] The *quṭb*, who does not necessarily belong to the Prophet's family (at least not in the physical-biological sense), represents the perfect man in general:

> He [man] corresponds to the first intellect and is connected to it [...] creation reached the human genus, at which point the circle was completed. Man became attached to the [first] intellect, in the same manner as the end of the circle is attached to its beginning; and so, a circle ensued.

The existence of the world depends upon this "human form", upon God's vicegerent on earth:

> [Allāh], glory be to Him, has established this human form with a straight movement [= in an upright position], like the form of a tent's pole [*ʿamad*], for the sake of this sky's dome. [Allāh], glory be to Him, 'holds the sky lest it fall' [see Q 35:41] because of him [man]. Hence we have defined man as a [tent's] pole [...].[99]

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[98] See, for example, Ibn al-ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt* i, 139 (the beginning of chapter 3, = ʿUthmān Yaḥyā's edition ii, 91), 204–5 (chapter 14), ii, 661–2 (chapter 295: "[...] *Al-quṭb al-ladhī huwa l-imām* [...] *yakūnu māddatuhu min al-ʿaql al-awwal*"); Ibn al-ʿArabī, *al-Mabādiʾ* 52 ("[...] *Ka-ḥaqīqat muḥammad ṣallā llāh ʿalayhi wa-sallama l-qāʾima bi-l-amr min warāʾ al-ghayb al-ladhī minhā māddat al-khulafāʾ wa-l-aʾimma wa-l-aqṭāb wa-l-qāʾimīna bi-amr allāh taʿālā*"). On the universal intellect as the source of *imdād*, see also *al-Futūḥāt* ii, 415 (chapter 198, *faṣl* 11); cf. Ibn al-ʿArabī, *al-Tadbīrāt* 122. See also *al-Futūḥāt* ii, 279 (towards the end of chapter 167), where it is said that the universal intellect is the source of "the knowledge pertaining to the friendship with God" (*ʿilm al-walāya*). On the similarities between Ibn al-ʿArabī's thought and the Ismāʿīlī tradition in the context dealt with here, see also Affifi, *Mystical philosophy* 74–5, 88–90, 188; de Jong, Al-Ḳuṭb 544; Corbin, *En Islam iranien* i, 253.

[99] Ibn al-ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt* i, 176 (chapter 7, = ʿUthmān Yaḥyā's edition ii, 251-2: "[...] *Fa-huwa naẓīr al-ʿaql al-awwal wa-bihi rtabaṭa* [...] *wa-ntahā l-khalq ilā l-jins al-insānī fa-kamulat al-dāʾira wa-ttaṣala l-insān bi-l-ʿaql kamā yattaṣilu ākhir al-dāʾira bi-awwalihā fa-kānat dāʾira* [...]"; "*Wa-aqāma subḥānahu hādhihi l-ṣūra l-insāniyya bi-l-ḥaraka l-mustaqīma ṣūrat al-ʿamad al-ladhī lil-khayma fa-jaʿalahu li-qubbat hādhihi l-samawāt fa-huwa subḥānahu yumsikuhā an tazūla bi-sababihi fa-ʿabbarnā ʿanhu bi-l-ʿamad* [...]"); see also ibid. 170 (chapter 6, = ʿUthmān Yaḥyā's edition ii, 231: "*Fa-l-ḥaqīqa l-muḥammadiyya* [...] *naẓīruhā min al-insān al-laṭīfa wa-l-rūḥ al-qudusī*"); and Ibn al-ʿArabī, *al-Tadbīrāt* 211. For a very similar Ikhwānian use of the term *naẓīr* ("corresponds" in the translation above), see *al-Jāmiʿa* ii, 33–4. Note that in several Neoplatonic Ismāʿīlī sources, the various worlds are likewise described as circles; see Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ, *Rasāʾil* iv, 198–249; Kraus, *Jābir ibn Ḥayyān* ii, 135–85; al-Sijistānī, *al-Yanābīʿ* 59 ("[...] *Wa-katabnā fī hādhihi l-dāʾira ʿinda nuqṭat al-markaz al-ʿaql fī muqābalat al-insān* [...]").

According to Ibn al-ʿArabī, the Divine flow, which he signifies by the use of the terms *imdād-istimdād*, also exists among other ranks of the *awliyāʾ* hierarchy, and influences the spiritual and physical wellbeing of human beings in general.[100] The link between *imdād* and *taʾyīd* likewise appears in Ibn al-ʿArabī's writings.[101]

Finally, it is significant that similar conceptions are also reflected in the works of Ibn Masarra. The latter maintains that the rational/speaking soul draws (*tastamiddu*, from *istimdād*) its spiritual-intellectual power from the light of the intellect, i.e., from the individual human intellect and, by implication, from the universal intellect.[102]

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[100] See, for example, Ibn al-ʿArabī, *al-Tadbīrāt* 112; Ibn al-ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt* i, 105 (chapter 2, *faṣl* 1, = ʿUthmān Yaḥyā's edition i, 277–81), 151–2 (chapter 5, the "waṣl" at the beginning of the chapter, = ʿUthmān Yaḥyā's edition ii, 144–5), 204–5 (chapter 14), 208 (chapter 15, = ii, 377), ii, 15 (chapter 73, "rijāl al-hayba wa-l-jalāl", = xi, 316), 16 ("rijāl al-imdād al-ilāhī wa-l-kawnī", = xi, 322), 24, 415 (chapter 198, *faṣl* 11), 465 (chapter 198, *faṣl* 50); Ibn al-ʿArabī, *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam* 47, 65–6, 163; Ibn al-ʿArabī, *ʿAnqāʾ mughrib* 42–3, 48, 51, 57–9; Ibn al-ʿArabī, *Kitāb al-mīm* 14–5.

[101] See above p. 71 n. 138.

[102] See Ibn Masarra, *Khawāṣṣ al-ḥurūf* 142-3 ("[…] *Fa-hādhihi l-nafs al-nāṭiqa l-latī fī l-insān tastamiddu min nūr al-ʿaql* […]").

CHAPTER FOUR

THE PERFECT MAN: FROM SHIʿI SECTARIANISM TO UNIVERSAL HUMANISM

The notion of human perfection and the concept of "the perfect man" (*al-insān al-kāmil*) play a central role in both the Ismāʿīlī tradition and in the thought of Ibn al-ʿArabī. This theme, which is closely linked to the broader subject of *walāya* and *awliyāʾ*, has its roots in the pre-Islamic heritage, including the Zoroastrian, Manichean and Gnostic traditions.[1] In Islam, the term *al-insān al-kāmil* is most frequently associated with the teachings of Ibn al-ʿArabī. However, this and similar terms appear already in the Epistles of Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ.[2] Thus, contrary to a prevalent opinion among modern scholars,[3] it seems that Ibn al-ʿArabī was not the first mystic to coin the term *al-insān al-kāmil*, nor was he the first one to develop the various ideas pertaining to it. Rather, it appears that the Ismāʿīlī authors, and above all Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ, should be credited with systematically developing the concept of the perfect man in its mystical-philosophical context.[4]

Discussions dedicated to the subject of human perfection are quite common in Ismāʿīlī literature. In al-Kirmānī's philosophical oeuvre, for instance, human perfection (*tamām, kamāl*) occupies a central place. According to al-Kirmānī, perfection—more precisely, "the second perfection" (*al-kamāl al-thānī*), to be distinguished from "the first perfection"

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[1] See Arnaldez, Al-Insān al-kāmil; Schaeder, Islamische Lehre; Böwering, Ensān-e Kāmel; see also the references in Amir-Moezzi, Remarques 89–90 n. 1–2; and cf. Massignon, L'Homme parfait, esp. pp. 288, 292–5.

[2] See, for example, Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ, *al-Jāmiʿa* i, 475–6, 511, 610, 668; Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ, *Rasāʾil* iii, 195–6, 371, iv, 198; see also al-Sijistānī, *al-Yanābīʿ* 50; and the statements attributed to the Ismāʿīlī author al-Muʾayyad fī l-Dīn al-Shīrāzī (died in 470/1078), quoted in Landolt, Walāyah 320. For the term *al-insān al-kāmil* in the writings of Ibn al-ʿArabī, see the references given throughout this chapter and in Takeshita, *Ibn ʿArabī's theory* 49.

[3] See, for example, Nicholson, *Studies* 77, 154; Takeshita, *Ibn ʿArabī's theory* 49; Böwering, Ensān-e Kāmel 457.

[4] See also Schaeder, Islamische Lehre, especially pp. 218–45; Affifi, *Mystical philosophy* 188 (cf. ibid. 77); al-Shaybī, *al-Ṣila* i, 492–4. On the significant role of the Shiʿi tradition in the development of the concept of the perfect man in Islam, see Amir-Moezzi, Remarques 89–90. See also Ivry, Ismāʿīlī theology 276–7 n. 20, 282–3, regarding the possible Shiʿi-Ismāʿīlī background of the terms *kāmil* and *kāmil fāḍil* found in Maimonides's *The Guide of the Perplexed*.

(*al-kamāl al-awwal*) which pertains to man's corporeal-physical existence—implies the realization of the intellectual-spiritual potential inherent in the human soul. From this perspective, man is required to actualize the full potential of his rational/speaking soul (*al-nafs al-nāṭiqa*), by performing ethical-religious deeds (*ʿamal*) and by acquiring Divine, religious-philosophical knowledge (*ʿilm*). Yet this goal can only be achieved through the spiritual guidance of God's friends—the prophets, their legatees and the *imām*s—who embody in their very beings the ideal figure of the perfect man. These ideas of al-Kirmānī were later espoused by al-Ḥāmidī and other Ismāʿīlī-Ṭayyibī authors. Notwithstanding the influence of al-Fārābī's philosophy on al-Kirmānī, the principal elements in the latter's perception of human perfection are already found in the Epistles of the Ikhwān.[5]

To be sure, the terms *tamām* and *kamāl* and the distinction between the "first" and the "second perfection" are also found in various Arabic philosophical works, dating from the 9th century onwards to the time of Ibn Rushd (Averroes). Naturally, these themes are rooted in Greek and Hellenistic philosophy as well as in the thought of Late Antiquity. The notion that the achievement of human perfection is only possible when man fully realizes his innate potential by means of both practical-ethical deeds and philosophical knowledge is shared by different Muslim philosophers, such as al-Fārābī, Ibn Sīnā (Avicenna), Ibn Bājja (Avempace) and Ibn Rushd.[6] Hence, the Ismāʿīlī discussions of human perfection cannot be detached from the general philosophical discourse in the medieval world of Islam. The Ismāʿīlī treatment of human perfection is, however, distinct from other Islamic approaches to this subject in two interrelated ways. First, the context in which the Ismāʿīlī authors deal with human perfection is *walāya*: the *awliyāʾ*—the prophets, their legatees and the *imām*s—are perceived as the only human beings who truly embody the figure of the perfect man. Moreover, it is only through them that the believers are able to actualize their own personal potential. Contrary to the philosophical

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[5] See al-Kirmānī, *Rāḥat al-ʿaql* 15-7, 33–4, 61–2, 74, 76–84, 99–100, 112–3, 134, 157–8, 188, 300–60; al-Kirmānī, *al-Riyāḍ* 58–9, 79–80, 89–90, 128; al-Ḥāmidī, *Kanz al-walad* 55, 176, 228, 275–6, 279–80; Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ, *Rasāʾil* iii, 5–6, 30; Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ, *al-Jāmiʿa* i, 101–3, 518, 559–62, ii, 63–4; see also Walker, *Ḥamīd al-Dīn al-Kirmānī* 116. On al-Ḥāmidī see above p. 70.

[6] See De Smet, *Perfectio prima*; Alon, *Al-Fārābī's philosophical lexicon* i, 17, 36, 82, 275, 419–21; Pines, Limitations; see also Adamson, *Arabic Plotinus* 49–54, 95–7, 119–24; Wisnovsky, Avicenna 96–105; Badawī (ed.), *Theology of Aristotle* (*the shorter version*) 54–5, 99–100, 110–1, 134–5, 139–40, 147; *al-Khayr al-maḥḍ* 6–8, 20, 23, 25; al-Kindī, *Fī l-nafs* 274–5.

point of view, the Ismāʿīlī authors, in general, do not maintain that man alone is capable of attaining perfection; he is dependent upon the "instruction" or "teaching" (*taʿlīm*) of God's friends. Although the attitude of Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ, as we shall see in what follows, is situated between the universal-humanistic approach of the philosophers and the sectarian perspective of the Shiʿi tradition, nevertheless, their discussions of human perfection derive from the Shiʿi-Ismāʿīlī notions of *walāya* and the ideal human being. Second, according to the Ismāʿīlī worldview, human perfection does not merely amount to extraordinary ethical, spiritual and philosophical achievements. Rather, ontologically speaking, the perfect man is rooted in the Divine world itself and is linked to cosmogonic or primordial events;[7] in cosmological terms, the perfect man corresponds in numerous ways to the universe and to the different worlds that comprise it;[8] and, finally, as regards eschatology, the perfect man is the key for the salvation of the individual and of creation at large.[9] It is evident, then, that in addition to various philosophical motifs, the Ismāʿīlī discussions of human perfection also contain mythic, esoteric, mystical and eschatological-messianic elements. One may say that, whereas the philosophical discourse in this context is focused on human perfection *per se*—on its qualities or characteristics, and the means of achieving it—the Ismāʿīlī discourse centers on the figure of the perfect man himself, that is, on his ontological essence; his relationship with God, the universe and mankind; his role in cosmogonic events; and his mission in the framework of human history and in the eschatological future.

As will become apparent throughout this chapter, Ibn al-ʿArabī's discourse concerning the perfect man is very similar to that of the Ismāʿīlīs, more so than to the philosophical discourse, or, for that matter, the Sufi discourse. In fact, it seems to me inaccurate to characterize Ibn al-ʿArabī's concept of the perfect man as being simply or essentially a 'Sufi' concept.[10] Although Ibn al-ʿArabī belongs to the Sufi tradition and was greatly inspired by it, and notwithstanding the Sufi and other Sunni-mystical elements in his discussions of the perfect man,[11] his treatment

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[7] See above pp. 143–56 and below pp. 160–2.

[8] See above pp. 169–72.

[9] See, for example, below pp. 173, 175.

[10] Cf. Nicholson, *Studies* 77–81; Takeshita, *Ibn ʿArabī's theory* 170–1 (and see especially the title of the third chapter there).

[11] See, for instance, Ibn al-ʿArabī, *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam* 195–6; Takeshita, *Ibn ʿArabī's theory* 113–8; Chittick, *Sufi path* 28–30; Chittick, *Imaginal worlds* 23–9, 168–70; Affifi, *Mystical philosophy* 80–1; and the references to Böwering's articles in the following note.

of this issue goes far beyond the ethical-psychological and unio-mystical aspects that are so characteristic of classical Sufism, at least as it evolved prior to Ibn al-ʿArabī's time. Furthermore, as far as I know, no such term as *al-insān al-kāmil* can be found in most Sufi teachings or sources predating the rise of Ibn al-ʿArabī, nor are there any discussions in these sources concerning human perfection in the mystical-philosophical context that will be presented here.[12] Ibn al-ʿArabī is thus the first Sunni mystic to have dealt with these matters in a systematic way. It was under the influence of his teachings, and primarily via the 14th-15th century work by ʿAbd al-Karīm al-Jīlī, *al-Insān al-kāmil fī maʿrifat al-awākhir wa-l-awāʾil* ("The Perfect Man in the Knowledge of the Beginnings and the Ends")—a work deeply influenced by Ibn al-ʿArabī's thought—that the term *al-insān al-kāmil*, as well as the various notions pertaining to it, entered the Sunni-mystical tradition.[13]

The Neoplatonic Background

In order to fully understand the concept of the perfect man as it developed in both the Ismāʿīlī tradition and Ibn al-ʿArabī's thought, one must first turn to early Arabic Neoplatonic sources. According to the *Theology of Aristotle*,[14] man in the corporeal world, called "the man of the senses" or "the lower man" (*al-insān al-ḥissī*, *al-insān al-suflī*), is but an "image" (*ṣanam*) of "the intellectual man" (*al-insān al-ʿaqlī*), i.e., the man who exists in the world of the universal intellect. The latter is also termed "the first and real man" (*al-insān al-awwal al-ḥaqq*) or "the supreme man" (*al-insān al-aʿlā*), and is perceived as the ideal 'model' or 'prototype' for the corporeal man. Although the corporeal man is similar to the supreme man and is attached (*muttaṣil*) to him, the supreme man, naturally, is entirely spiritual and is far nobler than the physical man; he is, in the words of the *Theology of Aristotle*, "complete and perfect (*tāmm kāmil*)". Similarly, within the universal soul resides "the second man" or "the man of the soul" (*al-insān al-thānī*, *al-insān al-nafsānī*), who is the ideal figure of the corporeal man in terms of his soul. Hence, the corporeal-terrestrial

[12] Cf. Böwering, Sulamī's treatise 353; Böwering, Ensān-e Kāmel.

[13] On al-Jīlī see Nicholson, *Studies* 77–161; Takeshita, *Ibn ʿArabī's theory* 49; Ritter, al-Djīlī; see also Schaeder, Islamische Lehre 239, 241, 245–61.

[14] On this work, see above pp. 36–40.

man is defined as "the third man" (*al-insān al-thālith*), who is comprised of both an intellect and a soul.[15]

This Neoplatonic notion of an upper-spiritual man, who is the ideal figure of the lower-corporeal man, was further developed by Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ, who sought to adapt it to the Shiʿi concept of *walāya* and to the distinct Neoplatonic scheme which characterizes the longer version of the *Theology* and Ismāʿīlī Neoplatonic writings.[16] In their *al-Risāla l-jāmiʿa*, the Ikhwān refer to "the man of knowledge and the figure of religion" (*al-insān al-ʿilmī wa-l-shakhṣ al-dīnī*), who is also called "the universal perfect man" (*al-insān al-kullī l-kāmil*). This man is the supreme ontological root of the terrestrial perfect man, and is linked to the Divine knowledge (*ʿilm*) and to God's creative word and command (*kalima, amr*), situated above the universal intellect. Contrary to the shorter version of the *Theology of Aristotle*, the Ikhwān raise the supreme perfect man above the universal intellect and place him on the threshold of the Divine world itself. According to the Ikhwān, "the man of knowledge and the figure of religion" manifests himself in the sub-lunar world in the figures of the seven *nuṭaqāʾ* ("the speaker prophets") and their heirs.[17] As might be recalled,[18] Ibn al-ʿArabī too places the creative Divine speech (*nafas al-raḥmān*, "the breath of the All-Merciful") above the universal intellect, and, like the Ikhwān, he defines this supreme hypostasis as *al-ḥaqq al-makhlūq bihi* ("the truth by means of which [the world] was created"), identifying it with the perfect man.[19]

Both the Ikhwān and Ibn al-ʿArabī perceive the perfect man, in terms of his ontological being, as directly connected to the Divine world, or at least

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[15] See Badawī (ed.), *Theology of Aristotle* (*the shorter version*) 69 ("*Wa-aqūlu inna l-insān al-ḥissī innamā huwa ṣanam al-insān al-ʿaqlī wa-l-insān al-ʿaqlī rūḥānī wa-jamīʿ aʿḍāʾihi rūḥāniyya* […]"), 139 ("[…] *Wa-l-insān fī l-ʿālam al-aʿlā tāmm kāmil* […]"), 144 ("[…] *Fa-kadhālika hādhā l-insān al-ḥissī huwa ṣanam li-dhālika l-insān al-awwal al-ḥaqq* […]"), 145–6 ("[…] *Wa-l-insān al-ʿaqlī yufiḍu bi-nūrihi ʿalā l-insān al-thānī wa-huwa l-insān al-ladhī fī l-ʿālam al-aʿlā l-nafsānī wa-l-insān al-thānī yushriqu nūruhu ʿalā l-insān al-thālith wa-huwa l-ladhī fī l-ʿālam al-jismānī l-asfal fa-in kāna hādhā hākadhā ʿalā mā waṣafnā qulnā inna fī l-insān al-jismānī l-insān al-nafsānī wa-l-insān al-ʿaqlī wa-lastu aʿnī annahu huwa humā lākinnī aʿnī bihi annahu muttaṣil bihimā li-annahu ṣanam lahumā wa-dhālika annahu yafʿalu baʿḍ afāʿīl al-insān al-ʿaqlī wa-baʿḍ afāʿīl al-insān al-nafsī* […]"); cf. Plotinus, *Enneads* vi, 314–7 (= Ennead vi, 4, 14), vii, 93–107 (= vi, 7, 3–6); and Schaeder, Islamische Lehre 221–6. Note that Philo of Alexandria too discusses the corporeal-terrestrial man vis-à-vis his spiritual-celestial counterpart or form; see Winston, *Logos* 25.

[16] On this scheme see above pp. 36–51.

[17] See above pp. 49–50.

[18] See above pp. 53–7.

[19] See especially Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ, *al-Jāmiʿa* i, 608–34; Ibn al-ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt* ii, 386, 390 (chapter 198), iii, 430 (chapter 371, *faṣl* 9).

to its manifest, creative dimension. This notion is formulated by these authors in Neoplatonic terms and in accordance with the unique Neoplatonic scheme known from the longer version of the *Theology of Aristotle* and from Ismāʿīlī literature.[20]

The Essence of Human Perfection

In the Ismāʿīlī tradition and in the thought of Ibn al-ʿArabī, human perfection is not merely an intellectual, spiritual and moral perfection, as in various medieval Arabic philosophical works, nor is it simply an ethical, psychological and mystical perfection, as in certain Sufi teachings. Rather, human perfection is an ontological state, total and comprehensive in its nature, deriving as it does from the Divine origins of the perfect man as well as from his central position in the universe. The perfect man—that is, the *nāṭiq*, his legatee and the *imām*s in the Ismāʿīlī tradition, or the ideal man in general, regardless of his physical genealogy, in Ibn al-ʿArabī's thought—is conceived of as an entity which comprises or unites within itself all the different worlds: the Divine world in its manifest-creative aspect, the upper-spiritual worlds and the lower-corporeal ones. The Divine aspect of the perfect man is apparent in the Divine names which he manifests[21] and in the image of God in which he was created;[22] the created aspect of the perfect man is evident in his role as a microcosm. Consequently, the perfect man functions as a link which bridges the gap between Divinity and creation, and is thus the mediator *par excellence* between God and man.[23]

The Arabic Root j.m.ʿ

In both Ismāʿīlī literature and the writings of Ibn al-ʿArabī, the perfect man is perceived as an all-inclusive entity, which comprises or unites within itself the different worlds. "In the [perfect] man", Ibn al-ʿArabī states,

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[20] Further evidence of the Neoplatonic background of the concept of the perfect man may be found in the work *Kitāb al-amad ʿalā l-abad* ("On the Afterlife", according to Rowson's translation), composed by the Neoplatonic philosopher Abū l-Ḥasan Muḥammad b. Yūsuf al-ʿĀmirī (died in 381/992); see Rowson, *A Muslim philosopher* 108 ("*Bal bi-hādhā yūjadu ʿishq al-insān al-kāmil lil-ḥusn al-bāṭin ashadd min ʿishq al-insān al-nāqiṣ lil-ḥusn al-ẓāhir* [...]").

[21] See above pp. 146–51.

[22] See below pp. 165–8.

[23] See pp. 172–5.

> there is the power of every existent in the world. He has all the levels (*jamīʿ al-marātib*) and consequently is the only one who was given the form [i.e., the only one who was created according to God's form]. He unites (*fa-jamaʿa*) the Divine true essences, which are the [Divine] names, with the true essences of the world, for he is the last existent [...]

Man is "the most perfect existent [...] everything other than man is created except for man, who is both a created being and a God".[24] The use of the derivatives of the root j.m.ʿ. in this context appears in other passages as well in the works of Ibn al-ʿArabī. The entity of the perfect man

> was the aim of Allāh [in creating] the world. He is the true vicegerent (*khalīfa*), he is the locus in which the Divine names are manifested and he comprises within himself (*jāmiʿ*) the true essences of the whole world [...]
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> Within this noble compendium [of the macrocosm, *al-mukhtaṣar al-sharīf*], that is, within the perfect man, [God] has brought into existence all (*jamīʿ*) the Divine names as well as the true essences of that which is found outside of him in the big world [...][25]

In his renowned work *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam*, Ibn al-ʿArabī explains that

> all the names in the Divine forms were manifested within this human entity. The latter thus obtained the encompassing and comprehensive degree (*rutbat al-iḥāṭa wa-l-jamʿ*) by this existence. [Through man], Allāh's argument (*ḥujja*) against the angels was established.[26]

According to Ibn al-ʿArabī, the great virtue of Adam—the prototype of the perfect man in general—was his *jamʿiyya*, i.e., his God-given ability to comprise or unite within himself (*jāmiʿ*, *majmūʿ*) all the Divine names and

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[24] Ibn al-ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt* ii, 390 (chapter 198: ("*Fa-fī l-insān quwwat kull mawjūd fī l-ʿālam fa-lahu jamīʿ al-marātib wa-li-hādhā khtuṣṣa waḥdahu bi-l-ṣūra fa-jamaʿa bayna l-ḥaqā'iq al-ilāhiyya wa-hiya l-asmā' wa-bayna ḥaqā'iq al-ʿālam fa-innahu ākhir mawjūd* [...]"; "F*a-kāna l-insān akmal al-mawjūdāt* [...] *fa-kull mā siwā l-insān khalq illā l-insān fa-innahu khalq wa-ḥaqq* [...]").

[25] Ibn al-ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt* i, 176 (chapter 7, = ʿUthmān Yaḥyā's edition ii, 252 : "[...] *ʿAlimnā qaṭʿan anna l-insān huwa l-ʿayn al-maqṣūda li-llāh min al-ʿālam wa-annahu l-khalīfa ḥaqqan wa-annahu maḥall ẓuhūr al-asmā' al-ilāhiyya wa-huwa l-jāmiʿ li-ḥaqā'iq al-ʿālam kullihi*"); Ibn al-ʿArabī, *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam* 199 ("*Fa-awjada fī hādhā l-mukhtaṣar al-sharīf al-ladhī huwa l-insān al-kāmil jamiʿ al-asmā' al-ilāhiyya wa-ḥaqā'iq mā kharaja ʿanhu fī l-ʿālam al-kabīr al-munfaṣil* [...]"); see also Ibn al-ʿArabī, *Inshā' al-dawā'ir* 21–2; Ibn al-ʿArabī, *ʿAnqā' mughrib* 5, 39, 45; Chodkiewicz, *Seal of the saints* 70–1; Takeshita, *Ibn ʿArabī's theory* 53–73. Note also the importance which Ibn al-ʿArabī attaches to the *ḥadīth* which states that Muḥammad was given "the comprehensive words" (*jawāmiʿ al-kalim*); see, for example, Chittick, *Sufi path* 104 and n. 17, 239.

[26] Ibn al-ʿArabī, *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam* 50 ("[...] *Fa-ẓahara jamīʿ mā fī l-ṣuwar al-ilāhiyya min al-asmā' fī hādhihi l-nash'a l-insāniyya fa-ḥāzat rutbat al-iḥāṭa wa-l-jamʿ bi-hādhā l-wujūd wa-bihi qāmat al-ḥujja li-llāh taʿālā ʿalā l-malā'ika*"). For a similar use of the root j.m.ʿ, see also ibid. 48. On the term *ḥujja* see above p. 66 n. 118.

true essences of creation. In his inner-hidden aspect (*bāṭin*), Adam was created in the image of God, that is, he embodied all the Divine names; in his external-manifest aspect (*ẓāhir*), he comprised the true essences of the created universe. This is the reason why Ibn al-ʿArabī defines Adam (or the perfect man) as both a God (*ḥaqq*) and a created being (*khalq*), since he unites within himself the creator with the created. This virtue of Adam was overlooked by the angels and was vehemently rejected by Iblīs.[27] As in the Shiʿi-Ismāʿīlī tradition,[28] Ibn al-ʿArabī too perceives the misapprehension of the angels regarding Adam's superiority and the unwillingness of Iblīs to bow down to him as a refusal to acknowledge the supreme status of the perfect man who embodies God's names.

A similar use of the root j.m.ʿ. is found in Ismāʿīlī literature. "Man's form", Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ state, "comprises the forms of all the worlds (*wa-hiya l-majmūʿ fīhā ṣuwar al-ʿālamīna jamīʿan*)". In man, who is composed of both a physical body and a spiritual soul, "were assembled together (*ijtamaʿa*) all the essences of the existents (*jamīʿ maʿānī l-mawjūdāt*)—the simple ones [*al-basāʾiṭ*, i.e., the spiritual existents] as well as the composed ones [*wa-l-murakkabāt*, i.e., the corporeal existents]". According to the Ikhwān, the qualities of all created beings are found in man, who contains within himself everything that exists in the macrocosm. Man is "the whole which encompasses everything (*al-kull al-muḥīṭ bi-l-jamīʿ*)".[29] The Shiʿi-Ismāʿīlī context of these themes is evident in al-Kirmānī's writings. Al-Kirmānī explains that all the virtues can be found in the personalities of those who have achieved full human perfection ("the second perfection"), i.e., the prophets, their legatees, the *imām*s and their close followers. These perfect human beings are referred to as a *majmaʿ lil-faḍāʾil*, "a locus in which all virtues are assembled". These are not merely religious or ethical virtues, but rather Divine powers and knowledge emanating from the upper, spiritual worlds. Furthermore, al-Kirmānī describes

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[27] See Ibn al-ʿArabī, *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam* 50, 54–6; see also Takeshita, *Ibn ʿArabī's theory* 50–3. For the term *majmūʿ* in relation to the perfect man, see, for example, Ibn al-ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt* iii, 289 (chapter 361).

[28] See above p. 147.

[29] Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ, *Rasāʾil* ii, 473, 475, iii, 188 ("*Wa-qad ijtamaʿa fī tarkīb al-insān jamīʿ maʿānī l-mawjūdāt min al-basāʾiṭ wa-l-murakkabāt al-latī taqaddama dhikruhā li-anna l-insān murakkab min jasad ghalīẓ jismānī wa-min nafs basīṭa rūḥāniyya* [. . .]"), iv, 12 ("[. . .] *Li-anna ṣūrat al-insān* [. . .] *wa-hiya l-majmūʿ fīhā ṣuwar al-ʿālamīna jamīʿan* [. . .]"); Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ, *al-Jāmiʿa* i, 240, 475–6, 482, 575 ("[. . .] *Wa-anna fīhi maʿānī l-mawjūdāt kullihā fahuwa l-kull al-muḥīṭ bi-l-jamīʿ* [. . .]"; cf. Tāmir's edition v, 144, where he reads كالكل instead of الكل), 579. For the use of the root j.m.ʿ. in similar contexts, see also al-Rāzī, *al-Iṣlāḥ* 211–6; al-Qāḍī l-Nuʿmān, *al-Mudhhiba* 53; al-Kirmānī, *Rāḥat al-ʿaql* 298.

the *nāṭiq* as comprising within himself (*jāmiʿ*) "the prophetic virtues and the lights of the kingdom", that is, the Divine lights flowing from the world of the ten intellects. In a similar vein, the *nāṭiq* is said to comprise within himself all the forms that emanate from this supreme world.[30] Finally, al-Kirmānī states that the human soul, having attained its final perfection, "comprises within itself all the levels (*marātib*), all the multiplicity (*kathra*), all the forms; it becomes one form for all the [different] forms".[31]

Thus, by employing the derivatives of the Arabic root j.m.ʿ., both the Ismāʿilī authors and Ibn al-ʿArabī portray the perfect man as a comprehensive entity, in an ontological as well as in an epistemological sense: the perfect man contains within himself all the different worlds, spiritual and physical alike; accordingly, his intellectual-mystical apprehension is all-encompassing.

ʿAlā Ṣūratihi

The idea according to which man, or the world at large, were created in the image of God is an ancient theme in the history of human thought. It appears in different formulations and in various sources: in the Bible (see Genesis 1: 26–27), in the Dialogues of Plato, in the *Enneads* of Plotinus and in many Jewish, Christian and Gnostic writings.[32] In Islamic literature, this theme is echoed in the well-known tradition which is contained in the canonical *Ḥadīth* compilations: "Allāh created Adam according to His form (*khalaqa llāh ādam ʿalā ṣūratihi*)". In another version, which does not appear in the canonical compilations, it is stated that man was created "according to the form of the All-Merciful (*ʿalā ṣūrat al-raḥmān*)".[33]

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[30] See al-Kirmānī, *Rāḥat al-ʿaql* 61–2 ("*Wa-lammā kāna mawjūdan min anfus al-bashar man kharaja ilā l-fiʿl mithl al-anbiyāʾ wa-l-awṣiyāʾ wa-l-aʾimma ʿalayhim al-salām wa-tābiʿihim bi-naylihim al-kamālayni wa-stīfāʾihim al-saʿādatayni wa-maṣīrihim majmaʿan lil-faḍāʾil ṣifran min al-radhāʾil tāmman* […]"), 124 ("*Fa-ḥakamnā min maqām al-nāṭiq fī hādhā l-ʿālam wa-kawnihi ʿaqlan tāmman sāʾisan li-man dūnahu jāmiʿan lil-faḍāʾil al-nabawiyya wa-l-anwār al-malakūtiyya* […]"), 187 ("*Wa-kawn al-nāṭiq jāmiʿan li-jamīʿ ṣuwar al-mawjūdāt al-ʿaqliyya l-sābiqa fī l-wujūd ʿalayhi* […]"); see also ibid. 127–9, 145, 152, 159, 162, 167, 431.

[31] Ibid. 336 ("[…] *Fa-takūnu jāmiʿa lil-marātib kullihā wa-lil-kathra kullihā wa-lil-ṣuwar kullihā fa-takūnu ṣūra lil-ṣuwar kullihā*"); see also ibid. 64, 134–7, 298, 338, 380, 425.

[32] See Plato, *Timaeus* 50–7, 252–3 (= 29–31, 92); Plotinus, *Enneads* v, 58–61 (= Ennead v, 2, 1). For Jewish, Christian and Gnostic sources, see the discussions and references in Takeshita, *Ibn ʿArabī's theory* 9–15; Amir-Moezzi, Remarques 89 n. 1; Lorberbaum, *Image of God* (in Hebrew); Kister, Some early Jewish and Christian exegetical problems; Winston, *Logos* 25.

[33] See, for example, al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ* iv, 122 (Kitāb al-istiʾdhān / bāb badʾ al-salām, *ḥadīth* 6227: "*Khalaqa llāh ādam ʿalā ṣūratihi ṭūluhu sittūna dhirāʿan* […]"); Aḥmad b.

Both in Sunni and Shiʿi sources, this *ḥadīth* was given different interpretations, in an attempt to eliminate its blunt anthropomorphism: Adam, according to these interpretations, was not at all created in the image of God, neither in a physical nor in a spiritual sense.[34]

Contrary to this mainstream, conservative approach, Ibn al-ʿArabī, who is quite fond of the *ʿalā ṣūratihi* tradition, chose to emphasize the close relationship between man and God as reflected in this *ḥadīth*. According to Ibn al-ʿArabī, the true meaning of this tradition is that Adam—the prototype of the perfect man—embodied all the Divine names:

> What is [the meaning of] the [Prophet's] saying, '[Allāh] created Adam according to His form'? The answer: know that any form which one pictures [in his mind, *yataṣawwaruhu*] is the same as one's own self; it is nothing else, for it is not extrinsic to him. The form of the world must be pictured by God according to what its entity manifests. The [perfect] man, who is Adam, is comprised of the whole world. He is the small man, the compendium of the big world [...] Allāh has arranged within him all that is found outside of him, save for Allāh. Furthermore, to each and every part of him was connected the true essence of the Divine name which caused it to appear and from which it became manifested; all the Divine names were connected to him, with no exception. Thus, Adam emerged according to the form of the name *Allāh*, for this name contains all the Divine names [...]

Despite man's small physique,

> he comprises within himself all the true essences of the big world. This is the reason why the wise men call the world 'a big man' [...] Knowledge is picturing the form of the object which is known; knowledge is also one of the essential attributes of the knower; His knowledge is His form, and according to it Adam was created. Hence, Allāh created Adam according to His form.[35]

Ḥanbal, *al-Musnad* viii, 219–20 (Musnad Abū Hurayra / Ṣaḥīfat Hamām b. Munabbih, *ḥadīth* 8156); al-Haythamī, *Majmaʿ al-zawā'id* viii, 106 ("*Qāla rasūl allāh ṣallā llāh ʿalayhi wa-sallama lā taqbaḥū l-wajh fa-inna bna ādam khuliqa ʿalā ṣūrat al-raḥmān tabāraka wa-taʿālā*"); see also the references in Chittick, *Sufi path* 399 n. 4.

[34] See Gimaret, *Dieu à l'image de l'homme* 123–36; Takeshita, *Ibn ʿArabī's theory* 15–7 n. 21, 29 n. 58; Amir-Moezzi, Remarques 100 n. 45; see also Ibn Qutayba, *Ta'wīl mukhtalif al-ḥadīth* 217–21.

[35] Ibn al-ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt* ii, 121 (chapter 73, question 143, = ʿUthmān Yaḥyā's edition xiii, 125–7: "*Mā qawluhu khalaqa ādam ʿalā ṣūratihi l-jawāb iʿlam annahu kull mā yataṣawwaruhu l-mutaṣawwir fa-huwa ʿaynuhu lā ghayruhu fa-innahu laysa bi-khārij ʿanhu wa-lā budda lil-ʿālam an yakūna mutaṣawwaran lil-ḥaqq ʿalā mā yuẓhiru ʿaynuhu wa-l-insān al-ladhī huwa ādam ʿibāra ʿan majmūʿ al-ʿālam fa-innahu l-insān al-ṣaghīr wa-huwa l-mukhtaṣar min al-ʿālam al-kabīr* [...] *fa-rattaba llāh fīhi jamīʿ mā kharaja ʿanhu mimmā siwā llāh fa-rtabaṭat bi-kull juzʾ minhu ḥaqīqat al-ism al-ilāhī l-latī abrazathu wa-ẓahara ʿanhā fa-rtabaṭat bihi l-asmāʾ al-ilāhiyya kulluhā lam yashudhdha ʿanhu minhā shayʾ fa-kharaja ādam ʿalā ṣūrat al-ism allāh idh kāna hādhā l-ism yataḍammanu jamīʿ al-asmāʾ*

In this passage, Ibn al-ʿArabī interprets the tradition of *ʿalā ṣūratihi* by referring to the motif of the Divine names and the notion of parallel worlds.[36] In Ibn al-ʿArabī's view, all beings are created according to God's knowledge. This implies a certain unity between God and the created beings, since the latter exist eternally as objects of the Divine knowledge, as "immutable entities" (*aʿyān thābita*). From a different perspective, creation is generated by the Divine names, which are in need of the world in order to realize the full potential inherent in them. Man, the microcosm, corresponds to the universe at large, the macrocosm; both man and the universe are the eternal objects of Divine knowledge and serve as the locus in which the Divine names manifest themselves. However, man is also an all-encompassing entity which comprises within itself the Divine names as well as the true essences of the created universe. Hence, a close, tripartite relationship exists between God, the universe and man. This relationship is the key to understanding the *ʿalā ṣūratihi* tradition.

In his interpretation of this tradition, Ibn al-ʿArabī seems to have been influenced, at least to a certain extent, by earlier Sufi teachings. Thus, both Abū Bakr Dulaf b. Jaḥdar al-Shiblī (died in 334/945) and the famous Abū Ḥāmid Muḥammad b. Muḥammad al-Ghazālī (died in 505/1111) draw a link between the *ʿalā ṣūratihi* tradition and the motif of the Divine names. In their view, the phrase "according to His form" means that man was created according to God's names and attributes. However, al-Shiblī and al-Ghazālī are not as radical in their approach as Ibn al-ʿArabī: they do not perceive man, in his ontological being, as an indispensable means for God's self-disclosure, for the manifestation of His names. In fact, al-Ghazālī is quite careful to emphasize that the affinity between the attributes of God and those of man is only true in a figurative sense.[37] It seems, therefore, that in his interpretation of the *ʿalā ṣūratihi* tradition, Ibn al-ʿArabī was inspired by other teachings as well.

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al-ilāhiyya […]"; "[…] *Kadhālika l-insān wa-in ṣaghura jirmuhu ʿan jirm al-ʿālam fa-innahu yajmaʿu jamīʿ ḥaqāʾiq al-ʿālam al-kabīr wa-li-hādhā yusammī l-ʿuqalāʾ al-ʿālam insānan kabīran* […] *wa-l-ʿilm taṣawwur al-maʿlūm wa-l-ʿilm min ṣifāt al-ʿālim al-dhātiyya fa-ʿilmuhu ṣūratuhu wa-ʿalayhā khuliqa ādam fa-ādam khalaqahu llāh ʿalā ṣūratihi*"); see also ibid. 385 (chapter 198); Chittick, *Sufi path* 16–7, 274–8; Chittick, *Imaginal worlds* 31–8; Takeshita, *Ibn ʿArabī's theory* 50–73; Affifi, *Mystical philosophy* 78.

[36] On the motif of the Divine names, see above pp. 146–51; on the notion of parallel worlds, see below chapter 5.

[37] See Takeshita, *Ibn ʿArabī's theory* 15–49, 171; cf. Gimaret, *Dieu à l'image de l'homme* 131–2.

As explained above,[38] according to various Shiʿi-Ismāʿīlī traditions, the *imām*s are the names of God. In a certain sense, then, the *imām*s alone are created in the image of God, although, to the best of my knowledge, no such claim is made in Shiʿi literature.[39] However, the link between the *ʿalā ṣūratihi* tradition and the motif of God's names is indeed found in the Epistles of Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ, in a passage to which I have referred above.[40] The Ikhwān state that the universal intellect, which is closer to God than all other created beings, is "the act of the Creator, may He be exalted, which He performed with His own essence; it is the book which He wrote with His own hands [...]". Given that

> he who performs an act gives this act, which is unique to him, his very own form and pattern (*ṣūratahu wa-mithālahu*), and likewise supports it with [his own] power [...] it follows that the [universal] intellect is an object for the command of God, powerful and mighty is He, and a place for His power. Indeed, it is mentioned in one of the revealed books that Allāh created Adam according to His form and pattern [...][41]

The Ikhwān further explain that the universal intellect as well as the other existents emanating from it all have their share in God's attributes. As will be recalled,[42] according to the Ikhwān, the *nāṭiq* and the perfect man in general correspond to the universal intellect. It seems, then, that in the eyes of the Ikhwān, the universal intellect, his terrestrial equivalent (= the perfect man, the microcosm) and creation at large (the macrocosm) are all created in God's image, that is, they all partake in his names and attributes.[43]

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[38] See above pp. 146–51.

[39] See also Amir-Moezzi, Remarques 100 n. 45.

[40] See above p. 151.

[41] See Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ, *Rasāʾil* iv, 206 ("*Wa-lammā kāna l-ʿaql huwa aqrab al-ashyāʾ min bārihi* [...] *wajaba an yakūna huwa fiʿl al-bārī taʿālā l-ladhī faʿalahu bi-dhātihi wa-kitābuhu l-ladhī katabahu bi-yadihi* [...]"; "*Wa-lammā kāna l-fāʿil yuʿṭī fiʿlahu l-khāṣṣ bihi ṣūratahu wa-mithālahu wa-yuʾayyiduhu bi-l-qudra* [...] *ṣāra l-ʿaql mawḍiʿan li-amr allāh ʿazza wa-jalla wa-makānan li-qudratihi wa-qad jāʾa fī baʿḍ al-kutub al-munazzala anna llāh khalaqa ādam ʿalā ṣūratihi wa-mithālihi* [...]"). Cf. Plotinus, *Enneads* v, 58–61 (= Ennead v, 2, 1); and also Takeshita, *Ibn ʿArabī's theory* 91–2.

[42] See above p. 154.

[43] Cf. Marquet, *La philosophie des Ihwan al-Safa: de Dieu à l'homme* 291–2. For other Ismāʿīlī-Neoplatonic interpretations of the *ʿalā ṣūratihi* tradition which likewise refer to the figure of the perfect man, see al-Ḥāmidī, *Kanz al-walad* 248–9; al-Kirmānī, *Rāḥat al-ʿaql* 145–6; Walker, *Ḥamīd al-Dīn al-Kirmānī* 102.

The Perfect Man as a Microcosm

The notion of parallel worlds and the correspondence between the microcosm (man) and the macrocosm (the universe) will be dealt with in detail in chapter 5 of this study. Here I wish to discuss the relation between these themes and the concept of the perfect man.

According to Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ, man, the microcosm (literally: "the small world", *al-ʿālam al-ṣaghīr*), is the compendium or précis (*mukhtaṣar*) of the universe, the macrocosm (literally: "the big world", *al-ʿālam al-kabīr*, or "the big man", *al-insān al-kabīr*). Alternatively, man is a résumé of "the preserved tablet" (*al-lawḥ al-maḥfūẓ*), which is identified by the Ikhwān with the universal soul. The Ikhwān explain that God

> created man in the best and most accurate way [*fī aḥsan taqwīm*, see Q 95:4], giving him the most perfect form. He made his form a mirror for his soul, so that the form of the big world would be reflected in it. For when the Creator, mighty is He, wanted to reveal to the human soul the treasures of His knowledge and cause the soul to witness the whole world, He knew that the world was too wide and big and that man has not the capacity to wander around the world in order to see it all [...] Therefore, He thought it wise to create for the soul a small world, which is a compendium of the big world. He formed in [this] small world everything that exists in the big world, placing the latter's pattern in front of the [soul] [...][44]

In this passage and elsewhere in the Ikhwān's Epistles, the perception of man as a microcosm is linked to the idea of Divine writing: man is the compendium or précis of the universe and of the preserved tablet, on which God has inscribed creation by means of the cosmic pen, i.e., the universal intellect. The Ikhwān explicitly state that man himself, like the universal intellect and all created beings, is a book (*kitāb, daftar*) written by God Himself.[45]

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[44] Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ, *Rasāʾil* ii, 460 ("[...] *Wa-yuqālu innahu mukhtaṣar min al-lawḥ al-maḥfūẓ*"), 462 ("[...] *Li-anna l-bārī taʿālā khalaqa l-insān fī aḥsan taqwīm wa-ṣawwarahu akmal ṣūra wa-jaʿala ṣūratahu mirʾāa li-nafsihi li-yatarāʾā fīhā ṣūrat al-ʿālam al-kabīr wa-dhālika anna l-bārī jalla jalāluhu lammā arāda an yuṭliʿa l-nafs al-insāniyya ʿalā khazāʾin ʿulūmihi wa-yushhidahā l-ʿālam bi-asrihi ʿalima anna l-ʿālam wāsiʿ kabīr wa-laysa fī ṭāqat al-insān an yadūra fī l-ʿālam ḥattā yushāhidahu kullahu li-qiṣar ʿamrihi wa-ṭūl ʿumrān al-ʿālam fa-raʾā min al-ḥikma an yakhluqa lahā ʿālaman ṣaghīran mukhtaṣaran min al-ʿalam al-kabīr wa-ṣawwara fī l-ʿālam al-ṣaghīr jamīʿ mā fī l-ʿālam al-kabīr wa-maththalahu bayna yadayhā* [...]"); see also Schaeder, Islamische Lehre 226–7.

[45] See, for example, Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ, *Rasāʾil* ii, 460, 475, iv, 12, 42, 167–8, 213, 427–8; Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ, *al-Jāmiʿa* i, 240, 480, 496–7. On the universal intellect as a book, see above n. 41. On the motif of the book in general, see below pp. 212–29.

Ibn al-ʿArabī too maintains that man is the compendium (*mukhtaṣar*) of the universe, of "the big man". His explanation of this idea is identical to that of the Ikhwān: the world is too large for man to encompass in a physical manner, hence the need for a microcosmic entity that comprises within it all of creation.[46] Moreover, both the Ikhwān and Ibn al-ʿArabī view the perfect man (the microcosm) and the universe (the macrocosm) as the product of God's creative speech and of God's creative writing.[47] According to Ibn al-ʿArabī,

> Allāh, may He be exalted, knew Himself and consequently knew the world. Hence, [the world] emerged according to the [Divine] form. Allāh created the [perfect] man as a noble compendium, in which He assembled together (*jamaʿa*) the essences of the big world. He made him into a copy comprising of (*nuskha jāmiʿa*) that which exists in the big world and the names in the Divine realm. It is in relation to him that the Messenger of God, may Allāh's prayers and blessings be upon him, said: 'Allāh created Adam according to His form'. This is why we say that the world emerged according to the [Divine] form.

The terms *mukhtaṣar* and *nuskha* appear in other passages as well in Ibn al-ʿArabī's writings.[48] In the same way that the Ikhwān view the universal intellect, creation at large and the perfect man as books written by God, so too Ibn al-ʿArabī perceives Muḥammad or *al-ḥaqīqa l-muḥammadiyya*, which he identifies with the universal intellect,[49] as a copy of God. Adam,

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[46] See, for example, Ibn al-ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt* ii, 121 (chapter 73, question 143, = ʿUthmān Yaḥyā's edition xiii, 126).

[47] On the world as a product of Divine speech and writing, see above pp. 45–57; see also Lory, *La Science* 38–9, 117–20, 127–8, 134. On the perfect man as a Divine book and a Divine word (*kalima*), see Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ, *al-Jāmiʿa* i, 496–7; Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ, *Rasāʾil* i, 360; Marquet, Imamat 128–9; Ibn al-ʿArabī, *ʿUqlat al-mustawfiz* 94 ("[…] *Fa-jaʿala nuskha min al-ʿālam kullihi fa-mā min ḥaqīqa fī l-ʿālam illā wa-hiya fī l-insān fa-huwa l-kalima l-jāmiʿa wa-huwa l-mukhtaṣar al-sharīf* […]"); Ibn al-ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt* i, 188 (chapter 10, = ʿUthmān Yaḥyā's edition ii, 300: "[…] *Lākinna l-insān huwa l-kalima l-jāmiʿa wa-nuskhat al-ʿālam* […]"), 276 (chapter 34, in the poem), 280; Ibn al-ʿArabī, *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam* 50; Chodkiewicz, *Seal of the saints* 70–1 and n. 39, 119–20.

[48] See Ibn al-ʿArabī, *ʿUqlat al-mustawfiz* 45 ("*Bāb al-kamāl al-insānī ammā baʿd fa-inna llāh taʿālā ʿalima nafsahu fa-ʿalima l-ʿālam fa-li-dhālika kharaja ʿalā l-ṣūra wa-khalaqa llāh al-insān mukhtaṣaran sharīfan jamaʿa fihi maʿānī l-ʿālam al-kabīr wa-jaʿalahu nuskha jāmiʿa limā fī l-ʿālam al-kabīr wa-limā fī l-ḥaḍra l-ilāhiyya min al-asmāʾ wa-qāla fihi rasūl allāh ṣallā llāh ʿalayhi wa-sallama inna llāh khalaqa ādam ʿalā ṣūratihi fa-li-dhālika qulnā kharaja l-ʿālam ʿalā l-ṣūra*"); see also Ibn al-ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt* ii, 121 (chapter 73, question 143, = ʿUthmān Yaḥyā's edition xiii, 125–7), 385 (the beginning of chapter 198); Ibn al-ʿArabī, *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam* 199; Ibn al-ʿArabī, *Inshāʾ al-dawāʾir* 21–2. On the perfect man as a microcosm, see also Chittick, *Imaginal worlds* 31-8; Affifi, *Mystical philosophy* 82.

[49] See above p. 152.

in turn, is a copy of Muḥammad, and the perfect man is a copy of both Muḥammad and Adam.[50]

It seems that in the history of Islamic mysticism, the notion that the ideal man is a Divine book originated in the Shiʿi milieu. In Shiʿi traditions, the *imām* is called "the speaking Quran" (*al-Qurʾān al-nāṭiq*), in contradistinction to the written text of the Quran itself, which is termed "the silent *imām*" (*al-imām al-ṣāmit*). To be sure, the idea according to which the friends of God alone are qualified and able to interpret the holy book, thus causing it to 'speak', is reflected in the *Ḥadīth* literature.[51] As mentioned in the previous chapter, this literature forms the basis for both the Shiʿi and the Sunni-mystical discussions of *walāya* and the *awliyāʾ*. However, the explicit identification of the *awliyāʾ* with the holy book is found in Shiʿi sources.[52] In early Ismāʿīlī literature as well, the *nāṭiq*, his legatee or the *imām* are identified with the Quran.[53] Hence, the Ikhwānian notion of the perfect man as a Divine book seems to be based on an early Shiʿi theme. As we shall see in what follows, the Ikhwān interpreted this and other Shiʿi-Ismāʿīlī themes in a humanistic-universal way: the perfect man in general—whatever his lineage—is conceived of as a Divine book and a holy microcosm. This very notion resurfaces in the writings of Ibn al-ʿArabī.

These ideas—that is to say, the concept of Divine writing and the perception of the perfect man as a book and a microcosm—are likewise found in some of al-Ghazālī's more esoteric works,[54] with which Ibn al-ʿArabī may have been acquainted. However, there is no doubt that the

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[50] See Ibn al-ʿArabī, *ʿAnqāʾ mughrib* 38 ("*Wa-kāna muḥammad ṣallā llāh ʿalayhi wa-sallama nuskha min al-ḥaqq bi-l-iʿlām wa-kāna ādam nuskha minhu ʿalā l-tamām wa-kunnā naḥnu nuskha minhumā ʿalayhimā l-salām wa-kāna l-ʿālam asfaluhu wa-aʿlāhu nuskha minnā wa-ntahat al-aqlām ghayr anna fī nuskhatinā min kitābay ādam wa-muḥammad sirr sharīf wa-maʿnā laṭīf* [. . .]"); see also ibid. 42 ("[. . .] *Fa-l-insān al-kitāb al-jāmiʿ* [. . .]").

[51] See, for instance, Ibn Abī l-Dunyā, *al-Awliyāʾ* 15 ("*Bihim qāma l-kitāb wa-bihi qāmū wa-bihim naṭaqa l-kitāb wa-bihi naṭaqū wa-bihim ʿulima l-kitāb wa-bihi ʿulimū* [. . .]").

[52] See Amir-Moezzi, Notes 729 and the references given there in n. 50; Amir-Moezzi, *Divine guide* 79; Amir-Moezzi, Remarques 106, 108 n. 93; Amir-Moezzi, *Le Coran silencieux* 101–7, 115; Ayoub, Speaking Qurʾān, especially pp. 178–83; Lory, *La Science* 63–5. See also the discussion of the terms *umm al-kitāb* and *ʿilliyyīn* in Amir-Moezzi, *Divine guide* 29, 38–9, 167 n. 198; Amir-Moezzi, La Préexistence 110 n. 5, 114, 122–5.

[53] See Jaʿfar b. Manṣūr al-Yaman, *al-Kashf* 20–1 ("[. . .] *Wa-l-kitāb al-mubīn amīr al-muʾminīna ʿalī bnu abī ṭālib ṣalawāt allāh ʿalayhi* [. . .]"), 50–1, 131 ("*Wa-min al-bayān fī qawl allāh ʿazza wa-jalla minhu āyāt muḥkamāt hunna umm al-kitāb anna l-kitāb mimmā yusammā bihi l-nāṭiq wa-l-āyāt mimmā yusammā bihi l-aʾimma* [. . .]"), 163 ("[. . .] *Al-imām wa-huwa l-kitāb* [. . .]"), 168, 171.

[54] See Takeshita, *Ibn ʿArabī's theory* 29–30, 42–4, 47–8.

ideas analyzed here are far more central to the Ismāʿīlī worldview and to the thought of Ibn al-ʿArabī than to al-Ghazālī's teachings. Moreover, it is quite plausible that al-Ghazālī himself was influenced by Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ in this context, notwithstanding his criticism of the Ismāʿīlī tradition.[55]

Cosmic Mediation

The concept of the *awliyāʾ* as mediators between God and men is an early theme in Islam, and it is reflected in various *ḥadīth*s treating of God's friends.[56] In Ismāʿīlī literature and above all in the Epistles of Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ, the ideal man is perceived as a bridge, as a mediating entity standing between the spiritual and the corporeal worlds. In addition to being a microcosm which unites within itself the different dimensions of reality, the mediating role of the perfect man derives from his unique position in the cosmic hierarchy. Although these notions are also familiar from other philosophical and religious traditions,[57] their distinctive formulation in the Epistles of the Ikhwān and in the writings of Ibn al-ʿArabī is particularly relevant to the current discussion.

According to the Ikhwān, when viewed in relation to other levels in the universal hierarchy, the level of man is the last to be found among the corporeal existents, and the first one to be found among the spiritual beings:

> [...] In truth, the human form, in its very nature, is the choice part of this world; it is its fruit and its best portion. Yet it is also the turbid part of that world—i.e., the upper world—and its refuse. The fact that [man] is the last of the corporeal essences indicates that he is the first one among the spiritual essences, that is, if he receives the flow from the [upper world] and adheres to it [...] He is like a line bordering each of the two worlds (*ka-l-ḥadd al-mutākhim li-kilā l-ʿālamayni*), like a root uniting both perfections. If he accepts the instructions of those who possess Divine knowledge, follows those who guide, obeys His creator and knows Him as he should—then he obtains both kinds of happiness and acquires the two ranks: that of human perfection and virtuous nature [or, according to another version: virtuous

[55] See Mitha, *Al-Ghazālī*. For possible Ismāʿīlī influences on al-Ghazālī, see below p. 191 n. 14.

[56] On these *ḥadīth*s, see above pp. 123–32.

[57] See Conger, *Theories* 22, 24, 30–2, 41, 79, 128; Allers, Microcosmus 321–2, 355, 361–2, 379–80, 384, 390–1; Armstrong, *Architecture* 101.

> philosophy] in this world, and that of the angelic form and the proximity to God on the rungs of paradise [...] in the world to come.[58]

The definition of man as a borderline (*ḥadd mutākhim*), or, alternatively, as a mediating entity (*wāsiṭa*), appears in other passages as well in the *Rasā'il*. Moreover, in their Epistles, the Ikhwān identify the perfect man with the *ṣirāṭ*, i.e., the right path (*al-ṣirāṭ al-mustaqīm*, see Q 1:6 and more), and also the bridge which, according to Islamic eschatology, extends over hell. In the Ikhwān's worldview, the perfect man functions as a bridge that leads from hell, that is: the physical-corporeal world, to paradise, that is: the upper, spiritual worlds.[59] It seems that here too, the Ikhwān were inspired by early Shi'i traditions in which the *imām* is identified with the *ṣirāṭ*.[60]

The notion that man is the last among the corporeal beings and the first among the spiritual ones is closely linked to the concept of *martaba* (hierarchal "level"), which, as explained above,[61] plays a central role in the thought of the Ikhwān. The Ikhwān explain that

> since the last level (*martaba*) among humans is attached to the first level among angels, and the last level among animals is attached to the first level among humans, it follows that man is comprised of both worlds, and stands between the two.[62]

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[58] Ikhwān al-Ṣafā', *al-Jāmi'a* i, 566–7 ("*Faṣl fī anna l-insān mukhtaṣar min al-'ālamayni l-rūḥānī wa-l-jismānī i'lam ayyuhā l-akh* [...] *anna l-ṣūra l-insāniyya muhayya'a majbūla min sūs huwa fī l-ḥaqīqa khulāṣat hādhā l-'ālam wa-thamaratuhu wa-zubdatuhu wa-kadar dhālika l-'ālam a'nī l-a'lā wa-nuqāyatuhu* [or read: *wa-nufāyatuhu*] *wa-anna kawnahu ākhir al-ma'ānī l-jismāniyya dalīl 'alā annahu awwal al-ma'ānī l-rūḥāniyya idhā qabila l-fayḍ minhu wa-ta'allaqa bihi* [...] *fa-huwa ka-l-ḥadd al-mutākhim li-kilā l-'ālamayni wa-ka-l-aṣl al-jāmi' lil-kamālayni fa-in qabila waṣāyā l-'ārifīna wa-ttaba'a al-murshidīna wa-aṭā'a bāriyahu wa-'arafahu ḥaqq ma'rifatihi nāla l-sa'ādatayni wa-ḥaṣalat lahu l-manzilatāni manzilat al-insāniyya l-kāmila wa-l-ṭabī'a l-fāḍila fī l-dunyā wa-ṣūrat al-malā'ika wa-jiwār al-raḥmān fī darajāt al-jinān* [...] *fī l-ākhira*"); for the alternate reading والفلسفة instead of والطبيعة, see Tāmir's edition v, 142).

[59] See, for example, Ikhwān al-Ṣafā', *al-Jāmi'a* i, 241, 480, 497, 570, 614–5; Ikhwān al-Ṣafā', *Rasā'il* iv, 12, 138, 211, 237. For the notion according to which the sub-lunar world is hell, whereas the world of the celestial spheres is paradise, see, for example, ibid. iii, 63, 296. On the term *ṣirāṭ*, see Monnot, Ṣirāṭ.

[60] See Amir-Moezzi, *Divine guide* 45; Amir-Moezzi, Remarques 95. For Ismā'īlī sources, see, for instance, Ja'far b. Manṣūr al-Yaman, *al-Kashf* 109, 119 ("[...] *Wa-l-ṣirāṭ al-mustaqīm fī l-bāṭin yusammā bihi l-imām 'alayhi l-salām* [...]"); and see also al-Ḥāmidī, *Kanz al-walad* 148, 152, 212, 282, 299.

[61] See above pp. 136–8.

[62] Ikhwān al-Ṣafā', *al-Jāmi'a* i, 342 ("*Wa-lammā kāna ākhir martabat al-insān muttaṣilan bi-awwal martabat al-malā'ika wa-ākhir martabat al-ḥayawān muttaṣilan bi-awwal martabat al-insān wajaba an yakūna l-insān majmū'an min al-'ālamayni mutawassiṭan baynahumā*").

One should bear in mind that according to Neoplatonic philosophy, the process of emanation entails the gradual descent of the various cosmic levels whereby all existents move farther and farther away from their source, the One. Accordingly, man's salvation depends upon an opposite, upward process: he must disengage himself from his corporeal-physical chains and attempt to perform a mystical-intellectual ascension through the levels of the universal hierarchy, with the ultimate aim of returning to the world of the universal soul and intellect and perhaps even uniting with the One.[63] Man's position in the cosmic hierarchy is therefore unique: he marks both the end of the descent into the corporeal world and the beginning of the ascent to the spiritual realm. According to the Ikhwān, it is this unique position which enables the perfect man to function as a mediating link between the physical and spiritual worlds.

Very similar notions are found in the writings of Ibn al-ʿArabī. According to the latter, man's supreme status in creation is due to the fact that in terms of the universal hierarchy, he is the last created being, comprising within himself all preceding levels (*marātib*).[64] Man is "the last existent in terms of the physical senses, and the first existent in terms of the soul", in other words, he is the last among the physical beings and the first among the spiritual ones.[65] As a result of his unique position in the cosmic hierarchy,

> man has two perfect relations (*dhū nisbatayni kāmilatayni*): a relation through which he enters the Divine realm, and a relation through which he enters the realm of [created] being. Hence it is said that man is a servant, in the sense that religious obligations are imposed on him, and in the sense that, like the world, he too came into being after nonbeing. Yet it is also said that man is a Lord, in the sense that he is God's vicegerent on earth (*khalīfa*), he [was created according to God's] form and [was fashioned in] the best and most accurate way (*aḥsan taqwīm*). He is like an isthmus (*barzakh*) between the world and God, uniting creation with God; he is the dividing line (*al-khaṭṭ al-fāṣil*) between the Divine realm and the realm of the universe, like the dividing line between the shadow and the sun. This is

For the concept of *martaba* in this context, see also ibid. 276–81, 341, 486; Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ, *Rasāʾil* ii, 150–1, 166–72, 378, iii, 127–31, 224–9, 359, 368–70, iv, 237–8, 276–82.

[63] See below pp. 221–9.

[64] See Ibn al-ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt* ii, 390 (chapter 198).

[65] Ibn al-ʿArabī, *ʿAnqāʾ mughrib* 39 ("[…] *Fa-innahu ākhir mawjūd ḥissan wa-awwal mawjūd nafsan* […]").

his true essence; he is absolutely perfect, in being both created and eternal without beginning.[66]

The affinity between Ibn al-ʿArabī and the Ikhwān is evident not only in their perception of man as a borderline which both separates and unites the spiritual and corporeal worlds (*ḥadd mutākhim, khaṭṭ fāṣil*), but also in the eschatological role which they assign to the perfect man. Just as the Ikhwān identify the perfect man with the *ṣirāṭ*, so too Ibn al-ʿArabī identifies him with the *barzakh*, a Quranic term designating an isthmus, a partition or a barrier (see Q 25:53; 55:20). In Islamic tradition, this term received an eschatological meaning (see also Q 23:100): according to different commentators, *barzakh* signifies that which separates life in this world from the afterlife, for instance, the interval between death and resurrection, or the physical tomb in which the dead person lies.[67] Thus, the Ikhwān and Ibn al-ʿArabī perceive the perfect man not only as an entity which mediates between the spiritual and corporeal realms or between the Divine and created dimensions, but also as a being which bridges the gap between this world and the world to come.

Khalīfa

In Ismāʿīlī literature and in the works of Ibn al-ʿArabī, the perfect man is defined as a *khalīfa*, that is, as the terrestrial vicegerent or deputy of God. The numerous religious, political and historical implications of the term *khalīfa* fall beyond the scope of this chapter.[68] I shall limit myself here to

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[66] Ibn al-ʿArabī, *Inshāʾ al-dawāʾir* 22 ("*Wa-l-insān dhū nisbatayni kāmilatayni nisba yadkhulu bihā ilā l-ḥaḍra l-ilāhiyya wa-nisba yadkhulu bihā ilā l-ḥaḍra l-kiyāniyya fa-yuqālu fihi ʿabd min ḥaythu annahu mukallaf wa-lam yakun thumma kāna ka-l-ʿālam wa-yuqālu fihi rabb min ḥaythu annahu khalīfa wa-min ḥaythu l-ṣūra wa-min ḥaythu aḥsan taqwīm fa-ka-annahu barzakh bayna l-ʿālam wa-l-ḥaqq wa-jāmiʿ li-khalq wa-ḥaqq wa-huwa l-khaṭṭ al-fāṣil bayna l-ḥaḍra l-ilāhiyya wa-l-kawniyya ka-l-khaṭṭ al-fāṣil bayna l-ẓill wa-l-shams wa-hādhihi ḥaqīqatuhu fa-lahu l-kamāl al-muṭlaq fī l-ḥudūth wa-l-qidam* […]"). Regarding the use of the term *nisba* ("relation" in the translation above), in the context of the perfect man and his role as a mediating link between the spiritual and physical worlds, cf. al-Kirmānī, *Rāḥat al-ʿaql* 112 ("[…] *Kawn al-nāṭiq fī dār al-jism dhī nisbatayni nisba ilā ʿālam al-quds bi-kawn sharafihi l-ladhī huwa l-kamāl al-thānī minhu wa-hiya l-ashraf wa-nisba ilā ʿālam al-ṭabīʿa bi-kawn dhātihi fī wujūdihi l-ladhī huwa l-kamāl al-awwal minhu* […]"), 233 ("[…] *Kawn al-nāṭiq jāmiʿan li-nisbatayni* […]"), 234.

[67] See Zaki, Barzakh; Carra de Vaux, Barzakh. On *barzakh* in Ibn al-ʿArabī's thought, see Bashier, *Ibn al-ʿArabī's Barzakh*; Chodkiewicz, *Seal of the saints*, index, s.v. "Barzakh"; Chittick, *Sufi path*, index, s.v. "barzakh".

[68] On some of these implications, see Crone and Hinds, *God's caliph*.

discussing the significance of this term in relation to the concept of the perfect man.

According to the Ismāʿīlī authors and Ibn al-ʿArabī, the perfect man is given by God complete authority over all created beings in the sub-lunar world. This authority entails above all religious-spiritual and magical powers, yet it is also reflected in the political sphere. The notion that man has the God-given right to dominate creation originates in the Bible, where man, formed in the image of God, is granted the prerogative of controlling nature and doing with it as he pleases.[69] This idea is likewise found in the Quran, and is reflected in the term *khalīfa* (see Q 2:30). In the Ismāʿīlī worldview and in Ibn al-ʿArabī's thought, *khilāfa* (the function or office of a *khalīfa*) is explained and legitimized by referring to the various ontological traits of the perfect man: his all-encompassing and microcosmic being; his Divine roots; and his role as a mediating link between the different worlds—these traits are the source of the perfect man's *khilāfa*. The Ikhwān, for example, declare that

> [...] the upright posture is the most noble physical form among the animals; it is created in the best and most accurate way (*wa-aḥsan taqwīm fī l-khilqa*) and it occupies the highest rank in terms of its level. The structure of the human body is a compendium of the world within the preserved tablet. [Man] is the bridge which extends between paradise and hell; he is the just scales which Allāh, glory be to Him, has placed among His created beings; he is the book which Allāh has written with His own hands, His handiwork which He Himself has crafted and His word which He has created with His own essence. The human soul is Allāh's vicegerent on earth (*khalīfat allāh fī arḍihi*): it manages (*mudabbira*) His lower world for a certain period of time, and then, after passing to the upper world, [man] becomes an ornament of the latter, retaining his existential essence for eternity.[70]

In a similar vein, having explained that man, created in the image of God, is the compendium of the macrocosm, a "copy" which comprises within it the whole universe as well as all of the Divine names, Ibn al-ʿArabī states that "since the perfect man is [created] according to the perfect [Divine]

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[69] See Genesis 1:26–8.

[70] See Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ, *al-Jāmiʿa* i, 496-7 ("[...] *Wa-anna ntiṣāb al-qāma ajall ashkāl al-ḥayawān wa-aḥsan taqwīm fī l-khilqa wa-aʿlā daraja fī l-rutba wa-anna binyat jasad al-insān mukhtaṣara min al-ʿālam al-ladhī fī l-lawḥ al-maḥfūẓ wa-annahu l-ṣirāṭ al-mamdūd bayna l-janna wa-l-nār wa-annahu l-mīzān al-qisṭ al-ladhī waḍaʿahu llāh subḥānahu bayna khalqihi wa-annahu l-kitāb al-ladhī katabahu bi-yadihi wa-ṣanʿatuhu l-latī ṣanaʿahā binafsihi wa-kalimatuhu l-latī abdaʿahā bi-dhātihi wa-anna l-nafs al-insāniyya khalīfat allāh fī arḍihi mudabbira li-ʿālamihi l-suflī mudda min al-zamān fa-idhā ntaqala ṣāra zīna lil-ʿālam al-ʿulwī wa-ḥāfiẓan li-dhātihi l-wujūdī ʿalā l-abad*"); see also ibid. 241–2, 474–80, 568.

form, he is worthy of being Allāh's vicegerent [on earth] and His deputy in the world".[71]

In addition to the religious-spiritual and magical aspects of *khilāfa*,[72] the perfect man also enjoys political power. From the Shiʿi-Ismāʿīlī point of view, the claim that the prophet's heir, the *imām*, is the only true *khalīfa* (along with the prophet himself), is both a religious assertion—he is God's vicegerent and deputy, embodying as he does the figure of the ideal man—and a political statement: the *imām* is the only one who is worthy of leading the Islamic community. Hence, the title *khalīfa* signifies "God's vicegerent on earth" (*khalīfat allāh ʿalā l-arḍ*) and, at the same time, "the successor of God's Messenger" (*khalīfat rasūl allāh*), that is, his heir as leader of the Islamic community.[73]

This political aspect resurfaces in Ibn al-ʿArabī's writings:

> Know that the required perfection, for which man was created, is none other than *khilāfa* [...] This is a more specific station than that of being a messenger, for not every messenger is a *khalīfa*. The rank of a messenger amounts specifically to the deliverance [of the Divine message] [...] The [messenger] does not have the authority to pass his own judgment against those who disobey him, but can only issue judgments from Allāh, or based on what Allāh has specifically shown him. If Allāh allows him to pass his own judgment among those to whom he was sent, then this is an appointment as a *khalīfa*, [this is] *khilāfa* and the messenger is the *khalīfa*. Not everyone who is sent [by God] is given authority to judge. If he is given the sword and he executes the deed, it is then that he has perfection, manifesting himself through the power of the Divine names: he bestows and he withholds, he elevates and abases, he gives life and brings about death, he causes both harm and benefit. He manifests himself through the opposite names, together with prophecy—there is no other way. However, if he passes his own judgment without prophecy, then he is a king, not a *khalīfa*. The latter is only he whom God has appointed to this office over His servants, not he

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[71] Ibn al-ʿArabī, *ʿUqlat al-mustawfiz* 45 ("*Wa-li-kawn al-insān al-kāmil ʿalā l-ṣūra l-kāmila ṣaḥḥat lahu l-khilāfa wa-l-niyāba ʿan allāh taʿālā fī l-ʿālam*"); see also ibid. 94; Ibn al-ʿArabī, *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam* 48–56; Takeshita, *Ibn ʿArabī's theory* 17, 28, 50; Affifi, *Mystical philosophy* 78, 188.

[72] On the magical knowledge and powers resulting from *khilāfa*, see, for example, Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ, *Rasāʾil* iv, 374–80.

[73] See Crone and Hinds, *God's caliph*; and cf. the discussion of the terms *khalīfa ʿan allāh* / *khalīfat allāh* and *khalīfa ʿan rasūl allāh* / *khalīfat rasūl allāh* in Ibn al-ʿArabī, *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam* 162–3. On the prophet and *imām* as *khalīfa*s, see, for example, Kohlberg, From Imāmiyya to Ithnā-ʿAshariyya 526 and n. 34; Amir-Moezzi, *Divine guide* 45, 56; Amir-Moezzi, Remarques 95; Hamdani, Evolution 91; Jaʿfar b. Manṣūr al-Yaman, *al-ʿĀlim wa-l-ghulām* 16, 28, 32, 58, 92; al-Sijistānī, *al-Iftikhār* 74, 121, 129, 148–9, 156–7, 171, 175; al-Kirmānī, *al-Riyāḍ* 189; and more.

> whom the people introduce, swear allegiance to and promote for their own sake and over themselves. This is the rank of perfection. Men are allowed to try and attain the station of perfection, but not prophecy. Hence, *khilāfa* can be acquired, not prophecy.[74]

According to Ibn al-ʿArabī, the highest degree of human perfection is embodied in the figure of the prophet who is both a messenger and a *khalīfa*, in other words, the prophet who delivers a new Divine law (*sharīʿa*) to mankind and, at the same time, is given political power, by means of which he enforces the Divine law. This political aspect is what transforms an 'ordinary' messenger into a truly perfect man, a *khalīfa*. The political authority of the *khalīfa* is divinely sanctioned, and, what is more, it derives from the power of God's own names. The latter are divided into two groups: those pertaining to the merciful attributes of God (bestowing, elevating, giving life, causing benefit), and those related to His wrathful attributes (withholding, abasing, bringing about death, causing harm).[75] Hence, a political leader who is not a prophet—even if he enjoys the support of his subjects—is merely a king: his actions do not manifest the Divine names, and, as a result, they are not sanctioned by God. On the other hand, even those who are not prophets—that is, the *awliyāʾ*, the friends of God—may become *khalīfa*s, or perfect men who function as God's terrestrial vicegerents. Thus, Ibn al-ʿArabī's figure of the prophet-messenger-*khalīfa* corresponds to the Ismāʿīlī *nāṭiq*, who enjoys prophetic powers as well as religious-legal and political authority; while Ibn al-ʿArabī's *walī* corresponds to the Ismāʿīlī *imām*, who, though

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[74] Ibn al-ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt* ii, 269 (chapter 167, "waṣl fī faṣl": "*Iʿlam anna l-kamāl al-maṭlūb al-ladhī khuliqa lahu l-insān innamā hiya l-khilāfa* […] *wa-huwa maqām akhaṣṣ min al-risāla fī l-rusul li-annahu mā kull rasūl khalīfa fa-inna darajat al-risāla innamā hiya l-tablīgh khāṣṣatan* […] *wa-laysa lahu l-taḥakkum fī l-mukhālif innamā lahu tashrīʿ al-ḥukm ʿan allāh aw bi-mā arāhu llāh khāṣṣatan fa-idhā aʿṭāhu llāh al-taḥakkum fīman ursila ilayhim fa-dhālika huwa l-istikhlāf wa-l-khilāfa wa-l-rasūl al-khalīfa fa-mā kull man ursila ḥukkima fa-idhā uʿṭiya l-sayf wa-amḍā l-fiʿl ḥīnaʾidhin yakūnu lahu l-kamāl fa-yaẓharu bi-sulṭān al-asmāʾ al-ilāhiyya fa-yuʿṭī wa-yamnaʿu wa-yuʿizzu wa-yudhillu wa-yuḥyī wa-yumītu wa-yaḍurru wa-yanfaʿu wa-yaẓharu bi-asmāʾ al-taqābul maʿa l-nubuwwa lā budda min dhālika fa-in ẓahara bi-l-taḥakkum min ghayr nubuwwa fa-huwa malik wa-laysa bi-khalīfa fa-lā yakūnu khalīfa illā man istakhlafahu l-ḥaqq ʿalā ʿibādihi lā man aqāmahu l-nās wa-bāyaʿūhu wa-qaddamūhu li-anfusihim wa-ʿalā anfusihim fa-hādhihi hiya darajat al-kamāl wa-lil-nufūs taʿammul mashrūʿ fi taḥṣīl maqām al-kamāl wa-laysa lahum taʿammul fī taḥṣīl al-nubuwwa fa-l-khilāfa qad takūnu muktasaba wa-l-nubuwwa ghayr muktasaba* […]").

[75] On the opposing Divine names, see Sviri, Between fear and hope.

neither a prophet nor (necessarily) a political figure, is regarded as a perfect human being and a *khalīfa*.[76]

The Identity of the Perfect Man

Who, then, is the perfect man? In theory, the answer to this question is rather simple: according to the Ismāʿīlī tradition, only the prophet and the *imām*s are perfect men, whereas in Ibn al-ʿArabī's thought, it is the perfect man in general—the ideal friend of God, regardless of his lineal descent. However, within the Shiʿi-Ismāʿīlī tradition itself, different approaches to this issue can be found. Above all, it is Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ who seem to have introduced a universal-humanistic interpretation of the Shiʿi-Ismāʿīlī beliefs, including those pertaining to the figure of the ideal man.[77] In addition to ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib and his biological offspring, or, at times, in their stead, the Ikhwān point to man in general—irrespective of his genealogy—as a potential perfect man and *khalīfa* of God. Accordingly, the ideal community envisioned by the Ikhwān is not necessarily the Shiʿi-Ismāʿīlī community, but rather an ecumenical and mystical—some would even say utopian—brotherhood of 'perfect men'.[78] It appears that this universal-humanistic attitude of the Ikhwān facilitated the reception in al-Andalus of the Shiʿi-Ismāʿīlī ideas related to the figure of the ideal human being.[79]

Nevertheless, it is important to emphasize that the universal-humanistic approach of the Ikhwān does not imply that they rejected the Shiʿi-Ismāʿīlī worldview, or that they sought to supersede it with their new teachings.

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[76] Cf. Ibn al-ʿArabī, *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam* 160–6.

[77] See also Stern, New information 175–6; Stern, Fāṭimid propaganda 86; De Smet, Au delà de l'apparent 212.

[78] The ecumenical attitude of the Ikhwān merits a separate discussion; see, for example, Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ, *Rasāʾil* iii, 489–90, iv, 124–7; Daftary, Forward xvii–xviii; El-Bizri, *Epistles* 10–11. Historically speaking, the humanistic and ecumenical attitude of the Ikhwān may be explained by referring to the cultural phenomenon which Kraemer (following the works of previous scholars) termed "the renaissance of Islam". This phenomenon entailed the revival of the Greek and Hellenistic heritage (especially in the fields of philosophy and science) in the world of Islam, during the 9th and 10th centuries. Various Shiʿi scholars played an important role in this renaissance, as Kraemer shows in his study, which focuses on the period of "enlightenment" under the rule of the Shiʿi Buwayhīs (945–1055). It was during this renaissance that the values of individualism, humanism, ecumenism and even universalism and "cosmopolitanism" were developed and cherished. See Kraemer, *Humanism*, especially the preface and pp. 1–30; see also the references given in Peña, El término 211 n. 77.

[79] On *Rasāʾil ikhwān al-ṣafāʾ* and al-Andalus, see above in the Introduction, pp. 28–32.

Throughout their Epistles, the Ikhwān oscillate between two opposite poles: the sectarian attitude of the Shiʿi-Ismāʿīlī tradition, on the one hand, and their own universal humanism, on the other. Contrary to the opinion of Ian Netton,[80] I do not think that the universal-humanistic approach of the Ikhwān excludes their Shiʿi-Ismāʿīlī identity; this identity is proven by many Shiʿi-Ismāʿīlī motifs which are found in the Ikhwān's oeuvre.[81] In my view, the Ikhwān indeed belonged to the Shiʿi-Ismāʿīlī milieu, but chose to interpret their own Shiʿi-Ismāʿīlī beliefs in a unique way, different from that of most other contemporary Shiʿi-Ismāʿīlī scholars. This should come as no surprise; the Ismāʿīlī world, in its formative period as well as in later times, was comprised of diverse movements and factions: the Qarāmiṭa, the Fāṭimīs, the Neoplatonic missionaries (*duʿāt*) who operated in the eastern parts of the Islamic world, Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ and more. Disagreeing on essential points of doctrine, these movements and factions often competed against one another for intellectual-religious authority and, at times, struggled for political hegemony.[82] Thus, the Ikhwān were but one party among many in the colorful 'mosaic' of the 9th–10th century Ismāʿīlī world.

One should also bear in mind that certain universal-humanistic themes are already found in early Shiʿi *ḥadīth*s which, perhaps, influenced the Ikhwān. For example, according to one such theme which is reflected in early Shiʿi traditions, and which was analyzed by Amir-Moezzi,[83] the Shiʿi believer is able to visualize God in his heart (*al-ruʾya bi-l-qalb*, "vision with/in the heart"). This visualization is performed by means of the spiritual-mystical intellect (*ʿaql*) located within the believer's heart, and it is described as a vision of light. The intellect and light involved in this process are linked to the essence of the *imām*, and therefore form an 'inner *imām*' residing inside the believer himself. As stated above,[84] knowledge of the *imām* leads to knowledge of God in His external-manifest aspect; hence the believer's ability to visualize God through his inner intellect

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[80] See Netton, *Muslim Neoplatonists* 95–104, 107; Netton, Brotherhood.

[81] See especially chapters 1, 3 and 5 of this study and the discussion in what follows.

[82] Concerning the different factions mentioned here and the various religious and political disputes in the early Ismāʿīlī world, see Madelung, Fatimids; Stern, Ismāʿīlīs and Qarmaṭians; Stern, Heterodox Ismāʿīlism; Daftary, *Ismāʿīlīs* 223–234; De Smet, Adam; and see also above p. 44 n. 42.

[83] See Amir-Moezzi, *Divine guide* 44–55; Amir-Moezzi, Only the man of God 36; see also Corbin, *En Islam iranien* i, 226–9, 232–4; Taylor, Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq 109–10; Nwyia, *Exégèse* 168–9.

[84] See pp. 146–8.

and light, by means of God's friend, the *imām*. One may conclude that in the early Shiʿi tradition, certain teachings centered on the believer himself and on his own spiritual-mystical experiences. As it seems, the Ikhwān were inspired by these teachings: in their Epistles, it is man himself who stands at the center of stage, alongside the prophet and the *imām*, or, at times, in their stead.

A few examples from the Ikhwān's *Rasā'il* will suffice in order to demonstrate these points. In the introduction to their twenty-second Epistle, the Ikhwān state that

> we have already made it clear in our Epistle on ethics that the human form is Allāh's vicegerent on earth (*khalīfat allāh fī arḍihi*). We have also clarified how every man should behave in order to become worthy of being one of Allāh's friends (*awliyā' allāh*) and in order to deserve His honor.

According to the Ikhwān, if a person is "virtuous and good, he is a noble angel and the best among men; but if he is bad, he is an accursed devil (*shayṭān*) and the worst among men".[85] The Shiʿi appellations, which are typically assigned to the prophets and *imām*s (*khalīfat allāh, awliyā' allāh*) or to their enemies (Satan and his followers), are here given to man in general, whoever he might be: if he chooses the right path, he most certainly will become a friend of God and an angel, that is, a potential angel before death and an actual angel after death. The definition of man in general, "the human soul" (*al-nafs al-insāniyya*), or "the human form" as God's vicegerent appears in many other passages of the Ikhwān.[86] Similarly, the Ikhwān refer to the believer's intellect (*ʿaql*) as "Allāh's hidden-inner vicegerent" (*khalīfat allāh al-bāṭin*), in other words, the vicegerent that is hidden within the believer himself, contrary to the manifest-external vicegerent, who is the historical prophet or *imām*. This brings to mind the aforementioned, early Shiʿi theme of *al-ruʾya bi-l-qalb*, according to which the believer contains within himself an 'inner *imām*'. Furthermore, the Ikhwān describe the intellect as "Allāh's argument" (*ḥujjat allāh*) against man; according to them, "the human form is the biggest argument Allāh has against His created beings". *Ḥujja* is an important Shiʿi term, typically

[85] See Ikhwān al-Ṣafā', *Rasā'il* ii, 179 ("*Wa-qad bayyannā fī risālat al-akhlāq anna ṣūrat al-insāniyya hiya khalīfat allāh fī arḍihi wa-bayyannā fīhā ayḍan kayfa yanbaghī an takūna sīrat kull insān ḥattā yasta'hila an yakūna min awliyā' allāh wa-yastaḥiqqa l-karāma minhu* […]"; "[…*Wa-anna l-insān idhā kāna fāḍilan khayran fa-huwa malak karīm khayr al-bariyya wa-in kāna sharīran fa-huwa shayṭān rajīm sharr al-bariyya*").

[86] See ibid. i, 297–8, iii, 427, 475; Ikhwān al-Ṣafā', *al-Jāmiʿa* i, 497.

used to designate the prophets, the *imām*s and (in the Ismāʿīlī tradition) one of the highest ranks in the *daʿwa* organization.[87]

The Ikhwān encourage the reader of their Epistles to adhere to "those who possess knowledge" (*ahl al-ʿilm*) and to "the people of remembrance, who hail from the family of prophecy, and who are responsible for the salvation of created beings" (*ahl al-dhikr min ahl bayt al-nubuwwa al-manṣūbīn li-najāt al-khalq*). As is well known, the concept of *ahl al-bayt* (the Prophet's family) is of great importance in Islam in general and in the Shiʿi tradition in particular. According to the Shiʿi interpretation of this term, *ahl al-bayt* designates the members of Muḥammad's family: Fāṭima (his daughter), ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib (Muḥammad's cousin and Fāṭima's husband), and their descendants, the *imām*s.[88] The Ikhwān, however, add that "in a certain sense, 'the people of remembrance' is the intellect, which reminds the soul of its spiritual world and its abode of lights which became hidden from it". The intellect—that is, the individual intellect of man as well as the universal intellect—urges the soul to disengage itself from the corporeal-physical world to which it is naturally inclined and to reunite with its spiritual source.[89] Thus, the term *ahl al-bayt*, which plays such a central role in the Shiʿi tradition, is interpreted here in both a universal sense (the universal intellect and soul) and an individual-humanistic sense (the individual intellect and soul of every human being). Due to its eminent status, the Ikhwān define the intellect as their "leader" (*raʾīs*)—a title which the Ikhwān usually assign to each one of the seven *nāṭiq*s.[90]

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[87] Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ, *Rasāʾil* iii, 174 ("[…] *Wa-l-ʿaql khalīfat allāh al-bāṭin* […]"), 303 ("[…] *ʿAqluka l-ladhī huwa ḥujjat allāh ʿalayka* […]"), iv, 12 ("[…] *Li-anna ṣūrat al-insān akbar ḥujja li-llāh ʿalā khalqihi* […]"); see also al-Rāzī, *al-Iṣlāḥ* 211–2. On the *ʿaql* (the spiritual-mystical intellect) in early Shiʿi traditions, and for the distinction made therein between *ḥujja ẓāhira* (the prophets and *imām*s) and *ḥujja bāṭina* (the believer's *ʿaql*), see Amir-Moezzi, *Divine guide* 6–13 and index, s.v. "'aql"; Taylor, Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq 204–5. For a possible Shiʿi influence on Sahl al-Tustarī in this context, see Böwering, *Mystical vision* 155, and above p. 130 n. 24. On the term *ḥujja*, see above p. 66 n. 118.

[88] On the term *ahl al-bayt*, see Sharon, Ahl al-bayt; Sharon, Umayyads.

[89] Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ, *Rasāʾil* iii, 156 ("*Fa-ʿalayka ayyuhā l-akh bi-ahl al-ʿilm wa-muwāẓabat al-ladhīna hum ahl al-dhikr min ahl bayt al-nubuwwa l-manṣūbīna li-najāt al-khalq* […] *thumma ʿlam bi-anna ahl al-dhikr fī baʿḍ al-wujūh huwa l-ʿaql al-ladhī yudhakkiru l-nafs mā ghāba ʿanhā min amr ʿālamihā l-rūḥānī ma-maḥallihā l-nūrānī* […]").

[90] Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ, *Rasāʾil* iv, 127 ("*Wa-naḥnu qad raḍīnā bi-l-raʾīs ʿalā jamāʿat ikhwāninā wa-l-ḥakam baynanā l-ʿaql al-ladhī jaʿalahu llāh taʿālā raʾīsan ʿalā l-fuḍalāʾ min khalqihi l-ladhīna hum taḥt al-amr wa-l-nahy* […]"). In a similar vein, Ibn al-ʿArabī declares that the intellect is the true *imām*; see Ibn al-ʿArabī, *ʿAnqāʾ mughrib* 6 ("[…] *Wa-ajʿalu ʿaqlī imāman ʿalayya wa-aṭlubu minhu l-ādāb al-sharʿiyya fī bāṭinī wa-ẓāhirī wa-ubāyiʿuhu ʿalā*

Many other discussions in the Epistles of the Ikhwān reflect this universal-humanistic approach, which seems to be quite at odds with the mainstream Shiʿi-Ismāʿīlī worldview. In their ninth Epistle, the Ikhwān explain that all human beings form individuals (*ashkhāṣ*) of "the absolute universal man" (*al-insān al-muṭlaq al-kullī*). The latter is Allāh's vicegerent on earth, and is described as "the universal human soul, which is found in every human individual" (*al-nafs al-kulliya l-insāniyya l-mawjūda fī kull ashkhāṣ al-nās*). This "absolute man" comprises within himself all the good virtues and deeds as well as all the various sciences and is manifested in the sub-lunar world, at all times, in every single man who actualizes the potential for human perfection latent within him.[91] Elsewhere, the Ikhwān claim that if man obeys his rational/speaking soul (*al-nafs al-nāṭiqa*) and succeeds in overcoming his appetitive and angry souls (*al-nafs al-shahwāniyya wa-l-ghaḍabiyya*), he ascends (*yartaqī*) to the level of the angels.

> He is then worthy of being called a 'man', worthy of [receiving] the angelic form and deserves to be Allāh's vicegerent on earth and the manager (*mudabbir*) of His world. He finds himself in the station of Lordship, and becomes worthy of the worshiping and obedience of the deficient and base souls that are situated below him, those who fall short of the degree of perfection. He eventually causes them to ascend to the noblest deeds and the most precious states.

Such perfect men, who assist their imperfect brothers in faith, are described by the Ikhwān as "Allāh's chosen ones from among His servants" (*ṣafwat allāh min ʿibādihi*), as those who are purified by God from all sin and as "the family which is immune from all errors and sins" (*ahl bayt al-ʿiṣma*)—Shiʿi epithets which are typically applied to the Prophet's family and the *imām*s. Yet the discourse in the passage referred to here is of an utterly humanistic-universal character: there is no mention of

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iṣlāḥ awwalī wa-ākhirī […]"); see also ibid. 60–3. On the term *raʾīs* as designating the *nāṭiq*, see, for example, Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ, *al-Jāmiʿa* i, 632.

91 Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ, *Rasāʾil* i, 306 ("[…] *Wa-lākinna l-insān al-muṭlaq al-kullī huwa l-maṭbūʿ ʿalā qubūl jamīʿ al-akhlāq wa-iẓhār jamīʿ al-ṣanāʾiʿ wa-l-aʿmāl lā l-insān al-juzʾī wa-ʿlam bi-anna kull al-nās ashkhāṣ li-hādhā l-insān al-muṭlaq wa-huwa l-ladhī asharnā ilayhi annahu khalīfat allāh fī arḍihi* […] *wa-hiya l-nafs al-kulliyya l-insāniyya l-mawjūda fī kull ashkhāṣ al-nās* […] *hādhā l-insān al-muṭlaq al-ladhī qulnā huwa khalīfat allāh fī arḍihi wa-huwa maṭbūʿ ʿalā qubūl jamīʿ al-akhlāq al-bashariyya wa-jamīʿ al-ʿulūm al-insāniyya wa-l-ṣanāʾiʿ al-ḥikamiyya huwa mawjūd fī kull waqt wa-zamān wa-maʿa kull shakhṣ min ashkhāṣ al-bashar taẓharu minhu afʿāluhu wa-ʿulūmuhu wa-akhlāquhu wa-ṣanāʾiʿuhu* […]"); cf. Marquet, *La philosophie des Ihwan al-Safa: de Dieu à l'homme* 289-90; Takeshita, *Ibn ʿArabī's theory* 82–3; Nasr, *An introduction* 68.

the prophets and *imām*s, and it is man in general who is the focus of the Ikhwān's attention.[92]

To be sure, in many other passages, the Ikhwān espouse the more familiar and 'orthodox' Shi'i-Ismā'īlī belief, according to which man's intellectual, spiritual and mystical perfection can only be attained through the mediation and guidance of the prophets and *imām*s.[93] However, it is difficult to ignore the humanistic-universal attitude of the Ikhwān. In one passage, the Ikhwān openly declare:

> Know [...] that there are people who seek to gain Allāh's proximity by means of His prophets and messengers, by means of their *imām*s and legatees, by means of God's friends and righteous servants or by means of the angels who are close to Allāh [...]

However,

> he who possesses the proper knowledge of Allāh does not seek His nearness by means of anyone else save for Allāh Himself. This is the level of those who possess Divine knowledge, the friends of God.

According to the Ikhwān, the attempt to draw closer to God by means of the prophets and *imām*s results from a misapprehension and a lack of true knowledge.[94] On the one hand, the Ikhwān acknowledge the important role of the prophets and their heirs in the spiritual-religious guidance of mankind; on the other hand, the Ikhwān explicitly state that the highest

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[92] Ikhwān al-Ṣafā', *al-Jāmi'a* i, 343–5 ("[...] *Wa-idhā rtafa'a ilā l-rutba l-malakiyya staḥaqqa sma l-insāniyya wa-ṣūrat al-malakiyya wa-an yakūna khalīfat allāh fī arḍihi wa-mudabbir 'ālamihi wa-yaṣīra fī maqām al-rubūbiyya wa-yastaḥiqqa l-'ibāda wa-l-ṭā'a mimman dūnahu min al-nufūs al-nāqiṣa l-radhla l-mutakhallifa 'an darajat al-kamāl ḥattā yuraqqiyahā ilā ajall al-a'māl wa-anfas al-aḥwāl* [...]"; "*Wa-l-ladhīna hādhihi manzilatuhum hum ṣafwat allāh min 'ibādihi wa-khāliṣatuhu min bariyyatihi l-ladhīna adhhaba 'anhum rijs al-khaṭī'a wa-ṭahharahum min dhunūb al-ma'ṣiya ahl bayt al-'iṣma* [...]"). See also ibid. 100–7, 346–7; Ikhwān al-Ṣafā', *Rasā'il* iii, 371.

[93] See, for example, Ikhwān al-Ṣafā', *al-Jāmi'a* ii, 63–4; see also ibid. i, 668; Ikhwān al-Ṣafā', *Rasā'il* i, 267, 323, ii, 478, and more.

[94] See Ikhwān al-Ṣafā', *Rasā'il* iii, 483 ("*Thumma 'lam yā akhī anna min al-nās man yataqarrabu ilā llāh bi-anbiyā'ihi wa-rusulihi wa-bi-a'immatihim wa-awṣiyā'ihim aw bi-awliyā' allāh wa-'ibādihi l-ṣāliḥīna aw bi-malā'ikat allāh al-muqarrabīna* [...]"; "*Fa-ammā man ya'rifu llāh ḥaqq ma'rifatihi fa-huwa lā yatawassalu ilayhi bi-aḥad ghayrihi wa-hādhihi martabat ahl al-ma'ārif al-ladhīna hum awliyā' allāh wa-ammā man qaṣara fahmuhu wa-ma'rifatuhu wa-ḥaqīqatuhu fa-laysa lahu ṭarīq ilā llāh ta'ālā illā bi-anbiyā'ihi wa-man qaṣara fahmuhu wa-ma'rifatuhu bihim fa-laysa lahu ṭarīq ilā llāh ta'ālā illā bi-l-a'imma min khulafā'ihim wa-awṣiyā'ihim wa-'ibādihi l-ṣāliḥīna fa-in qaṣara fahmuhu wa-ma'rifatuhu bihim fa-laysa lahu ṭarīq illā ttibā' āthārihim* [...]"); see also ibid. i, 362–83, iv, 57–8, 173–5. Concerning the term *awliyā' allāh* in the Epistles of the Ikhwān, cf. Baffioni, "Friends of God".

level to which every man can and should aspire—that of human perfection and friendship with God—is beyond the mediation of the prophets and *imām*s. This revolutionary and radical approach, which is at odds with both the Shiʿi and Sunni worldview, indicates that the perfect man in general—rather than the prophet and the *imām*—is the main focus of the Ikhwān.

Theoretically, then, there is a contradiction in the *Rasā'il* between the Shiʿi-Ismāʿīli sectarian view and the Ikhwān's own universal-humanistic attitude. One possible way of solving this apparent contradiction would be to refer to the historical dimension of the issues dealt with here. In one passage in their Epistles, the Ikhwān write that during the cycle of concealment (*dawr al-satr*), the prophets, the *imām*s and their close followers (perhaps the *daʿwa* members), who are all defined as God's vicegerents on earth, do not reveal themselves and, therefore, are not always available to the believers. The Ikhwān advise their reader that if his attempts to contact the *khalīfa* of his generation prove to be unsuccessful, "you should appoint your intellect as your own *khalīfa*, and receive from him his commandments and prohibitions".[95] Presumably, then, the universal-humanistic approach in the Ikhwān's *Rasā'il* is only relevant to the cycle of concealment, during which time the *imām*s are in hiding. However, it seems wrong to view the numerous, profound universal-humanistic statements of the Ikhwān as merely reflecting a temporary and relative ideology, designed for a very specific period of time in human history. Another possible solution to the aforementioned contradiction lies in the concept of *taqiyya*, i.e., the Shiʿi obligation to conceal (when necessary) one's true beliefs or to dissimulate oneself by outwardly adopting the Sunni faith. In fact, there are modern scholars who claim that the Ikhwān practiced or employed *taqiyya* in the writing of their Epistles.[96] Accordingly, one may posit that the various passages in these Epistles that express a universal-humanistic approach are simply a façade and disguise,

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[95] See Ikhwān al-Ṣafā', *Rasā'il* iv, 379 ("*Wa-l-ladhīna hum al-khulafā'* […] *mithl al-anbiyā' wa-l-a'imma wa-l-tābiʿīna lahum bi-l-iḥsān* […] *hum khulafā' allāh taʿālā l-tābiʿūna li-amrihi wa-bihim ṣalāḥ al-ʿālam wa-rubbamā kānū ẓāhirīna bi-l-ʿiyān mawjūdīna fi l-makān fi dawr al-kashf wa-bi-l-ḍidd min dhālika fī dar al-satr* […] *fa-ammā awliyā'uhum fa-yaʿrifūna mawāḍiʿahum wa-man arāda minhum qaṣdahum tamakkana minhu* […]"), 380 ("[…] *Wa-milta naḥwa l-khalīfa l-ladhī ʿindahu l-ḥaqq wa-l-yaqīn wa-stakhlaftahu ʿalā nafsika l-zakiyya ra-rūḥika l-muḍīʾa wa-in qadarta ʿalayhi wa-waṣalta ilayhi fa-qad najawta* […] *wa-in ʿadumta dhālika fa-jʿal al-khalīfa ʿalā nafsika ʿaqlaka wa-qbal minhu awāmirahu wa-nawāhiyahu* […]").

[96] See, for example, El-Bizri, *Epistles* 6; Baffioni, "Friends of God" 19 n. 9. On *taqiyya* see Ebstein, 2010 and especially the references there in n. 4.

aimed at alluring Sunni readers and eventually winning them over to the Shiʿi-Ismāʿīlī cause. In other words, Ikhwānian statements pertaining to the perfect man in general should be interpreted as actually referring to the prophet or the *imām*.[97] Notwithstanding the possible use of *taqiyya* in the Ikhwāns' writings,[98] here too, it seems wrong to view the complex and profound corpus of the Ikhwān as a 'deceitful', albeit sophisticated instrument of propaganda, aimed at disseminating Shiʿi-Ismāʿīlī beliefs.

Viewing the *Rasā'il ikhwān al-ṣafā'*, including *al-Risāla l-jāmiʿa*, as a single whole[99] leads me to the conclusion that the Ikhwān were indeed affiliated with the Shiʿi-Ismāʿīlī milieu, and that, in this sense, they can be defined as Shiʿis-Ismāʿīlīs. However, they were also very different from the majority of the Shiʿi-Ismāʿīlī authors who were active in that period. The great accomplishment of the Ikhwān lies in their ability to combine their own Shiʿi-Ismāʿīlī beliefs with a truly universal-humanistic outlook. It was this outlook, *inter alia*, that inspired the Sunni and Jewish intellectual world in al-Andalus, the world from which Ibn al-ʿArabī emerged.[100]

Having emphasized the universal-humanistic attitude of the Ikhwān, it is important to note that this attitude does not imply full equality between all human beings; on the contrary. Both the Ikhwān and Ibn al-ʿArabī regard the majority of human beings, who, unsurprisingly, fail to reach the level of human perfection, as animals rather than real men. This radical and extreme view is reflected in several passages in Ibn al-ʿArabī's writings. For instance, in chapter 198 of the *Futūḥāt*, Ibn al-ʿArabī refers to the figure of the perfect man, who unites within himself the Divine names with the true essences of the created world, thus obtaining the title of *khalīfa*. Ibn al-ʿArabī adds that

> if someone does not obtain the level of perfection, then he is an animal, whose external form is similar to that of a human being. Our discussion, then, pertains [only] to the perfect man.

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[97] See Marquet, Imamat 66 and throughout the article; Marquet, *La philosophie des Iḫwân aṣ-Ṣafâ: l'Imâm et la société* 135. Support for this explanation may be found in Ikhwān al-Ṣafā', *Rasā'il* iv, 204 ("[...] *Wa-khalīfat allāh fīhā wa-amīnuhu ʿalayhā huwa l-nafs al-juz'iyya l-latī hiya nafs ṣāḥib sharʿ kull dawr* [...]").

[98] See also Ebstein, Secrecy, especially pp. 319–29.

[99] Cf. above p. 45 n. 48. Even if *al-Risāla l-jāmiʿa* was not composed by the Ikhwān, one can still find both approaches—the Shiʿi-Ismāʿīlī approach and the universal-humanistic one—in the *Rasā'il* themselves.

[100] On the influence of the Ikhwān's Epistles on Jewish authors in al-Andalus, see above p. 28 n. 83.

Elsewhere, Ibn al-ʿArabī writes that the imperfect individual is an "animal man" (*al-insān al-ḥayawānī*), and that "the level of the animal man in relation to the perfect man is like the level of the semi-human creatures (*al-nasnās*/*al-nisnās*) in relation to the animal man".[101] These surprising statements—at first glance, so uncharacteristic of Ibn al-ʿArabī's writing—can be better understood, if we recall the strict, hierarchal division of human society in the medieval Shiʿi-Ismāʿīlī tradition.[102] According to this tradition, only the prophets, the *imām*s and their close followers are considered ideal men, whereas the rest of mankind—in fact, the majority of humanity—are not real human beings, but are rather *nasnās*/*nisnās*, i.e., semi-human, monstrous creatures.[103] This point of view is also found in Ismāʿīlī sources, where only the *nuṭaqāʾ*, their legatees, the *imām*s and their supporters are perceived as truly human; other men are nothing but animals of different kinds, whose external-corporeal form alone is human.[104]

Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ likewise express the notion dealt with here. In accordance with the Aristotelian definition, the Ikhwān maintain that what separates man from animal is the former's *nuṭq*, that is, his rationality as well as the manifestation of this rationality in speech.[105] Consequently, human perfection is attained when man actualizes the full potential of his rational/speaking soul (*al-nafs al-nāṭiqa*), through the acquisition

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[101] See Ibn al-ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt* ii, 458 (chapter 198, *faṣl* 37: "*Fa-idhā lam yaḥuz insān rutbat al-kamāl fa-huwa ḥayawān tushbihu ṣūratuhu l-ẓāhira ṣūrat al-insān wa-kalāmunā fī l-insān al-kāmil*"), iii, 289 (chapter 361: "*Wa-hādhā huwa l-insān al-kāmil al-maṭlūb wa-mā ʿadā hādhā fa-huwa l-insān al-ḥayawānī wa-rutbat al-insān al-ḥayawānī min al-insān al-kāmil rutbat khalq al-nasnās/nisnās min al-insān al-ḥayawānī*"). See also ibid. ii, 390 (chapter 198: "*Wa-innamā qulnā l-kāmil li-anna sma l-insān qad yuṭlaqu ʿalā l-mushbih bihi fī l-ṣūra kamā taqūlu fī zayd innahu insān wa-fī ʿamr innahu insān wa-in kāna zayd qad ẓaharat fīhi l-ḥaqāʾiq al-ilāhiyya wa-mā ẓaharat fī ʿamr fa-ʿamr ʿalā l-ḥaqīqa ḥayawān fī shakl insān* […]"); Ibn al-ʿArabī, *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam* 75, 199; Ibn al-ʿArabī, *ʿUqlat al-mustawfiz* 46; see also Takeshita, *Ibn ʿArabī's theory* 109–13; Chittick, *Sufi path* 275–7; Chittick, *Imaginal worlds* 23, 36–8.

[102] See above pp. 136–43.

[103] See Amir-Moezzi, *Divine guide* 39, 162 n. 178, 197 n. 403; Amir-Moezzi, Only the man of God. On the creatures termed *al-nasnās*/*al-nisnās* in Islamic tradition in general, see Ibn Manẓūr, *Lisān al-ʿArab* vi, 231–2 (s.v. n.s.s.); Amir-Moezzi, Only the man of God 26 n. 27; Jesús Viguera, El *Nasnās*.

[104] See, for instance, al-Kirmānī, *Rāḥat al-ʿaql* 145 ("*Wa-lastu urīdu bi-qawlī l-insān illā man huwa bi-l-ḥaqīqa insān mithl aṣḥāb al-adwār wa-khāṣṣatan ṣāḥib al-dawr al-sābiʿ al-jāmiʿ lil-nuṭaqāʾ wa-l-usus wa-l-atimmāʾ wa-tābiʿīhim ʿalā amrihim al-ladhīna ḥāzū l-faḍāʾil wa-ḥawawhā fa-ṣārū ʿuqūlan qāʾima bi-l-fiʿl lā man hum ashbāh al-insān bi-ṣuwarihim al-jismāniyya wa-hum wuḥūsh wa-dhiʾāb wa-qirada wa-khanāzīr wa-ʿaqārib wa-kilāb bi-ṣuwarihim al-nafsāniyya l-ladhīna lā ḥaẓẓ lahum fī dār al-thawāb*"), 338; al-Ḥāmidī, *Kanz al-walad* 55; see also De Smet, Mīzān 253–4.

[105] See above p. 106 n. 103.

of knowledge and its realization in deeds; it is then that one "exists as a man, after having existed as an animal". Alternatively, if one fails to achieve the level of human perfection, "he is not an actual man, only a potential man". It is only by actualizing his full intellectual, spiritual and ethical potential that man "becomes worthy of the name 'man'".[106] It is noteworthy that the last sentence is also found in the Ikhwān's discussion of "the man of knowledge and the figure of religion" (*al-insān al-ʿilmī wa-l-shakhṣ al-dīnī*), also called "the universal perfect man" (*al-insān al-kullī l-kāmil*), who is the ontological root—located above the universal intellect—of the *nuṭaqāʾ* and their followers.[107] The Ikhwān declare that only through the knowledge of this supreme man, the believer "becomes worthy of the name 'man' ".[108] From a sectarian Shiʿi point of view, this statement implies that the believer must acknowledge the prophets and the *imām*s; yet from a broader, universal-humanistic perspective, this statement can be interpreted as a call for all human beings to realize their full, latent potential.

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[106] See Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ, *al-Jāmiʿa* i, 100–3 (102: "[…] *Li-yaṣīra bi-wujūd dhālika mawjūdan bi-mā huwa insān baʿda an kāna mawjūdan bi-mā huwa ḥayawān* […] *wa-matā saqaṭa l-insān ʿan fiʿlihi l-khāṣṣ bihi idhā lam yakun ʿalā afḍal aḥwālihi wa-ʿāmilan bi-anfaʿ aʿmālihi lam yakun insānan mawjūdan bi-l-fiʿl innamā huwa insān bi-l-quwwa*"), 343–4; Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ, *Rasāʾil* iv, 251.

[107] See above p. 161.

[108] See Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ, *al-Jāmiʿa* i, 608 ("[…] *Wa-hiya maʿrifat al-insān al-kullī wa-l-shakhṣ al-ʿilmī l-ladhī bi-maʿrifatihi yastaḥiqqu l-insān ism al-insāniyya*"); see also ibid. 621.

CHAPTER FIVE

PARALLEL WORLDS

The notion of parallel worlds is a central theme in Ismāʿīlī literature and constitutes an essential element in all the different Ismāʿīlī teachings. According to this notion, reality is comprised of various corresponding dimensions: man, the microcosm, corresponds to the universe, the macrocosm;[1] the hierarchy of the friends of God—the prophets and their legatees, the *imām*s and the members of the *daʿwa* organization—corresponds to the structure of the cosmos, in its upper, spiritual realm as well as in its lower, corporeal one;[2] the hierarchy of the friends of God and the cosmos are both paralleled by the numbers and the letters of the alphabet;[3] human speech is analogous to Divine speech;[4] and, finally, a tripartite correspondence exists between man, the Divine holy book and the universe at large.[5] The Ismāʿīlī believer is required to interpret and decipher the external-manifest aspect of reality (the *ẓāhir*), in accordance with this intricate network of parallel worlds. Passing continuously from one world to the other, his ultimate goal is to penetrate the inner-hidden dimension of reality (the *bāṭin*). Having reached this goal, the Ismāʿīlī adherent becomes a true believer in the unity of God (*tawḥīd*) and fully realizes the supreme-Divine nature of His friends, the *awliyāʾ*. Certain elements in this complex worldview are shared by both Ibn Masarra and Ibn al-ʿArabī, and will therefore be the focus of the discussion in this chapter.

Microcosm-Macrocosm

Common Themes and their Distinct Treatment in Ismāʿīlī Literature

The comparison between man, the microcosm (*al-ʿālām al-ṣaghīr*, "the small world"), and the universe at large, the macrocosm (*al-ʿālam al-kabīr*, "the big world", or *al-insān al-kabīr*, "the big man"), is a prevalent motif

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1 See below pp. 189–212.
2 See above pp. 132–5. On the *daʿwa* organization, see above p. 129 n. 21.
3 See above pp. 102–8.
4 See above chapter 1.
5 See below pp. 212–29.

in Ismāʿīlī literature. Naturally, this motif is not unique to the Ismāʿīlī tradition, but is rather common to many other religious and philosophical systems, western as well as eastern, ancient and modern alike.[6] The microcosm-macrocosm analogy is also found in medieval Arabic philosophy. It appears in the Neoplatonic *Theology of Aristotle* and in the writings of various philosophers such as al-Kindī, al-Fārābī and Ibn Sīnā (Avicenna).[7] These philosophers and the Ismāʿīlī authors ultimately derived their notions regarding the microcosm-macrocosm analogy from the pre-Islamic heritage.[8] In what way, then, is the Ismāʿīlī tradition unique in its treatment of this ancient, universal theme?

To begin with, as I mentioned above, in the Ismāʿīlī tradition, the correspondence between man and the universe is seen as just one relationship among many in the complex network of cosmic correspondences. This network likewise consists of the hierarchy of the *awliyāʾ*, the numbers, the letters of the alphabet, the Divine holy book and so forth. Furthermore, in Ismāʿīlī writings, the microcosm-macrocosm analogy is emphasized and developed much more so than in the works of Muslim philosophers such as al-Kindī, al-Fārābī and Ibn Sīnā. In fact, this analogy, and the notion of parallel worlds in general, are of crucial importance for the Ismāʿīlī faith itself. According to the Ismāʿīlī worldview, the three-way relationship between God, the friend of God and the common believer began prior to creation, and it unfolds not only in the terrestrial-horizontal framework of human history, but also along the hierarchal-vertical axis which connects the world of man to the upper, spiritual realm.[9] Man is thus inevitably linked to the universe at large and to the various worlds that lie beyond the corporeal, sub-lunar world. In addition, the numerous comparisons drawn in Ismāʿīlī literature between the *awliyāʾ* hierarchy and the macro-

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[6] For the history of the microcosm-macrocosm analogy in western culture, see Conger, *Theories*; Allers, Microcosmus; El-Bizri, Microcosm/macrocosm analogy 5–12. Regarding Philo of Alexandria in this context, see also Winston, *Logos* 17–8. For the Hermetic tradition, see also Drijvers, Bardaiṣan 199–200; and, concerning Zoroastrianism, see Schaeder, Islamische Lehre 205. For a phenomenological comparison between Western philosophy and Islamic thought as regards the microcosm-macrocosm analogy, see Tymieniecka, *Islamic philosophy*. As for Eastern traditions, one may mention, for example, the importance of this analogy in the Upaniṣads; see Olivelle, *Upaniṣads* lii–lvi (in the Introduction).

[7] See Badawī (ed.), *Theology of Aristotle (the shorter version)* 77–8. For al-Kindī, see Fakhry, *A history* 84; Takeshita, *Ibn ʿArabī's theory* 75–7. Al-Fārābī: Fakhry, *A history* 121; Conger, *Theories* 51. Ibn Sīnā: Banchetti-Robino, Microcosm/macrocosm analogy 25–30; Nasr, *An introduction* 251–62.

[8] See the references in the last two notes.

[9] See above pp. 143–56.

cosm grant the figure of God's friend a truly cosmic dimension, and, consequently, are essential for both establishing and legitimizing his supreme status in human society. Finally, the microcosm-macrocosm analogy is based on the assumption that the universe is a well-organized, harmonious and hierarchal system, in which every part finds its right place and proper rank.[10] This hierarchal perception of the universe is an essential component of Ismāʿīlī thought.[11]

It comes as no surprise, then, that the notion of parallel worlds in general, and the correspondence between man and the universe in particular, occupy a central place in most (if not in all) medieval Ismāʿīlī works. It is noteworthy that the microcosm-macrocosm analogy is especially characteristic of many Neoplatonic teachings in the history of Western thought, notably those that were influenced by the Pythagorean/Neopythagorean, Hermetic and Gnostic traditions, and in which astrology, alchemy and magic figure prominently. Typical examples of such teachings may be found in the Italian renaissance and in the Ismāʿīlī tradition itself.[12] Yet it seems that the Ismāʿīlī speculations on the microcosm-macrocosm analogy are of an extent and range that are unprecedented not only in the world of Islam—at least prior to the emergence and crystallization of the Ismāʿīlī tradition—but perhaps even in the entire pre-Islamic religious and philosophical heritage.[13] In fact, it is possible that the Ismāʿīlī tradition, and particularly *Rasāʾil ikhwān al-ṣafāʾ*, influenced in this context various scholars in the world of medieval Islam, including Jewish authors.[14]

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[10] See also Allers, Microcosmus 332.

[11] See above pp. 136–43. For the link between the microcosm-macrocosm analogy and the hierarchal perception of reality, see, for example, Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ, *Rasāʾil* iii, 212–30, iv, 230–1, 236–8.

[12] On the Italian renaissance in this context and later teachings that were influenced by it, see Conger, *Theories* 20–4; Allers, Microcosmus 331, 334–7, 357, 362–7, 385–401; El-Bizri, Microcosm/macrocosm analogy 21 n. 7; Banchetti-Robino, Microcosm/macrocosm analogy 25, 30.

[13] See the pertinent words of Conger (*Theories* 48, 50–2), concerning *Rasāʾil ikhwān al-ṣafāʾ*: "The parallelisms between the universe and man are worked out in much more detail than in any previous works"; "[…] one may say that it is in the *Encyclopaedia* of the Brethren of Sincerity that the theory that man is a microcosm first becomes imposing. It is no longer fragmentary, but fundamental; and it is no longer isolated, but linked up with a comprehensive and correlated world-system […] of all who have written on man as a microcosm, only Fechner has tried to point out more resemblances". See also Takeshita, *Ibn ʿArabī's theory* 75.

[14] On this possible influence of Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ on medieval Muslim scholars, including al-Ghazālī, see Takeshita, *Ibn ʿArabī's theory* 74, 77–8, 99; Smith, Al-Risālat al-laduniyya 185; De Callataÿ, Classification 82; Michot, Misled 175–9; Fierro, Opposition 191; Nasr, *An introduction* 36; Daiber, Abū Ḥātim ar-Rāzī 90 n. 13. On the possible influence of the *Rasāʾil*

The notion of parallel worlds and the microcosm-macrocosm analogy appear in the early Ismāʿīlī myth of *Kūnī-Qadar*, in North-African Fāṭimī literature and in the works of the eastern Neoplatonists Abū Ḥātim al-Rāzī and Abū Yaʿqūb al-Sijistānī.[15] In these sources, the different systems and physical phenomena in the lower, corporeal worlds—the sun and the moon; the seven heavens, the seven celestial spheres, the seven planets, the seven layers of the earth, the seven seas and the seven days of the week; the twelve signs of the zodiac and the twelve regions of the sublunar world (the *jazā'ir*)[16]—all correspond to the spiritual beings in the upper worlds, whether they are described in a mythical language (*Kūnī* and *Qadar*; the seven Cherubs and the twelve "spiritual boundaries")[17] or in accordance with Neoplatonic cosmology (the universal intellect and soul and the angelic hypostases that emanate from them). These different worlds, in turn, all correspond to the hierarchy of the friends of God (the seven *nuṭaqā'* and the seven *imām*s; the twelve *nuqabā'*, the twelve *ḥujaj* and so forth).[18] Man's body as well, with its external and internal

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on Jewish authors, especially in al-Andalus, see Conger, *Theories* 29, 36–7, 41–3, 48 n. 4, 51–2; Allers, Microcosmus 346–7, 387 n. 199; Altmann and Stern, *Isaac Israeli* 30 n. 2; Kiener, Jewish Ismāʿilism 258–62; Ivry, Ismāʿīlī theology 297 n. 93. As regards Ibn Sīnā, in the short work attributed to him, entitled *al-Risāla l-nayrūziyya*, the author establishes a network of correspondences between the hierarchal levels of the universe, the numbers and nineteen letters of the Arabic alphabet (the fourteen letters of the *fawātiḥ* + five additional letters; on the importance of the number nineteen in the Ismāʿīlī tradition, see below n. 48). As Massignon has demonstrated, this work clearly points to an Ismāʿīlī influence on its author; see Ibn Sīnā, *al-Nayrūziyya*; Massignon, La philosophie; Nasr, *An introduction* 209–12. As is well known, both the father and brother of Ibn Sīnā adhered to the Ismāʿīlī faith, and it is through them that the young Ibn Sīnā became acquainted with Ismāʿīlī teachings. Moreover, he was familiar with *Rasā'il ikhwān al-ṣafā'*, and most likely was influenced by them. See Nasr, *An introduction* 177–8, 182; Fakhry, *A history* 133–4, 136; Wisnovsky, Avicenna 94–6, 98–9; Halm, *Fatimids* 51; De Callataÿ, Classification 82; Walker, Ismāʿīlīs 88–9; Pines, Shīʿite terms 215 n. 283; Michot, Misled 175–9; see also De Smet, La doctrine avicennienne. In contradistinction, according to Lory (Lory, *La Science* 77–88; see also Grill, Science 135), it is the Sufi tradition rather than the Ismāʿīlī one which influenced the author of *al-Risāla l-nayrūziyya*. However, the analogies drawn in this work between the letters, the numbers and the cosmic hierarchy are characteristic of Ismāʿīlī works, not of classical Sufi writings (at least not those composed prior to Ibn al-ʿArabī's time). In addition, the cosmological scheme of *al-Risāla l-nayrūziyya* features the universal intellect and soul, as in Ismāʿīlī Neoplatonism. Finally, the terms *ibdāʿ* ("creation [*ex nihilo*]"), *amr* ("command"), and *takwīn* ("bringing into being", from *kun*, "be!"), which appear in *al-Risāla l-nayrūziyya* in a Neoplatonic framework, are very typical of Ismāʿīlī writings (see above chapter 1).

15 On these sources and authors see above pp. 41–5.

16 On the *jazā'ir*, see above p. 102 n. 93.

17 See above pp. 41–3.

18 See above pp. 132–5.

organs, corresponds to these various worlds. Finally, the numbers and the letters of the Arabic alphabet—the latter perceived as the building blocks of reality, or as signs indicating cosmogonic processes and cosmological systems—parallel the structure of the universe and the hierarchy of the friends of God.[19]

Such correspondences are likewise one of the main features of *Rasā'il ikhwān al-ṣafā'*. Although both the twenty-sixth Epistle of the Ikhwān (*fī qawl al-ḥukamā' inna l-insān ʿālam ṣaghīr*, "Concerning the Saying of the Wise Men that Man is a Small World") and the thirty-fourth one (*fī maʿnā qawl al-ḥukamā' inna l-ʿālam insān kabīr*, "On the Meaning of the Wise Men's Saying that the World is a Big Man") are dedicated to the microcosmic-macrocosmic analogy, in reality this motif appears throughout the Ikhwān's writings.[20] According to the Ikhwān, the human body corresponds to the universal body. Man's soul and its powers, which spread throughout the human body, parallel the universal soul and its powers, which spread throughout the corporeal world. The seven internal organs of man (the heart, spleen, liver, gall bladder, stomach, brain and lungs) correspond to the seven planets and their spiritual powers (*rūḥāniyyāt*) which influence the sub-lunar world.[21] The seven physical faculties of man (the attracting, grasping, digesting, pushing, feeding, growing and forming faculties = *al-jādhiba, al-māsika, al-hāḍima, al-dāfiʿa, al-ghādhiya, al-nāmiya* and *al-muṣawwira*), as well as his seven spiritual faculties (the five senses, the speaking faculty and the faculty of the intellect), all correspond to the seven planets. In the worldview of the Ikhwān, these are not merely fanciful speculations, but rather form the theoretical basis for such practices as astrology and magic. The Ikhwān further maintain that the human body corresponds to the sub-lunar world itself: the four main parts

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[19] For the Ismāʿīlī myth of *Kūnī-Qadar* and Fāṭimī literature, see Stern, Earliest cosmological doctrines 9, 14; Jaʿfar b. Manṣūr al-Yaman, *al-ʿĀlim wa-l-ghulām* 15, 17; al-Qāḍī l-Nuʿmān, *al-Mudhhiba* 53–4, 79; see also De Smet, Adam 187–8 (on Qarmaṭī teachings). Eastern Neoplatonists: al-Sijistānī, *al-Yanābīʿ* 8–15, 17–9, 56–9, 92; al-Sijistānī, *al-Iftikhār* 106–7, 143–5, 178–9; Halm, *Kosmologie* 69; al-Rāzī, *al-Iṣlāḥ* 211–20. On letters, see also above pp. 102–8.

[20] For Epistles 26 and 34, see Ikhwān al-Ṣafā', *Rasā'il* ii, 456–79, iii, 212–30. For the terms *ʿālam ṣaghīr, ʿālam kabīr* and *insān kabīr*, see, for example, ibid. ii, 24–5, 378, 462, iii, 114, 333, iv, 213; Ikhwān al-Ṣafā', *al-Jāmiʿa* i, 238–40, 563–5, ii, 28; and see the references to al-Qāḍī l-Nuʿmān's *al-Mudhhiba* and al-Rāzī's *al-Iṣlāḥ* in the previous note. For general discussions of the microcosmic-macrocosmic analogy in the Epistles of the Ikhwān, see Takeshita, *Ibn ʿArabī's theory* 77–92; Nasr, *An introduction* 66–74, 96–104; Conger, *Theories* 46–51; El-Bizri, Microcosm/macrocosm analogy 10–12; Fakhry, *A history* 178–9.

[21] On the term *rūḥāniyyāt*, see above p. 135 n. 42.

of man's body—the head, the chest, the stomach, and the area extending from the intestines to the legs—parallel the four elements which comprise the physical world. Man's body as a whole resembles the earth; his bones resemble the mountains; his bone marrow is similar to the minerals; his intestines and the arteries are similar to rivers and brooks; his hair resembles the plants; his breath the wind; his speech the thunder; and so on. The Epistles of the Ikhwān abound with such speculations; their descriptions in this context are rather exhaustive, yet colorful and poetic.[22]

The distinctive Ismāʿīlī aspect of these Ikhwānian speculations is reflected in two main points. First, the perception of the universe as "a big man" is closely linked to the Ismāʿīlī concept of the Divine word and command.[23] The Ikhwān explain that "the big man" is governed by and is under the complete control of the Divine command (*amr, amr Allāh*), which is situated above the universal intellect. This command is an expression of God's will, volition and power (*irāda, mashīʾa, qudra*); it encompasses (*muḥīṭ*) all of creation, thus unifying it and turning it into a living organism, which corresponds to man, "the small world". In the Ikhwān's own words, the whole universe is "one body whose spirit is the word of Allāh (*kalimat allāh*)".[24] Second, the Ikhwān view the hierarchy of the friends of God as corresponding to both the microcosm and the macrocosm. For instance, according to the Ikhwān, the seven planets and the twelve signs of the zodiac parallel the seven faculties in the human body and its twelve orifices, and are also analogous to the seven *nuṭaqāʾ* (termed by the Ikhwān *sabʿa ashkhāṣ fāḍila*, "seven virtuous figures") and the twelve supporters of each *nāṭiq*.[25]

The numerical-mathematical dimension of these various correspondences plays an important role in the writings of the Ikhwān, a fact which bears testimony to the impact of the Pythagorean/Neopythagorean tradition on their thought.[26] According to the Ikhwān, all existents are

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[22] See, for example, Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ, *Rasāʾil* ii, 463–8, 472–3, 476–9; see also ibid. 143–8, iii, 124–5, iv 212–25, 231–8, 345, 414–6; Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ, *al-Jāmiʿa* i, 582–92.

[23] On this concept, see above chapter 1.

[24] See Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ, *al-Jāmiʿa* i, 635–6, ii, 24–38.

[25] See ibid. i, 624–34.

[26] On the importance of the microcosmic-macrocosmic analogy in the Pythagorean and Neopythagorean traditions, see Allers, Microcosmus 332, 341–3, 370–83; Takeshita, *Ibn ʿArabī's theory* 74–5. On the influence of these traditions on the Ikhwān's thought, see Netton, *Muslim Neoplatonists* 9–16; Nasr, *An introduction* 33–40, 45 n. 5, 47–51, 77–8, 84; Fakhry, *A history* 170–5. Concerning the importance of numbers and mathematics in the Ikhwān's Epistles, see also Lory, *La Science* 70–4; Marquet, *La philosophie des Ihwan al-Safa: de Dieu à l'homme* 32–5.

arranged in different hierarchal levels (*marātib*), in line with the hierarchal ordering (*tartīb*) of the numbers. For instance, God corresponds to the number one; the universal intellect corresponds to the number two; the universal soul to three; prime matter (*al-hayūlā l-ūlā*) to four; and so forth. The last level in this cosmic hierarchy—the level of the minerals, plants and animals in the sub-lunar world—corresponds to the number nine.[27] The Ikhwān hold that the numbers which recur in the various dimensions of reality—such as the numbers seven and twelve mentioned above—have special numerical-mathematical properties (*khawāṣṣ*). Hence, the correspondence between these numbers and the various worlds is not arbitrary but intentional, reflecting the Divine wisdom and providence.[28] Finally, the letters of the alphabet are likewise included in the Ikhwān's network of cosmic correspondences, though their speculations in this context are much less mythical and exhaustive than those found in other Ismāʿīlī works.[29]

The notion of parallel worlds and the microcosm-macrocosm analogy are the cornerstone of Ḥamīd al-Dīn al-Kirmānī's philosophical system,[30] as is evident in his most important work, *Rāḥat al-ʿaql* ("The Repose of the Intellect"). These themes, in fact, may be regarded as a fundamental philosophical method in *Rāḥat al-ʿaql*: most chapters in this work are comprised of a philosophical discussion which is typically followed by numerous speculations on the correspondences between man, the universe, the *awliyāʾ* hierarchy and the numbers. These speculations are designed to prove and illustrate the philosophical claims of the author, which mostly pertain to the structure of the spiritual and corporeal worlds and to their modes of operation. Hence, in al-Kirmānī's view, the correspondences between the various dimensions of reality constitute an indispensable means for understanding the nature of both the universe and the world of man. In addition, the detailed analogies which al-Kirmānī draws between the hierarchy of the friends of God and the different worlds are aimed at explaining and legitimizing the central role of the *awliyāʾ* in human religiosity.

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[27] See Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ, *Rasāʾil* i, 53–4, ii, 461–2, iii, 181–2, 202, 224, 377, iv, 276; see also ibid. iii, 141–2, 148.

[28] See Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ, *Rasāʾil* i, 140–1, ii, 197, iii, 362. On the term *khawāṣṣ* and its significance in the Shiʿi-Ismāʿīlī corpus attributed to Jābir b. Ḥayyān, see Kraus, *Jābir ibn Ḥayyān* ii, 61–95.

[29] See Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ, *Rasāʾil* iii, 141–5, 376–83, iv, 232–3; Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ, *al-Jāmiʿa* i, 585–8. For analyses of these passages, see above pp. 105–8, 111–2.

[30] On al-Kirmānī, see above pp. 40–1.

One typical example from *Rāḥat al-ʿaql* will suffice in order to demonstrate these points. In a chapter dedicated to a discussion of nature (*al-ṭabīʿa*), al-Kirmānī explains that nature is situated midway between the first intellect, which is termed, in this context, "the first extremity" (*al-nihāya l-awwala*), and man, called "the second extremity" (*al-nihāya l-thāniya*). The chapter is divided into two parts: the first one contains the philosophical-cosmological claims concerning nature, and the second supplies proofs for these claims, all based on the notion of parallel worlds. The second part of the chapter begins as follows: "Our preceding statements are verified by the type of correspondence and agreement (*al-muwāzana wa-l-muṭābaqa*) that is expressed by the balance of religion (*mīzān al-diyāna*)". According to al-Kirmānī, the fact that the *nāṭiq* ("the speaker prophet") in the world of religion is a "first extremity" from which the *daʿwa* organization derives proves that the first intellect in the upper, spiritual world is likewise a "first extremity" from which nature derives. Nature, which operates through the celestial spheres and the four elements, corresponds to the *daʿwa* hierarchy, which operates by means of the Quran and the *sharīʿa*. In a similar vein, the *qāʾim* (the messianic figure of the seventh *nāṭiq*),[31] from a religious point of view, is a "second extremity", since he occupies the final hierarchal level (*martaba*) and comprises within himself the "lights" and spiritual knowledge of all the preceding *nuṭaqāʾ*. This proves that from a cosmological point of view, man is "the second extremity" in relation to nature and occupies the last hierarchal level in creation. In addition to these correspondences between the macrocosm and "the world of religion" (*ʿālam al-dīn*), al-Kirmānī proves his philosophical claims by drawing analogies between the *awliyāʾ* hierarchy and the human organism, "the small world" or "the child of the big world" (*walad al-ʿālam al-kabīr*). Al-Kirmānī concludes the chapter analyzed here by stating:

> This, briefly, is the correspondence between the small world and the big world, on the one hand, and the world of religion, on the other. If indeed there exists a correspondence and an agreement (*al-tawāzun wa-l-taṭābuq*) between the worlds, and the world of religion is similar to the small world, and the big world is like the world of religion—then it follows that the small world is like the big world. Nothing of the latter escapes the former [see Q 18:49].

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[31] On him, see above p. 60 n. 101.

> All the worlds are held fast to one another. They are linked together like a chain, in accordance with the harmonious order dictated by the Divine wisdom.[32]

These notions and the various terms used to express them (*mīzān al-diyāna, muwāzana/tawāzun, muṭābaqa/taṭābuq, niẓām*) all recur, in different variations, in al-Kirmānī's works.[33] Furthermore, al-Kirmānī dedicated an entire epistle, albeit a short one, to the idea of parallel worlds (*Risālat al-naẓm fī muqābalat al-ʿawālim*). In this epistle, al-Kirmānī draws various analogies between the letters of the Arabic word *fard* ("The One and Only"), the numbers from one to twelve and the different worlds which comprise the universe. These worlds include "the world of creation" (*ʿālam al-ibdāʿ*, i.e., the world of the ten intellects); "the world of assembling" (*ʿālam al-tarkīb*, i.e., the world of the celestial spheres); "the small

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[32] Al-Kirmānī, *Rāḥat al-ʿaql* 158–9 ("*Yuṣaḥḥiḥu mā awradnāhu mā yanṭiqu bihi mīzān al-diyāna min qabūl al-muwāzana wa-l-muṭābaqa l-ladhī yūjibu kawn al-nāṭiq nihāya awwala muḥīṭa bi-mā hiya ʿilla ʿanhā tūjadu l-ḥudūd al-muḥarrika lil-anfus ilā l-ʿibāda wa-l-tawḥīd fī ʿālam al-dīn anna l-ibdāʿ al-ladhī huwa l-mubdaʿ al-awwal nihāya awwala muḥīṭa bi-mā hiya ʿilla ʿanhā wujidat al-ṭabīʿa l-latī hiya l-nafs al-muḥarrika li-ʿālam al-jism wa-kawn al-ḥudūd fī wujūdihā ʿan al-nāṭiq bi-wujūd mā yajrī minhā majrā l-mawḍūʿ al-ladhī taʿmalu fihi min al-kitāb wa-l-sharīʿa bi-arkānihā anna l-ṭabīʿa wujūduhā bi-wujūd mawḍūʿihā l-ladhī taʿmalu fihi min al-aflāk wa-l-arkān*"), 160 ("*Wa-kawn al-qāʾim huwa l-nihāya l-thāniya l-latī lā takūnu warāʾahā martaba ukhrā yūjibu anna l-insān huwa l-nihāya fī l-mawjūdāt fa-lā takūnu warāʾahu martaba ukhrā fī l-wujūd*"), 162 ("*Wa-hādhā tawāzun al-ʿālam al-ṣaghīr wa-l-ʿālam al-kabīr li-ʿālam al-dīn ʿalā khtiṣār wa-idhā kāna l-tawāzun wa-l-taṭābuq mawjūdayni bayna l-ʿawālim wa-kāna ʿālam al-dīn mithla l-ʿālam al-ṣaghīr wa-l-ʿālam al-kabīr mithla ʿālam al-dīn fa-l-ʿālam al-ṣaghīr mithlu l-ʿālam al-kabīr lā yughādiru minhu shayʾan*"; "*Fa-l-ʿawālim kulluhā mutaʿalliq baʿḍuhā bi-baʿḍ mutasalsil ʿalā l-niẓām al-ladhī tūjibuhu l-ḥikma l-ilāhiyya*"). For the terms *ʿālam kabīr, ʿālam ṣaghīr* and *walad al-ʿālam al-kabīr*, see also ibid. 130, 133, 145, 246, 290, 296.

[33] See, for example, al-Kirmānī, *Rāḥat al-ʿAql* 19, 64–8, 79, 94, 102, 112–6, 119–39, 151–4, 167–70, 176, 179–81, 186–92, 197–200, 205–15, 223–6, 229, 233–5, 255–7, 267–73, 295–9, 318–22, 335; see also De Smet, Mīzān. For the terms *muṭābaqa* and *muṭābiq* in this context, see also Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ, *Rasāʾil* i, 140, ii, 197. For other terms and verbs signifying the notion of parallel worlds, such as *bi-izāʾ, muwāzī, ḥiyāla, tilqāʾ* ("facing, fronting"), *qābala/muqābil* ("faced/facing", "corresponded/corresponding"), and *wāfaqa/muwāfiq, munāsib* and *mushākil* ("agreed/agrees with", "resembled/resembles"), see, for example, al-Kirmānī, *Rāḥat al-ʿaql* 25, 115; al-Kirmānī, *al-Riyāḍ* 156; al-Ḥāmidī, *Kanz al-walad* 55; al-Sijistānī, *al-Yanābīʿ* 8–10, 59, 80, 92–3; al-Sijistānī, *Tuḥfat al-mustajībīn* 153. On the Ismāʿīlī use of the terms and verbs derived from the roots w.z.n. and q.b.l., see also Pines, Nathanaël ben al-Fayyûmî 16 n. 2. Finally, note that the term *mīzān* mentioned by al-Kirmānī is already given a cosmological dimension in the Shiʿi-Ismāʿīlī corpus attributed to Jābir b. Ḥayyān. In this corpus, the scientific theory which forms the basis for the Jābirian alchemical teachings is termed *ʿilm al-mīzān* ("the science of the balance"); see above pp. 96–7; see also Corbin, Science. On the notion of parallel worlds in the Jābirian corpus (including the correspondence between the macrocosm and the *awliyāʾ* hierarchy), see Kraus, *Jābir ibn Ḥayyān* ii, 50; Kraus, *Jābir ibn Ḥayyān* i, liii–liv; Kraus, Les Dignitaires 90–7; Lory, *Alchimie* 36, 42–3, 50, 101, 118–20, 217 n. 154.

world" (*ʿālam al-ṣaghīr* = man); "the world of composition" (*ʿālam al-taʾlīf* = the world of the Quran and the *sharīʿa*); and "the world of esoteric interpretation" (*ʿālam al-taʾwīl* = the world of the *awliyāʾ*).[34]

The various motifs analyzed so far resurface in the Ismāʿīlī-Ṭayyibī literature, which was influenced by the writings of both Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ and al-Kirmānī.[35] The Ṭayyibī authors incorporated these motifs into their own distinctive worldview. Thus, in the Ṭayyibī myth of creation, which tells of the crisis and fall within the world of the ten intellects, the latter world is perceived as corresponding to the world of man: *daʿwa* activity takes place within it, and its inhabitants are divided into those who wholeheartedly respond to the *daʿwa* and to those who reject it.[36]

In Ibn al-ʿArabī's writings too, the notion of parallel worlds and the microcosm-macrocosm analogy occupy a central place.[37] For example, in chapter 6 of his *al-Futūḥāt*, Ibn al-ʿArabī compares the physical and spiritual structure of man, the microcosm (*al-ʿālam al-aṣghar*), to the four worlds which comprise the macrocosm (*al-ʿālam al-akbar*): "the upper world" (*al-ʿālam al-aʿlā*, consisting of *al-ḥaqīqa l-muḥammadiyya*, "the true essence of Muḥammad",[38] the celestial spheres and the seven planets); "the world of changes" (*ʿālam al-istiḥāla* = the spheres of the four elements and the seven layers of earth in the sub-lunar world); "the world of inhabitants" (*ʿālam al-taʿmīr* = the angels, animals, plants and inanimate beings); and "the world of relationships" (*ʿālam al-nisab* = the ten Aristotelian categories).[39] Notwithstanding the differences in details, the general outlook which emerges from such speculations of Ibn al-ʿArabī is rather similar to that which is reflected in Ismāʿīlī sources. To begin with, like al-Sijistānī, al-Kirmānī and al-Ḥāmidī, Ibn al-ʿArabī too perceives the microcosm-macrocosm analogy as a graphical correspondence between

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[34] See al-Kirmānī, *Risālat al-naẓm*.

[35] See, for example, al-Ḥāmidī, *Kanz al-walad* 36–7, 50, 55, 85, 163–71. On al-Ḥāmidī, see above p. 70.

[36] Concerning this myth, see the references above in p. 139 n. 52.

[37] See also the statement of Ibn al-ʿArabī himself in *al-Tadbīrāt* 209: "It remains for us [to deal with] the second [type of] resemblance, that which exists between man and the world. We have already spoken at length about this [subject] in most of our books" ("[…] *Wa-baqiyat lanā l-muḍāhāt al-thāniya l-latī bayna l-insān wa-l-ʿālam wa-qad basaṭnā al-qawl fihi fī akthar kutubinā*").

[38] On *al-ḥaqīqa l-muḥammadiyya*, identified by Ibn al-ʿArabī with the universal intellect, see above pp. 145–6, 151–2.

[39] See Ibn al-ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt* i, 170–1 (= ʿUthmān Yaḥyā's edition ii, 231–3); Ibn al-ʿArabī, *al-Tadbīrāt* 210–3. On the microcosm-macrocosm analogy in the writings of Ibn al-ʿArabī, see also Chittick, *Sufi path*, index, s.v. "microcosm", "macrocosm", "ʿālam ṣaghīr", "insān kabīr"; Chittick, *Self-disclosure*, index.

circles (*dawā'ir*) and spheres (*aflāk*).[40] In addition, Ibn al-ʿArabī maintains that the seven planets correspond to the seven faculties of man: the knowing faculty, the remembering faculty, the faculty of the intellect, and the thinking, estimating, imagining and sensing faculties (*al-quwwa l-ʿilmiyya*, *al-dhākira, al-ʿāqila, al-mufakkira, al-wahmiyya, al-khayāliyya, al-ḥissiyya*). The angels (*al-malā'ika*) or "the spiritual beings" (*al-rūḥāniyyūn*) likewise correspond to these human faculties.[41] As might be recalled, the Ikhwān also compare the seven physical and spiritual faculties of man to the seven planets, and they too identify the angels with the *rūḥāniyyāt*, that is, the spiritual powers of the seven planets which influence the sub-lunar world.[42] The analogy which Ibn al-ʿArabī draws in chapter 6 of *al-Futūḥāt* between the four elements in the sub-lunar world (fire, air, water and earth) and the four humors in the human body (yellow bile, blood, phlegm and black bile) is also found in Ismāʿīlī literature.[43] Finally, both Ibn al-ʿArabī and the Ikhwān affirm that man comprises within himself the faculties or properties of all existents—angels, animals, plants and inanimate beings.[44]

The idea that man contains within himself the different properties of all existents and the various elements of the physical world originates in the pre-Islamic heritage to which I referred in the beginning of this

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[40] See Ibn al-ʿArabī, *al-Tadbīrāt* 210 ("*Wa-lawmā qaṣadnā fī kitābinā hādhā ṭarīq al-ishāra wa-l-tanbīh la-ḍarabnā lahu dawā'ir ʿalā ṣuwar al-aflāk wa-tartībihā wa-najʿalu li-kull falak fī l-ʿālam mā yuqābiluhā min al-insān* […]"); al-Sijistānī, *al-Yanābīʿ* 59 ("*Waqad ṣawwarnā dā'ira mushtamila ʿalā ṣūrat hādhihi l-taqāsīm* […] *wa-waḍaʿnā kull qism minhā bi-izā' mā yalīhi min qismat al-arbaʿ bi-l-arbaʿ wa-l-sabʿa bi-l-sabʿa wa-l-ithnay ʿashar bi-l-ithnay ʿashar wa-katabnā fī hādhihi l-dā'ira ʿinda nuqṭat al-markaz al-ʿaql fī muqābalat al-insān* […]"); al-Kirmānī, *Rāḥat al-ʿaql* 121–31; al-Ḥāmidī, *Kanz al-walad* 163–71. The circular vision of the cosmos and of human history is typically an Ismāʿīlī theme, which merits a separate discussion; see above p. 155 n. 99.

[41] See Ibn al-ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt* i, 171 (= ʿUthmān Yaḥyā's edition ii, 231–2: "*Wa-min dhālika l-malā'ika wa-naẓīruhā min al-insān al-arwāḥ al-latī fīhi wa-l-qiwā*"; "*Fa-minhum al-rūḥāniyyūna naẓīruhum al-qiwā l-latī fī l-insān*").

[42] See above p. 193. The term *naẓīr* ("corresponding to") in the passages quoted here from Ibn al-ʿArabī's *al-Futūḥāt* (see above nn. 39, 41) appears in a very similar context in Ismāʿīlī literature; see, for example, Stern, Earliest cosmological doctrines 9; Ikhwān al-Ṣafā', *al-Jāmiʿa* ii, 33–4; al-Sijistānī, *al-Yanābīʿ* 14, 90–2. The term *muqābala* and its derivatives, which are quite common in Ismāʿīlī discussions of the microcosm-macrocosm analogy (see above n. 33), are also employed by Ibn al-ʿArabī; see, for instance, Ibn al-ʿArabī, *al-Tadbīrāt* 108, 111, 174, 177, 210.

[43] See Ikhwān al-Ṣafā', *Rasā'il* i, 213, 251–7; al-Sijistānī, *al-Yanābīʿ* 58; see also Kraus, *Jābir ibn Ḥayyān* ii, 173 n. 1; and Pseudo al-Majrīṭī, *Ghāyat al-ḥakīm* 102.

[44] See, for example, Ikhwān al-Ṣafā', *Rasā'il* ii, 473–5; and above, pp. 162–5, 169–72. For the possible influence of the Ikhwān on Ibn al-ʿArabī in these matters, see Affifi, *Mystical philosophy* 188.

chapter.[45] Naturally, this idea is unique neither to the Ismāʿīlī authors nor to Ibn al-ʿArabī but is shared by other medieval Muslim scholars.[46] Ibn al-ʿArabī, therefore, must have derived this and other concepts pertaining to the microcosm-macrocosm analogy from diverse sources. Nevertheless, the close affinity between Ibn al-ʿArabī and the Ismāʿīlī authors becomes apparent when one considers the specific contexts in which they employ the microcosm-macrocosm analogy—namely, the notion of *walāya* and the *awliyāʾ* hierarchy; the concept of the perfect man; the letters of the alphabet and their cosmogonic-cosmological significance;[47] and, finally, numerical-mathematical speculations.[48] The fact that all these various themes are woven together by the notion of parallel worlds, and are often discussed in the framework of Neoplatonic cosmology, points to the similarity between Ibn al-ʿArabī's thought and the Ismāʿīlī tradition.

The Human Organism: From the Kingdom of the Imām *to the Kingdom of Man*

The comparison between the human organism and society at large is a common theme in Western thought and appears in many religious, phil-

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[45] See Conger, *Theories* 19, 32, 34, 42–3, 56–7, 65, 83; Allers, Microcosmus 321–3, 340, 344–51, 379–80, 384, 399.

[46] For instance, both al-Kindī and Ibn Sīnā maintain that man has the faculties or properties of all existents; see Takeshita, *Ibn ʿArabī's theory* 76; Banchetti-Robino, Microcosm/macrocosm analogy 27–8; Nasr, *An introduction* 257–60.

[47] See above pp. 102–8.

[48] For the connection between numbers and the letters of the alphabet, the hierarchal structure of the universe and the hierarchy of the *awliyāʾ*, see, for instance, Ibn al-ʿArabī, *al-Mabādiʾ* 43, 99–140; Ibn al-ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt* i, 97–8 (chapter 2, *faṣl* 1, = ʿUthmān Yaḥyā's edition i, 243, 246), 125–6 (= ʿUthmān Yaḥyā's edition i, 344–9). A good example of the close affinity between Ibn al-ʿArabī and the Ismāʿīlī authors may be found in their speculations on the number nineteen. In chapter 22 of the *Futūḥāt* (i, 228, 237–8, = iii, 147–8), Ibn al-ʿArabī draws an analogy between nineteen mystical stations or levels of mystical knowledge (*manāzil*/*marātib*) and the following worlds: the twelve signs of the zodiac + the seven planets; the fourteen *fawātiḥ* + the five levels in which they are arranged (according to Ibn al-ʿArabī's own theory); the nineteen letters of the *basmala* (the formula *bi-smi llāh al-raḥmān al-raḥīm*, بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم); and the twelve *nuqabāʾ* + the seven *abdāl* (on whom see above, p. 130 n. 25). Very similar speculations are found in Ismāʿīlī sources. For instance, the nineteen letters of the *basmala*, or the twelve letters of the *shahāda* (the formula *lā ilāh illā llāh*) + its seven orthographic parts (لا إله إلا الله), correspond to the twelve signs of the zodiac + the seven planets, as well as to the twelve *ḥujaj* + the seven *nuṭaqāʾ*/*imām*s. See Pines, Nathanaël ben al-Fayyûmî 17–9; Kiener, Jewish Ismāʿīlism 260–1; al-Shaybī, *al-Ṣila* i, 216–7; al-Sijistānī, *al-Yanābīʿ* 56–9; Filippani-Ronconi, Soteriological cosmology 115; and see also Corbin, Science 81–103; al-Qāḍī l-Nuʿmān, *al-Mudhhiba* 36; and above, p. 134 n. 37.

osophical and political works from medieval times to the modern era.[49] In fact, this theme is already found in the Dialogues of Plato and in the writings of Aristotle.[50] In medieval Islamic thought, the Platonic analogy between man and the city-state was employed by different philosophers and mystics such as al-Fārābī, Ibn Sīnā, al-Ghazālī, Ibn al-ʿArabī and the Ismāʿīlī authors.[51] The latter placed much emphasis on this analogy, as it served them to illustrate and legitimize the supreme status of the prophets and their heirs in human society. Consequently, Ismāʿīlī discussions of the correspondences between the human organism and society focus on various concepts that pertain to religious-political power and authority, such as *khilāfa* and *imāma*.[52] Similarly, Ibn al-ʿArabī too attaches much importance to the analogy between man and the city-state, and in his treatment of this theme the concepts of *khilāfa* and *imāma* likewise occupy a central place.

Ismāʿīlī writings contain many speculations on the human body, which is perceived as corresponding to human society in general and to the Ismāʿīlī community in particular. For example, al-Rāzī, al-Sijistānī and al-Kirmānī draw various parallels between the different organs of the human body and the hierarchy of the *awliyāʾ*—the *nuṭaqāʾ*, their legatees, the *imām*s and the *daʿwa* organization.[53] Similar speculations are also found in the Epistles of Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ. According to the latter, the human organism corresponds not only to the world of the celestial spheres, but also to human society and to the religious system. Thus, man's physical organs correspond to the prophets, their heirs, their close supporters and the common believers, while the various activities and functions of the human body parallel the modes in which both human society and religion operate. The religious leaders, like the seven planets and the main organs of the human body, are termed *ruʾasāʾ* ("leaders"), and are responsible for managing (*tadbīr*) the

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[49] See Conger, *Theories* 35–6, 68–9, 78, 87, 99–101, 110–8; Allers, Microcosmus 323–5, 367–9.

[50] See, for example, Plato, *Republic* i, 370–85, 404–23 (Book iv, 434–6, 441–5), ii, 371 (Book ix, 580); Plato, *Laws*, ii, 552–5 (Book xii, 964–5). Regarding Aristotle, see Conger, *Theories* 7–8, 10.

[51] Al-Fārābī: see al-Fārābī, *al-Madīna l-fāḍila* 97–104 (chapters 26–27). Ibn Sīnā: Nasr, *An introduction* 270. Al-Ghazālī: Takeshita, *Ibn ʿArabī's theory* 92–9, 103–5. Concerning the Ismāʿīlīs and Ibn al-ʿArabī, see the discussion below. On the close affinities between al-Fārābī and Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ and their historical implications, see Baffioni, Al-madīnah al-fāḍilah; and cf. Marquet, Imamat 50 n. 2, 54 n. 11; Hamdani, Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ.

[52] On *khilāfa*, see above pp. 175–9.

[53] See al-Rāzī, *al-Iṣlāḥ* 211–6; al-Sijistānī, *al-Yanābiʿ* 18, 79–80; al-Kirmānī, *Rāḥat al-ʿaql* 160–2, 295–9, 343–5; see also De Smet, Adam 187–8 (on the Qarāmiṭa).

system that is under their control. The Ikhwān describe man (the microcosm), the universe (the macrocosm) and the ideal society as living organisms which enjoy internal unity and harmony.[54]

The Ismāʿīlī authors accord special honor to the seventh *nāṭiq*, the messianic *qāʾim*, and emphasize his superiority over all his predecessors, the preceding prophets and *imām*s. In their view, the *qāʾim* is destined to complete the process of human redemption and to bring it to its final end. The linear progression of sacred human history, with its messianic-eschatological climax, corresponds in Ismāʿīlī literature to the development of the fetus in his mother's womb. In the same way that the six stages of pregnancy, alluded to in the Quran (see Q 23:12–14), are indispensable for the perfect formation of the fetus's physical form, so are the six historical cycles, led by the *nuṭaqāʾ* and their heirs, necessary for the formation of a perfect spiritual-religious "form" (*ṣūra*). The advent of the messianic figure in the seventh cycle, and the various eschatological events associated with it—i.e., the completion of the aforementioned spiritual-religious "form", resurrection and the appearance of the world to come—correspond to the birth of man.[55] In al-Ḥāmidī's mythical-mystical worldview,[56] the spiritual-religious forms of the prophets, the *imām*s and their followers are all gradually assembled together throughout the many cycles of human history into one single form, which constitutes a spiritual figure. The organs of this figure are composed of the spiritual-religious forms of the Ismāʿīlī community. According to al-Ḥāmidī, this figure eventually ascends to the Divine world, more precisely, to the level of the tenth intellect, which, during creation, had fallen from its initial rank as the third intellect. This process enables the tenth intellect itself to rise to its original rank, thus restoring the Divine world to its pristine, pure state.[57]

Overall, the analogies drawn in Ismāʿīlī literature between the human organism and the Ismāʿīlī community are intended to portray the ideal society. This society is led by the prophets and the *imām*s, and it is this leadership alone that guarantees prosperity and spiritual salvation. The structure of the human body and its physical development reflect the

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[54] See Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ, *al-Jāmiʿa* i, 601–2, 624–42, 702–3, ii, 111–23; Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ, *Rasāʾil* iv, 134.

[55] See al-Rāzī, *al-Iṣlāḥ* 216; Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ, *al-Jāmiʿa* ii, 358–66; al-Kirmānī, *Rāḥat al-ʿaql* 391–5; Walker, *Early philosophical Shiism* 141; and the references to al-Ḥāmidī below in n. 57.

[56] See above p. 139 n. 52.

[57] See al-Ḥāmidī, *Kanz al-walad* 172, 174, 188, 217, 228–9, 239–48, 253–8, 264, 268–9, and more.

progression of sacred human history and indicate the role of the prophets and the *imām*s in this Divine-human 'drama'. One may conclude that the Ismāʿīlī treatment of the correspondences between the human organism and society is rather unique in its Shiʿi, mythical, mystical and eschatological aspects, in addition to a certain magical-alchemical aspect, which, however, cannot be dealt with here.[58]

As mentioned above, Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ likewise discuss at length the correspondences between the human organism and human society. However, in many passages throughout their *Rasāʾil*, the Ikhwān focus their attention on man in general rather than on the prophet and the *imām*s.[59] In these passages, the human organism is perceived not only as a microcosm which reflects or indicates society and the supreme status of the prophets and the *imām*s, but is also seen as an autonomous and independent world which forms the real locus of human spirituality. Contrary to other Shiʿi-Ismāʿīlī authors and to philosophers such as Plato and al-Fārābī, who typically emphasize the political-social aspect of the analogy between man and the city-state, the Ikhwān stress the individual-personal aspect of this analogy, that which pertains to man's inner, spiritual-mystical realm. The correspondences between the human organism and society serve the Ikhwān as a means of illustrating the function and significance of this inner realm.

According to the Ikhwān, man's body is a city (*madīna*) or a kingdom (*mamlaka*), headed by a king (*malik*) or a leader (*raʾīs*)—that is, the human soul, or rather, the rational/speaking soul (*al-nafs al-nāṭiqa*). The faculties (*qiwā*) of the soul are the soldiers of the city and its sentries, while the five "external senses" (*al-ḥawāss al-ẓāhira*) are spies (*ʿuyūn, aṣḥāb al-akhbār*), who are responsible for gathering information and bringing it to the king. As regards "the inner senses" (*al-ḥawāss al-bāṭina*) or "the spiritual faculties" of man, the imagining, thinking and preserving faculties (*al-mutakhayyila, al-mufakkira, al-ḥāfiẓa*) are the close companions

[58] As an example of this magical-alchemical aspect, one may mention the term *tadbīr* ("management"). This term signifies the universal soul's management of the physical world, by means of the celestial spheres (see, for example, Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ, *Rasāʾil* iii, 36, iv, 285); the individual soul's management of the human body (ibid. ii, 387); man's domination of nature, in his capacity as "God's vicegerent on earth" (*khalīfa*; Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ, *al-Jāmiʿa* i, 26); the *nāṭiq*'s political-religious control over his fellow men (al-Sijistānī, *al-Iftikhār* 118; al-Sijistānī, *al-Yanābīʿ* 91); and, finally, the alchemical operation (Kraus, *Jābir ibn Ḥayyān* ii, index, s.v. "tadbīr"). Similarly, the concept of *khilāfa* entails both political-religious authority and magical powers; see above p. 177 n. 72.

[59] See also above pp. 179–88.

(*nudamāʾ*) of the king, whereas the speaking and creative/writing faculties (*al-nāṭiqa, al-ṣināʿiyya*) are the king's doorkeeper (*ḥājib*) and vizier (*wazīr*) respectively.[60] In the Epistles of the Ikhwān, the various concepts which pertain to religious-political power and authority, and which, in the Shiʿi-Ismāʿīlī worldview, typically refer to the figures of the prophet and the *imām*, are shifted from the external, social-political arena to the inner domain of man, to his personal intellectual, spiritual and mystical realm. For instance, the Ikhwān hold that the human soul or the rational/speaking soul is in charge of "managing" (*tadbīr*) the human organism,[61] and define it as the "king" or "leader"; the latter term, as might be recalled, is usually reserved for the *nāṭiq*s. The human soul, or "the human form" (*ṣūrat al-insāniyya*), is "the vicegerent of Allāh on earth" (*khalīfat allāh fī arḍihi*), and is responsible for managing the sub-lunar world. In a similar vein, the Ikhwān view the human intellect (*ʿaql*) as a "king" or a "leader" that rules the human organism. It resembles "a just *imām* from among the successors of the prophets" (*imām ʿādil min khulafāʾ al-anbiyāʾ*), who guides the members of his community in the right path and preserves their unity in faith.[62]

In addition to the individual-humanistic aspect, the Ikhwān also emphasize the universal aspect of the man-city-state analogy. In one passage, for example, the Ikhwān describe in great detail the way in which the human organism resembles a city with its many streets and houses, markets and shops, and its numerous inhabitants—merchants, artisans, men of religion, administrators, governmental clerks and so on.[63] Yet elsewhere, the macrocosm, "the big man", is portrayed as a single, united city, headed by a king—the universal soul. Alternatively, the sun is the king, while the other planets are its servants.[64]

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[60] See Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ, *Rasāʾil* ii, 384, 468–72 (cf. ibid. iii, 242); Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ, *al-Jāmiʿa* i, 593–603. On "the inner senses" or "the spiritual faculties", see above p. 106 n. 103. Note that in his *al-Madīna l-fāḍila* (71, chapter 20), al-Fārābī likewise describes the five senses as *aṣḥāb al-akhbār* who are in charge of gathering information from the different parts of the kingdom and bringing it to the king. The latter, according to al-Fārābī, is "the leading faculty" (*al-raʾīsa*), which resides in the heart (*qalb*). On the affinity between the Ikhwān and al-Fārābī in this context, see above n. 51. On the heart, see below n. 77.

[61] On *tadbīr* see above n. 58.

[62] See Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ, *Rasāʾil* ii, 382, 384, 387, 389; Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ, *al-Jāmiʿa* i, 242–4. For the definition of the human soul and intellect as *khalīfa*s, see above p. 176 n. 70 and pp. 181–2 nn. 85, 87. For the definition of both the *nāṭiq* and intellect as *raʾīs*, see p. 182 n. 90.

[63] See Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ, *Rasāʾil* ii, 380–2, 385–95; and see also ibid. iii, 427.

[64] See Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ, *Rasāʾil* ii, 467, iii, 215–21. On the Neoplatonic notion of the cosmos as a living organism controlled by the universal soul, see also Plotinus, *Enneads* iv,

A humanistic-universal approach, similar to that of the Ikhwān, is reflected in the writings of Ibn al-ʿArabī. The latter dedicated a whole work to the correspondences between the human organism and human society, entitled "The Book of the Divine Management Concerning the Reformation of the Human Kingdom" (*Kitāb al-tadbīrāt al-ilāhiyya fī iṣlāḥ al-mamlaka l-insāniyya*). In this work, Ibn al-ʿArabī draws numerous analogies between man and society at large. Like society, man too contains within himself different governmental-administrative systems and functionaries—a *khalīfa*, a *wazīr*, a judge (*qāḍī*), a scribe (*kātib*), a tax collector, soldiers, sentinels, and so forth—as well as diverse populations, such as nomads and sedentary people, believers and heretics, religious hypocrites (*munāfiqūn*) and disobedient men (*ʿuṣāt*).[65] The comparison between man and society is designed to outline the intellectual, spiritual and mystical 'map' of man's inner world. Generally speaking, such a detailed and exhaustive treatment of the man-city-state analogy as that found in *al-Tadbīrāt al-ilāhiyya* is unprecedented not only in classical Sufi literature, but also in the Arabic-Islamic philosophical tradition. Al-Fārābī, Ibn Sīnā and al-Ghazālī, for instance, who indeed employed the man-city-state analogy in their writings, never dedicated a whole work to it, nor did they attach such importance to it as did Ibn al-ʿArabī. In contradistinction, as is clear from the discussion in this chapter, the correspondences between the human organism and society at large occupy a central place in Ismāʿīlī literature, including the Epistles of Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ.[66]

Like the Ikhwān, Ibn al-ʿArabī transfers the concepts pertaining to religious-political power and authority—*khalīfa, imām, raʾīs, tadbīr*, etc.—to the inner dimension of man, to his own intellectual, spiritual and mystical world. According to Ibn al-ʿArabī, the human spirit (*rūḥ*), defined as the "king" (*malik*), "Allāh's vicegerent" (*khalīfa*), "leader" (*raʾīs*) and *imām*, rules "the kingdom of man", or "the city of the body" (*madīnat al-jism/al-badan*). The affinity between the Ismāʿīlī authors and Ibn al-ʿArabī is particularly evident in the Neoplatonic motifs scattered throughout

232–9 (= Ennead iv, 4, 32), v, 14–9 (= v, 1, 2). On the analogy between the cosmos and the polis in Greek philosophy, see Allers, Microcosmus 338.

[65] See Ibn al-ʿArabī, *al-Tadbīrāt* 104, 111, 137, 154, 185. For the microcosm-macrocosm analogy in general, and for the terms *al-ʿālam al-akbar/al-kabīr* and *al-ʿālam al-ṣaghīr*, see ibid. 103, 106–12.

[66] It is possible that Ibn Sīnā and al-Ghazālī—perhaps even al-Fārābī—were influenced by the Ismāʿīlī tradition in the context dealt with here; see above nn. 14, 51. Note that al-Ghazālī is mentioned in Ibn al-ʿArabī's *al-Tadbīrāt* (122, 134), albeit in a discussion of the *amr-kalima* motif which bears resemblance to Ismāʿīlī speculations (on this see below).

al-Tadbīrāt al-ilāhiyya. Thus, Ibn al-ʿArabī also refers to the human spirit as "the universal spirit" (*al-rūḥ al-kullī*), "the holy spirit" (*al-rūḥ al-qudusī*) or "the universal holy spirit" (*al-rūḥ al-kullī l-qudusī*).[67] It seems that in Ibn al-ʿArabī's view, the spirit found within man, which governs his body and soul, corresponds to the universal spirit, which controls the whole universe.[68] In Ismāʿīlī Neoplatonic writings, the same relationship is envisaged between man's soul and intellect, on the one hand, and the universal soul and intellect, on the other.[69] Elsewhere in his writings, Ibn al-ʿArabī explicitly identifies the spirit or the universal spirit with the universal intellect. Similarly, the Ismāʿīlī Neoplatonists refer to the universal intellect, *inter alia*, as "spirit" or as "the holy spirit".[70] Moreover, Ibn al-ʿArabī holds that the spirit or the universal spirit was the first being to have been created; he identifies it with the Divine throne (*ʿarsh*), and names it "the first [spiritual] substance" (*al-mādda l-ūlā*), "the first source of [spiritual] substance / of reinforcement" (*al-mumidd al-awwal*) and "the first teacher" (*al-muʿallim al-awwal*); and he explains that the spirit was created directly from God's word and command (*kalima, amr*), with no other intermediary (*wāsiṭa*) separating between the spirit and its Lord.[71] Equally, according to Ismāʿīlī Neoplatonism, the universal intellect is identical to the Divine throne and is the first created being;[72] it is the source of "[spiritual] substance" or of "reinforcement" (*imdād*) for the lower cosmic beings,[73] and is also responsible for their *taʿlīm* ("teaching"), that is, for granting them spiritual powers and knowledge;[74] and, finally, the intellect was created

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[67] For the terms mentioned here, see Ibn al-ʿArabī, *al-Tadbīrāt* 120–2, 131, 143–4, 185–6, 188–9, 211, 213. See also ibid. 181: man—that is, his spirit—is entrusted with "the office of the *imām*" (*manṣib al-imāma*). For other passages in which the concepts related to religious-political power are given an inner, mystical interpretation, see, for example, ibid. 111–2; Ibn al-ʿArabī, *ʿAnqāʾ mughrib* 6, 60–3. Note also the use of the terms *khalīfa* and *mustakhlif* ("He who appoints someone to the office of *khalīfa*") in *al-Tadbīrāt* 132; and cf. Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ, *Rasāʾil* iv, 380.

[68] See also Ibn al-ʿArabī, *al-Tadbīrāt* 127 ("*Wa-nisbat hādhihi l-arwāḥ ʿindahum ilā l-rūḥ al-kullī ka-nisbat wulāt al-amṣār ilā l-imām* […]").

[69] See above p. 154 n. 97.

[70] See above p. 152 n. 89; and see also al-Kirmānī, *al-Riyāḍ* 64–5; Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ, *al-Jāmiʿa* ii, 139.

[71] See Ibn al-ʿArabī, *al-Tadbīrāt* 121–5.

[72] See above pp. 44–51; concerning the Divine throne, see above p. 50 n. 64.

[73] See above p. 49 n. 59, pp. 151–6.

[74] For the cosmological context of the terms *muʿallim-taʿlīm*, see, for instance, Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ, *Rasāʾil* iii, 354–5, 480, iv, 212–3; cf. Ibn al-ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt* iii, 387 (chapter 369, *waṣl* 19).

by means of the Divine word and command, which function as a mediating link between God and the intellect.[75]

One may also note the importance which Ibn al-ʿArabī attaches to the human intellect (*ʿaql*) in *al-Tadbīrāt al-ilāhiyya*. This positive attitude towards the intellect is more in line with Neoplatonic philosophy than with the classical Sufi tradition, which tends to view this organ as a potential obstacle on man's mystical path. Ibn al-ʿArabī defines the intellect, which resides in the brain (*dimāgh*), as the vizier (*wazīr*) of the spirit, which (according to the opinion favored by Ibn al-ʿArabī himself) resides in the heart (*qalb*). The intellect is "the manager of the kingdom" (*mudabbir al-mamlaka*), and is depicted as playing a central role in the spiritual-mystical function of man.[76] It seems that Ibn al-ʿArabī sought to combine the Sufi notion of the heart as the center of man's mystical activity with the positive perception of the intellect in Neoplatonic philosophy.[77] Ibn al-ʿArabī's taxonomy of the soul in *al-Tadbīrāt al-ilāhiyya* likewise reflects this tendency to combine Sufi ideas with philosophical-Neoplatonic concepts.[78] This ability to draw from diverse sources and traditions, while creating a new mystical-philosophical discourse, no doubt testifies to Ibn al-ʿArabī's genius and originality.

In their discussions of the correspondences between man and human society, both the Ikhwān and Ibn al-ʿArabī perceive the human organism

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[75] See above chapter 1; on *wāsiṭa* in Ismāʿīlī sources, see p. 63 n. 110.

[76] See Ibn al-ʿArabī, *al-Tadbīrāt* 132–3, 135–6, 152, 157–61, 177, 220–6.

[77] The importance which Ibn al-ʿArabī attaches to the heart may also be linked to the Aristotelian tradition. According to the latter, man's mental processing takes place in the heart, rather than in the brain. This is also al-Fārābī's opinion, who perceives the heart as the most important organ in the human body, and compares it to the leader of the city-state (*raʾīs al-madīna*); see, for example, al-Fārābī, *al-Madīna l-fāḍila* 97–100 (chapters 26–27); see also Marquet, *La Philosophie* 91. Note, in addition, that in early Shiʿi traditions and in the Epistles of the Ikhwān, both the intellect and heart play a central role in the mystical experience of the believer; see above pp. 180–1 and below n. 138, 140; see also Amir-Moezzi, Du Droit à la théologie 56–7.

[78] Thus, in the term *al-qalb al-nabātī* ("the vegetative heart", see *al-Tadbīrāt* 132), Ibn al-ʿArabī combines the Sufi motif of the heart with the philosophical concept *al-nafs al-nabātiyya* ("the vegetative soul"). Further on in his discussion (ibid. 134), Ibn al-ʿArabī explicitly mentions the philosophical terms *nafs nabātiyya, nafs ḥayawāniyya* and *nafs nāṭiqa*. He explains (ibid. 135) that if the rational/speaking soul follows the evil inclination in man, it becomes *al-nafs al-ammāra bi-l-sūʾ* ("the soul which commands evil"). However, if it follows the intellect, it gains spiritual serenity and becomes *al-nafs al-muṭmaʾinna* ("the serene soul"). *Al-nafs al-ammāra bi-l-sūʾ* and *al-nafs al-muṭmaʾinna* are Quranic terms, which play an important role in Sufi psychology. Finally, the three faculties mentioned by Ibn al-ʿArabī in *al-Tadbīrāt* 133—imagination, thought and preservation (*al-khayāl, al-fikr, al-ḥifẓ*)—are identical to the three faculties enumerated by the Ikhwān (*al-mutakhayyila, al-mufakkira, al-ḥāfiẓa*) in their discussions of the man-city-state analogy; see above n. 60.

as a battlefield in which a spiritual-mystical war takes place between the forces of good and the forces of evil. In the Shiʿi-Ismāʿīlī worldview, human history is characterized by an ongoing battle between the prophets and *imām*s, on the one hand, and their satanic enemies, "the rivals" (*al-aḍdād*), on the other. This struggle began already with Adam and Iblīs and will continue until the end of time.[79] The Ikhwān interpret this historical drama as occurring in the inner dimension of man: the struggle between Adam and Iblīs is essentially a struggle between the rational/speaking soul, on the one hand, and the appetitive and angry souls (*al-nafs al-shahwāniyya, al-nafs al-ghaḍabiyya*), on the other; or between the intellect, the *khalīfa* of God, and the evil inclination of man (*al-hawā*), the *khalīfa* of Iblīs. The struggle against these inner, evil forces is the real *jihād*, "the bigger *jihād*" (*al-jihād al-akbar*). According to the Ikhwān, if the rational/speaking soul, aided by the intellect, succeeds in overcoming the appetitive and angry souls and the evil inclination, if the rational/speaking soul

> abandons the objects of the senses and [only] their impressions remain within it, and it beholds the intellectual forms divested of matter—then this will assist the [rational/speaking soul] in uniting with these [forms] and in being with them where they are, in the garden of refuge [*jannat al-maʾwā*, see Q 53:15], the supreme paradise [...] This is the everlasting form and the permanent pleasures, which are found in the world of spirits [or, according to another version: in the world of the intellect] in a perfect condition, free from all changes, from the cessation of existence and from the transition between different states. The soul will only attain this as long as it exerts itself in learning and in ascending (*wa-l-taraqqī*) from one state to another [...][80]

In this passage, the Shiʿi-Ismāʿīlī struggle between the *imām*s and their satanic enemies is interpreted in a mystical manner, in line with Neoplatonic philosophy: man must fight his physical tendencies, and by means of ascetic practices, intellectual-philosophical studies and spiritual progress, he might eventually succeed in ascending and uniting with the spiri-

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[79] See Amir-Moezzi, Notes 735–8; Amir-Moezzi, *Divine guide* 87–8, 127–8.

[80] See Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ, *al-Jāmiʿa* i, 246, 247–8 ("*Fa-idhā fāraqat al-maḥsūsāt wa-baqiyat āthāruhā fihā wa-shāhadat al-ṣuwar al-ʿaqliyya l-mujarrada min al-hayūlā kāna dhālika muʿīnan lahā ʿalā l-ittiḥād bihā wa-l-kawn bi-ḥaythu hiya wa-hiya jannat al-maʾwā wa-l-firdaws al-aʿlā* [...] *wa-hiya l-ṣūra l-bāqiya wa-l-ladhdhāt al-dāʾima l-mawjūda fī ʿālam al-arwāḥ wujūdan tāmman lā tashūbuhu shawāʾib al-taghayyur wa-l-zawāl wa-l-intiqāl min ḥāl ilā ḥāl wa-innamā tanālu l-nafs dhālika mā dāmat mujtahida fī l-taʿlīm wa-l-taraqqī min ḥāl ilā ḥāl* [...]"); and see Tāmir's edition v, 65, for the reading عالم العقل instead of عالم الأرواح); see also Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ, *Rasāʾil* iv, 380.

tual forms in the world of the universal intellect. The final victory of the rational/speaking soul over the appetitive and angry souls and its complete control over them establishes the ideal hierarchy within man's spiritual-psychological realm. This hierarchy, in turn, corresponds to the hierarchy that prevails in the macrocosm between man and the animals, as well as to the hierarchy that exists in human society between the friends of God and all other men.[81]

In *al-Tadbīrāt al-ilāhiyya* too, the human organism is perceived as a battleground in which a similar struggle takes place between the human spirit and intellect, on the one hand, and the evil inclination of man and its vizier, lust (*shahwa*), on the other. These fierce enemies fight for control over the human soul (*nafs*), or rather, the rational/speaking soul, which Ibn al-ʿArabī describes as the "noble" female spouse (*ḥurra, karīma*) of the *khalīfa-imām*, the spirit.[82] The Neoplatonic framework is clearly evident here: according to Ibn al-ʿArabī, the soul corresponds to the Divine footstool (*kursī*) and is also identified by him with the universal soul.[83] This correspondence is typical of Ismāʿīlī Neoplatonic literature, where the relationship between the universal intellect and soul is likewise portrayed as an erotic one, like the relationship between man and wife.[84] As in the Epistles of the Ikhwān, so too in *al-Tadbīrāt*, the battle over the human soul is linked to the primordial struggle between Adam and Iblīs.[85]

The concept of psychomachia—that is, the raging battle within man's soul between his base, physical inclinations and the noble, spiritual ones—and the various motifs pertaining to it (such as the role of Satan; the evil inclination and lust; or the spiritual interpretation of *jihād*) are unique neither to the Ikhwān nor to Ibn al-ʿArabī. They are found in various Islamic mystical sources, be they Sunni sources—for instance, in the writings of al-Ḥakīm al-Tirmidhī and al-Ghazālī, or in the teachings attributed to Sahl al-Tustarī—or Shiʿi ones, for instance, in the work *Umm al-kitāb* ("The Mother of the Book"). In fact, the concept of psychomachia

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[81] See Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ, *al-Jāmiʿa* i, 237–55, especially pp. 242–4. On this Shiʿi-Ismāʿīlī hierarchal worldview, see above pp. 136–43; and cf. the hierarchal perception reflected in Ibn al-ʿArabī's *al-Tadbīrāt* 108–9, 185–6.

[82] See Ibn al-ʿArabī, *al-Tadbīrāt* 133–8, 141–3, 189–200; see also Ibn al-ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt* i, 162–3 (chapter 5, "waṣl fī qawlihi rabb al-ʿālamīna l-raḥmān al-raḥīm", = ʿUthmān Yaḥyā's edition ii, 193–7).

[83] See Ibn al-ʿArabī, *al-Tadbīrāt* 176, and the references in the previous note.

[84] See above p. 50 n. 64. Regarding the erotic relationship between the universal intellect and soul, see, for example, Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ, *Rasāʾil* iv, 200, 203–4; and see also Plotinus, *Enneads* iii, 194–203 (= Ennead iii, 5, 8–9).

[85] See Ibn al-ʿArabī, *al-Tadbīrāt* 137.

originates in the pre-Islamic heritage, namely, in the Platonic philosophy, in Gnostic traditions and in Christian writings.[86] It is obvious, then, that in their discussions of the spiritual struggle within man's soul, the Ikhwān are developing a pre-Islamic theme shared by other mystical movements in medieval Islam. It is also probable that Ibn al-ʿArabī derived his notions concerning this theme from diverse sources, including Sufi ones. However, several common features in their treatment of the psychomachian idea testify to the close affinity between Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ and Ibn al-ʿArabī: the detailed and exhaustive analogies between man and human society, and the great importance attached to these analogies; the Neoplatonic framework, including idiosyncratic motifs such as that of the *amr-kalima*; and various concepts pertaining to religious-political power (*khalīfa, imām, raʾīs, tadbīr*, etc.), which are given an inner, spiritual-mystical interpretation. These features indicate that in addition to his Sufi background, Ibn al-ʿArabī was also inspired by the type of mystical-philosophical thought which is reflected in *Rasāʾil ikhwān al-ṣafāʾ*.

Before concluding this discussion of the man-city-state analogy, a few words are in order concerning the Arabic work *Sirr al-asrār* ("The Secret of Secrets") and its influence on *al-Tadbīrāt al-ilāhiyya*. This work, the full title of which is *Kitāb al-siyāsa fī tadbīr al-riyāsa* ("The Book of Governance Concerning the Management of Leadership"), is erroneously attributed to Aristotle. It contains advice or various instructions which Aristotle had allegedly given to Alexander the Great, in fields such as political governance, the king's personal ethics and even his own physical hygiene. In the first chapter of his *al-Tadbīrāt al-ilāhiyya*, Ibn al-ʿArabī explains that the incentive to write this book arose after he had read *Sirr al-asrār*, a work to which he had been introduced during a visit to the house of the Shaykh Abū Muḥammad ʿAbdallāh al-Mawrūrī, in Mawrūr (Moron, not far from Seville). According to Ibn al-ʿArabī, al-Mawrūrī stated that *Sirr al-asrār* treats of "the management of this world's kingdom", and invited Ibn al-ʿArabī to "compare it with the governance of the human kingdom, wherein our [spiritual] happiness lies". Ibn al-ʿArabī responded positively to this request, and, according to his own explanation, his work *al-Tadbīrāt*

[86] See Sviri, Self 196 and the references given there in nn. 8–10; Van Ess, *Gedankenwelt* 64–159; Elmore, *Islamic sainthood* 238 n. 11; Böwering, *Mystical vision* 158–9, 241–61; Radtke, Iranian and Gnostic elements; Takeshita, *Ibn ʿArabī's theory* 96–9, 103–5; see also Plato, *Republic* i, 404–9 (= Book iv, 441–2). On the war between the armies of the *ʿaql* and those of the *jahl* (ignorance, wrong conduct or even savagery) in early Shiʿi traditions, see Amir-Moezzi, La Préexistence 120–2; Amir-Moezzi, *Divine guide* 7–8 and index, s.v. "ʿaql".

al-ilāhiyya contains many elements that are missing in *Sirr al-asrār*, namely, those pertaining to man, the microcosm, and his inner, spiritual-mystical realm.[87] Certainly, in many respects, *al-Tadbīrāt al-ilāhiyya* is based on *Sirr al-asrār*, and it contains various materials derived from this pseudo-Aristotelian work. Yet the advice and instructions given by Aristotle to Alexander in *Sirr al-asrār* are shifted in *al-Tadbīrāt al-ilāhiyya* into the inner "kingdom of man", and are interpreted in a mystical manner, in accordance with both the Sufi and Neoplatonic traditions. This interpretation is entirely missing in *Sirr al-asrār*, a work which focuses primarily on the public-political sphere, as Ibn al-ʿArabī himself explains in the first chapter of *al-Tadbīrāt*. Although the analogy between man and the city-state appears in one chapter of *Sirr al-asrār*, it is only referred to briefly.[88] Moreover, different motifs pertaining to this analogy are quite similar to those which are found in the Epistles of *Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ*. The Neoplatonic cosmological scheme which figures in the beginning of the aforementioned chapter in *Sirr al-asrār*—a scheme which is missing in other parts of this work—is clearly derived from the *Ikhwān*'s Epistles.[89] In fact, several scholars have acknowledged the Ikhwānian influence on these passages from *Sirr al-asrār*. According to Manzalaoui, who dedicated to this work an exhaustive study, the longer version of *Sirr al-asrār*—the version which forms the basis for the printed edition—was indeed influenced by *Rasāʾil ikhwān al-ṣafāʾ*.[90] Whether the version which Ibn al-ʿArabī read was this longer version or perhaps some other version which was not necessarily influenced by the Ikhwān's Epistles,[91] it is clear from the foregoing discussion that *al-Tadbīrāt al-ilāhiyya* cannot be fully understood by

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[87] See Ibn al-ʿArabī, *al-Tadbīrāt* 120–1 ("*Kāna sabab taʾlīfinā li-hādhā l-kitāb annahu lammā zurtu l-shaykh al-ṣāliḥ abā muḥammad al-mawrūrī bi-madīnat mawrūr wajadtu ʿindahu kitāb sirr al-asrār* […] *fa-qāla lī abū muḥammad hādhā l-muʾallif qad naẓara fī tadbīr hādhihi l-mamlaka l-dunyawiyya fa-kuntu urīdu minka an tuqābilahu bi-siyāsat al-mamlaka l-insāniyya l-latī fihā saʿādatunā fa-ajabtuhu wa-awdaʿtu fī hādhā l-kitāb min maʿānī tadbīr al-mulk akthar min al-ladhī awdaʿahu l-ḥakīm wa-bayyantu fihi ashyāʾ aghfalahā l-ḥakīm fī tadbīr al-mulk al-kabīr* […] *wa-yakūnu jirm kitāb al-ḥakīm fī l-rubʿ aw al-thulth min jirm hādhā l-kitāb*"); see also Takeshita, *Ibn ʿArabī's theory* 100; Manzalaoui, Pseudo-Aristotelian *Kitāb sirr al-asrār* 242. On al-Mawrūrī see Addas, *Quest*, index, s.v. "ʿAbd Allāh (b. al-Ustādh) al-Mawrūrī". *Sirr al-asrār* was indeed known to Muslims, Jews and Christians alike in medieval al-Andalus, and was translated into Latin and Hebrew; see Manzalaoui, Pseudo-Aristotelian *Kitāb sirr al-asrār* 158, 170, 189.

[88] See Badawī (ed.), *Sirr al-asrār* 132–3.

[89] See ibid. 129–33, 139–40; Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ, *Rasāʾil* ii, 468–72, 474–5, iii, 206–7, 187–96.

[90] See Manzalaoui, Pseudo-Aristotelian *Kitāb sirr al-asrār* 175–84, 193, 197, 199.

[91] See Manzalaoui, Pseudo-Aristotelian *Kitāb sirr al-asrār* 242; cf. ibid. 170, and Grignaschi, L'Origine.

referring only to Sufi literature or, for that matter, to *Sirr al-asrār* alone. Rather, this work should also be analyzed by unearthing the subtle links that connect it to the Ismāʿīlī tradition, particularly to the Epistles of Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ.

Man, the Book and the Universe

As stated in the beginning of this chapter, according to the Ismāʿīlī world-view, a tripartite correspondence exists between man, the Divine holy book and the universe at large: both man and the universe are perceived as a book written by God Himself. This unique perception of reality leads to an equally unique interpretation of the religious duty incumbent on the believer: like the Quran, the text which is inscribed within the human soul and in the various dimensions of creation constitutes a Divine code waiting to be deciphered. Accordingly, man is obliged to read and understand the Divine letters and words that compose the human and universal realities.[92] The concept of God's creative word and the perception of the letters as building blocks of reality are here combined with the notion of parallel worlds; this combination is very typical of the Ismāʿīlī world-view and is likewise reflected in the thought of both Ibn Masarra and Ibn al-ʿArabī.

In order to fully understand the concept dealt with here, one must first analyze its Shiʿi background, and then refer to its humanistic-universal interpretation in the Epistles of Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ.

Shiʿi-Ismāʿīlī Motifs

Elsewhere in this study, I have analyzed the Shiʿi-Ismāʿīlī perception of the *imām*s as God's names and have also referred to the Shiʿi-Ismāʿīlī identification of the *imām* with the Quran or a Divine holy book (*kitāb*).[93] According to another related notion which is likewise reflected in early Shiʿi-Ismāʿīlī traditions, the *imām*s are *āyāt* (singular: *āya*), i.e., miraculous signs indicating the existence and greatness of God and, at the same time, the verses of the Quran. In these traditions, the *imām* is also described as *al-mathal al-aʿlā* ("the most sublime simile"; see Q 30:27; 16:60).[94]

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[92] Cf. Allers, Microcosmus 326–30, 370–83.

[93] See above pp. 146–51, 169–72.

[94] See Amir-Moezzi, *Divine guide* 45, 47–9, 54, 196 n. 387, 201 n. 427; Amir-Moezzi, Remarques 95–6, 100 n. 45; see also Ibn Shahrāshūb, *Manāqib āl abī ṭālib* iii, 315 ("*Qāla*

The idea behind these various speculations is that God's friends—the prophets and their heirs—are the only means by which the believer is able to gain knowledge of God: they are His names, His holy book and its verses; and they are the signs and similes which man must interpret in order to obtain the Divine truths.

In Ismāʿīlī thought, man, the microcosm, corresponds to the universe, the macrocosm; the latter is the product of both the Divine speech and the Divine writing.[95] Hence, not only the *imām* but all of creation is perceived as a Divine book, as a written reality replete with verses/signs indicating the existence of God. This perception is evident, above all, in *Rasāʾil ikhwān al-ṣafāʾ*. In line with their humanistic-universal approach, the Ikhwān maintain that both man and the universe are created by the Divine word and are a book written by God Himself.[96] A similar conception is reflected in the works of Ibn Masarra and Ibn al-ʿArabī.[97] Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ, Ibn Masarra and Ibn al-ʿArabī all combine this conception with Neoplatonic cosmology: the universal intellect, identified with the cosmic pen of the Quran, was created by the Divine speech and writing. From the universal intellect, all other existents emanate, and consequently, all of creation is a Divine book.[98]

The Hermeneutics of Reality

The idea that creation is a reality replete with signs appears already in the Quran. According to the Quran, the wondrous phenomena of nature, the lessons to be learnt from history, the miracles performed by God's prophets and the verses of the Quran itself are all miraculous signs (*āyāt*),

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l-ṣādiq naḥnu wajh allāh wa-naḥnu l-āyāt wa-naḥnu l-bayyināt wa-naḥnu ḥudūd allāh"); Jaʿfar b. Manṣūr al-Yaman, *al-Kashf* 44–5, 80, 115, 131–3 (see especially ibid. 131: "[…] *Minhu āyāt muḥkamāt hunna umm al-kitāb anna l-kitāb mimmā yusammā bihi l-nāṭiq wa-l-āyāt mimmā yusammā bihi l-aʾimma*"); al-Qāḍī l-Nuʿmān, *al-Mudhhiba* 29–30 ("*Wa-ʿanhu ṣalawāt allāh ʿalayhi annahu qāla naḥnu āyāt allāh al-kubrā wa-asmāʾihi* [read: *wa-asmāʾuhu*] *l-ḥusnā wa-amthāluhu l-ʿulyā wa-kalimātuhu l-ṣidq wa-l-ʿadl fa-man tawassala bi-ghayrinā lam yuʿṭā* [read: *yuʿṭa*] *wa-man daʿā li-ghayrinā lam yujab* […] *fa-man aṭāʿanā fa-qad aṭāʿa llāh wa-man ʿaṣānā fa-qad ʿaṣā llāh*"); Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ, *al-Jāmiʿa* i, 118.

95 See above pp. 41–51.

96 See above pp. 169–72.

97 See above pp. 51–7.

98 On the universal intellect as a Divine book in the Epistles of the Ikhwān, see above p. 168 n. 41; and in the writings of Ibn al-ʿArabī, see, for example, *al-Futūḥāt* i, 160 (chapter 5, "waṣl fī asrār umm al-qurʾān", = ʿUthmān Yaḥyā's edition ii, 184: "[…] *Li-anna l-kitāb ʿibāra min bāb al-ishāra ʿan al-mubdaʿ al-awwal* […]"); see also above pp. 170–2; and in the works of Ibn Masarra, see Ibn Masarra, *Khawāṣṣ al-ḥurūf* 145–6, 151–2, 154.

testifying to the existence and greatness of the Creator. Man is required to pay attention to these signs—he must look at them (*ibṣār*), observe and consider them (*naẓar*), reflect on them (*tafakkur*), understand them (*ʿaql*) and take warning or example by them (*iʿtibār, ʿibra*). In the Quranic worldview, the true believers are distinct from all other men in their ability to recognize God's signs and to fathom them. In fact, this intellectual-spiritual activity is considered to be one of the main traits that define one as a believer.[99] The Quranic notion of creation as a reality replete with signs was later adopted by Muslim theologians and philosophers, who readily employed it in their attempts to prove the existence of God.[100] Furthermore, in several medieval Arabic sources such as *Kitāb al-dalāʾil wa-l-iʿtibār ʿalā al-khalq wa-l-tadbīr* ("The Book of Proofs and Contemplation Regarding Creation and the [Divine] Management"), attributed to the well-known *adab* writer and Muʿtazilī author Abū ʿUthmān ʿAmr b. Baḥr al-Jāḥiẓ (died in 255/868–869), but which was most likely composed by a Christian theologian around the 10th century; or *Kitāb al-ḥikma fī makhlūqāt allāh* ("The Book of the [Divine] Wisdom [Reflected] in Allāh's Created Beings"), ascribed to al-Ghazālī; or *al-Hidāya ilā farāʾiḍ al-qulūb* ("The Duties of the Hearts"), by the Jewish Andalusī author Baḥyā b. Paqūda—in these sources, the contemplation of creation and nature (*iʿtibār*) in order to learn about the existence of God, His power, wisdom and providence is presented as a religious duty incumbent upon man. In a similar vein, both Ibn Rushd (Averroes) and Maimonides maintain that *iʿtibār*—according to them the intellectual-philosophical contemplation of creation and nature—is a fundamental religious obligation.[101]

In Ismāʿīlī literature, these various themes were interpreted in a unique way. To begin with, the religious-hermeneutical activity incumbent on man—that is, his obligation to decipher the signs and similes in creation, to read the Divine book of reality and to study the names of God—this activity is perceived by the Ismāʿīlī authors as centered on and as leading to the recognition of God's friends, the prophets and *imām*s. Moreover, in the course of his religious-hermeneutical 'journey', the believer is seen as ascending, intellectually and mystically, through the various echelons of

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[99] See the many references to the Quran in Jeffery, Āya; Abrahamov, Signs; and ʿAbd al-Bāqī, *al-Muʿjam al-mufahras*, s.v. b.ṣ.r., n.ẓ.r., f.k.r., ʿ.q.l. and ʿ.b.r.

[100] See Abrahamov, Signs 8–9.

[101] Apparently, the aforementioned *Kitāb al-dalāʾil wa-l-iʿtibār* was the source from which both al-Ghazālī and Baḥyā derived their notions regarding *iʿtibār*. On this matter and on Ibn Rushd and Maimonides, see Baneth, Common teleological source (in Hebrew); Harvey, Averroes (in Hebrew); Lobel, *A Sufi-Jewish dialogue* 117–45.

the universe.[102] This cosmic-vertical dimension is linked to the notion of parallel worlds: the believer is expected to discover the correspondences between the different worlds, and by doing so, he himself becomes connected to the universe at large, the macrocosm. Finally, the deciphering of reality is intended not only to fulfill the intellectual and spiritual needs of man, but also to guarantee him an eschatological salvation (*najāt*). Thus, in chapter 23 of his work *al-Yanābīʿ*, al-Sijistānī draws several analogies between the letters, the words and the orthographic divisions that comprise the *shahāda* (the formula *lā ilāh illā llāh*, "there is no god but Allāh"), on the one hand, and the universal intellect, the universal soul, the world of the celestial spheres and the human body, on the other. Al-Sijistānī refers to the world of the celestial spheres and the human body as *al-āfāq* ("the horizons" = the macrocosm) and *al-anfus* ("the souls" = the microcosm) respectively, in accordance with the Quranic verse in Q 41:53: "We will show them our signs (*āyātinā*) in the horizons and in their souls, so it will become clear to them that this indeed is the truth".[103] In the concluding paragraph of this chapter, al-Sijistānī writes:

> In this way, he [the spiritual novice] will realize that his body and his world correspond (*muwāfiqāni*) to his religion by means of which he believes in Allāh, and that his afterlife corresponds to his religion, to this world of his and to his body. He will thus worship Allāh, mighty is He, as He is truly worthy of being worshipped.[104]

In this passage, discovering the correspondences between the various worlds and deciphering the signs in both the microcosm and macrocosm are presented as the true *taʾwīl* (esoteric interpretation), and, consequently, as the only form of worship (*ʿibāda*) that leads one to salvation.[105]

Similarly, in their twenty-sixth Epistle ("Concerning the Saying of the Wise Men that Man is a Small World"), the Ikhwān employ the aforementioned term *iʿtibār* ("contemplation") in order to signify the hermeneutical

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[102] See below pp. 221–9.

[103] See also Q 51:20–21.

[104] Al-Sijistānī, *al-Yanābīʿ* 59 ("*Wa-qad ṣawwarnā dāʾira mushtamila ʿalā ṣūrat hādhihi l-taqāsīm min al-shahāda wa-min al-āfāq wa-l-anfus wa-min ʿibādat al-sābiq*"; "[. . .] *Li-yakūna dhālika nuṣba ʿayn al-murtādīna l-bāḥithīna fa-yaʿlamu anna badanahu waʿālamahu muwāfiqāni li-dīnihi l-ladhī yadīnu llāh bihi wa-yaʿlamu anna maʿādahu muwāfiq li-dīnihi wa-dunyāhu wa-badanihi fa-yaʿbudu llāh ḥaqq ʿibādatihi jalla jalāluhu*"). For a similar use of the expression *al-āfāq wa-l-anfus* in connection with the notion of parallel worlds, see al-Kirmānī, *Rāḥat al-ʿaql* 94, 121; cf. Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ, *Rasāʾil* iv, 427–8.

[105] On *taʾwīl, ʿibāda bāṭina* ("inner worship"), the notion of parallel worlds and salvation, see also al-Kirmānī, *Rāḥat al-ʿaql* 167, 209.

activity whereby one discovers the correspondences between the different worlds.[106] The Ikhwān instruct their reader as follows:

> Oh, brother, observe (*fa-nẓur*) this temple which is built so wisely, look into (*wa-ta'ammal*) this book which is filled with knowledge, reflect (*wa-tafakkar*) on this bridge which leads in the right direction (*al-ṣirāṭ al-mustaqīm*) and extends from paradise to hell—and perhaps you will be given the ability to perform good actions and to pass over this bridge. Look into these just scales—and perhaps you will come to know the weight of your good and bad deeds; perform your own reckoning with [these scales], before the capital of your property will disappear, for paradise is behind all this.[107]

Reading the "book", i.e., the microcosm, and discovering its correspondences with the macrocosm inevitably leads one to paradise.

Eschatological salvation is thus dependent upon man's understanding that religion (*dīn*) matches and corresponds to the structure of the world and of creation (*dunyā, khalq*). This correspondence is what enables man to learn about the universe from religion and *vice versa*—to learn about religion from the structure of the universe.[108] In Ismā'īlī literature, this hermeneutical passage between the physical and the spiritual dimensions of reality is neatly reflected in the opposite terms *ẓāhir-bāṭin* ("external-manifest" as opposed to "inner-hidden"), *mathal*/*mithāl-mamthūl* ("simile" as opposed to that which is indicated by the simile), *ism-ma'nā* ("name" as opposed to its "meaning") and *dalāla*/*dalīl-madlūl* ("sign" or "proof"

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[106] See, for example, the titles of the chapters in this Epistle (*Rasā'il* ii, 457, 463, 473): *i'tibār aḥwāl al-insān bi-aḥwāl al-mawjūdāt* ("learning about the condition of man from the condition of [other] existents"), *i'tibār aḥwāl al-insān bi-aḥwāl al-falak* ("learning about the condition of man from the condition of the celestial sphere[s]"), *i'tibār aḥwāl al-insān bi-l-mawjūdāt al-latī dūna falak al-qamar* ("learning about the condition of man from the existents in the sub-lunar world"). Note also the recurring use of the verb *i'tabara* in this context in ibid. 456–7 (+ *naẓar*, *mushāhada, tafakkur*), 458–60; see also ibid. iv, 235 (+ *ta'ammul*). Compare to a similar use of the term *i'tibār* in Ibn al-'Arabī, *al-Tadbīrāt* 107–9 (+ *fikr* and the verse from Q 41:53), 120, 126–7, 139–41, 152; see also ibid. 104 (+ *naẓar*), 105, 111 (+ *naẓar*). On eschatological salvation (*najāt*) and the notion of parallel worlds, see ibid. 111. For the verse from Q 41:53 in the writings of Ibn al-'Arabī, in a context similar to the one examined here, see also Chittick, *Self-disclosure* 6–12; Chittick, *Sufi path* xv, 157 and n. 21. For a general discussion of *i'tibār* in the thought of Ibn al-'Arabī, see Gril, L'Interprétation 147, 157–61.

[107] Ikhwān al-Ṣafā', *Rasā'il* ii, 475–6 ("*Fa-nẓur yā akhī ilā hādhā l-haykal al-mabnī bi-l-ḥikma wa-ta'ammal hādhā l-kitāb al-mamlū' min al-'ulūm wa-tafakkar fī hādhā l-ṣirāṭ al-mustaqīm al-mamdūd bayna l-janna wa-l-nār fa-la'allaka an tuwaffaqa lil-khayrāt 'alayhi wa-l-mamarr 'alā l-ṣirāṭ al-mustaqīm wa-ta'ammal hādhā l-mīzān al-mawḍū' bi-l-qisṭ fa-la'allaka ta'rifu wazn ḥasanātika wa-sayyi'ātika wa-ḥsub ḥisābaka bihi qabla fawt ra's mālika fa-inna l-janna min warā' hādhā kullihi*").

[108] See, for example, Ikhwān al-Ṣafā', *al-Jāmi'a* i, 608–9, ii, 111; al-Kirmānī, *Rāḥat al-'aql* 180–1, 226, 240, 263; al-Ḥāmidī, *Kanz al-walad* 273.

as opposed to that which is indicated or proven by it).[109] The believer is obliged to pass from the external-manifest aspect of reality to its inner-hidden realm; he must decipher the similes and signs scattered throughout creation, in order to reach the subtle objects indicated by them; and he is required to uncover the real meanings behind the various names known to man. The unveiling of the inner-hidden and upper-spiritual dimension of reality through the external-manifest and lower-corporeal domain is often referred to as *istidlāl* (literally: "seeking an indication/proof", "adducing an indication/proof").[110]

However, there is no consensus in the Ismāʿīlī tradition regarding the ultimate objective of the hermeneutical process described here. According to the mainstream view in Ismāʿīlī literature, the believer's hermeneutical activity should center on the prophet and the *imām*: they are the means by which one arrives at the Divine truth—that is, they are the Divine book and its verses, they are the names of God, the signs and the similes—and, at the same time, they are the content itself of the Divine truth, they themselves are the final goal of man's hermeneutical 'journey'. A fine example of this approach can be found in *al-ʿĀlim wa-l-ghulām*.[111] In this work, the structure of the corporeal world and all its inhabitants are perceived as signs, as evidence, proofs and similes (*āyāt, shawāhid, dalāʾil, amthāl*) which indicate the existence of God as well as the reality of God's friends—the *nuṭaqāʾ*, the *imām*s and the members of the *daʿwa* hierarchy. The *awliyāʾ* are thus the inner-hidden aspect (*bāṭin*) of reality, they are the truths which are indicated by the similes (singular: *mamthūl*) in creation. On the other hand, the *awliyāʾ* themselves are signs which prove the existence of God (*dalāʾil, adilla*), and they are likewise guides (*adillāʾ*) who direct the believers towards their salvation (*najāt*).[112] Similarly, according to the myth of *Kūnī-Qadar*, the seven planets and the twelve signs of the zodiac are the external aspect, the signs and the similes

[109] See, in addition to the references in nn. 110–12 below, al-Qāḍī l-Nuʿmān, *al-Mudhhiba* 29, 41, 63; al-Kirmānī, *Rāḥat al-ʿaql* 246–7; al-Kirmānī, *al-Riyāḍ* 176–7, 185, 194.

[110] For *istidlāl*, see, for example, Stern, Earliest cosmological doctrines 14; Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ, *Rasāʾil* ii, 114–5 (+ *tafakkur*), iii, 377 (+ *iʿtibār*); Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ, *al-Jāmiʿa* (Tāmir's edition) v, 154; al-Ḥāmidī, *Kanz al-walad* 273. On *istidlāl* as the process whereby one learns about the structure of the universe from religion, see al-Kirmānī, *Rāḥat al-ʿaql* 179, 318. On *istidlāl* as the unveiling of the inner aspect of religion through its external aspect (= *taʾwīl*), see al-Kirmānī, *al-Riyāḍ* 176.

[111] On this early Ismāʿīlī work and its author, see above p. 43.

[112] See Jaʿfar b. Manṣūr al-Yaman, *al-ʿĀlim wa-l-ghulām* 15–8, 24–5 and the references in the index, p. 112. On the friends of God as signs proving the existence of God and as guides, see also al-Kirmānī, *Rāḥat al-ʿaql* 51, 217–8; Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ, *al-Jāmiʿa* i, 672–3, ii, 346–9.

indicating the seven Cherubs and the twelve "spiritual boundaries", while the sun and the moon indicate *Kūnī* and *Qadar* respectively.[113] Finally, Abū Ḥātim al-Rāzī maintains that the structure of the human body points to the seven letters of *kūnī-qadar* and to the *awliyāʾ* hierarchy—the seven *nuṭaqāʾ*, their legatees, the *imām*s and the ranks of the *daʿwa* organization. Al-Rāzī explains that man is

> the small world, for within him all the evidence (*shawāhid*) is assembled together. Allāh, powerful and mighty is He, created man and all his [different] parts as an indicative sign (*dalīl*) for his own sake, so that he will be an argument against himself (*ḥujja ʿalā nafsihi*).[114]

In al-Rāzī's view, studying the microcosm and discerning its correspondences with the macrocosm lead one to the recognition of God's friends. Man is therefore "an argument against himself"—in other words, on judgment day, he will not be able to claim that he was unaware of the right path, unaware of the existence and true nature of the *awliyāʾ*.[115]

Contrary to this mainstream Ismāʿīlī approach, Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ espouse a more complex view, one which focuses not only on the prophets and their heirs, but also on man in general and on the universe at large. As regards the universe, the macrocosm, the Ikhwān perceive all of creation as a Divine book and as a reality replete with signs, marks and proofs (*āyāt, ʿalāmāt, dalālāt*). This notion is reflected in many passages throughout their Epistles; the Ikhwān urge the believer to read the cosmic book, to consider and observe (*naẓar*), to look into (*taʾammul, tadabbur*) and to reflect on (*tafakkur*) "the signs/verses which are written in the horizons and in the souls" (*al-āyāt al-maktūba fī l-āfāq wa-l-anfus*). The deciphering of these signs will lead one to the knowledge of the Creator, His unity, power and might.[116] As to the microcosm, the Ikhwān maintain that man himself abounds with signs, evidence and proofs (*āyāt, shawāhid, dalālāt*), similes and indications (*mithālāt*/*amthāl, ishārāt*) which all point to the

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[113] See Stern, Earliest cosmological doctrines 9, 14–5; see also al-Qāḍī l-Nuʿmān, *al-Mudhhiba* 54. On the hypostases and angelic beings mentioned here, see above pp. 41–3.

[114] Al-Rāzī, *al-Iṣlāḥ* 211–2 ("*Wa-kadhālika l-sharāʾiʿ kulluhā ʿalā mithāl ṣūrat al-insān al-ladhī huwa l-ʿālam al-ṣaghīr li-annahu majmaʿ al-shawāhid kullihā wa-inna llāh ʿazza wa-jalla khalaqahu wa-khalaqa jamīʿ ajzāʾihi dalīlan lahu li-yakūna ḥujja ʿalā nafsihi*"); see also ibid. 213.

[115] On the term *ḥujja*, see above p. 66 n. 118.

[116] See, for example, Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ, *al-Jāmiʿa* i, 104–7, 151, 182, 199–201, 289–90, 360, 448–50, ii, 21, 25–6, 35, 356.

structure of creation and to its mode of operation.[117] Moreover, according to the Ikhwān, the human organism is a Divine book which merits reading, consideration and observation, thought and reflection. It is by means of this book that one may attain the Divine truth.[118] From a Shiʿi perspective, this truth amounts to acknowledging the supreme-Divine status of the prophets and their heirs. However, from a humanistic-universal perspective, the Divine truth means awareness of man's central position in creation, the realization of his true relationship with God and the universe. Both perspectives 'coexist' in the Epistles of the Ikhwān and should not be viewed as mutually exclusive.

Ibn Masarra shares the Ikhwānian perception of reality as a book whose verses/signs necessitate reading and deciphering. In fact, Ibn Masarra's *Risālat al-iʿtibār* ("The Epistle on Contemplation") is dedicated in its entirety to clarifying this very perception, and, like the Epistles of the Ikhwān, is utterly inspired by Neoplatonic philosophy. According to Ibn Masarra,

> [Allāh], powerful and mighty is He, established His heaven and earth, which He created, as signs indicating Him (*āyāt dāllāt ʿalayhi*) and expressing his Lordship and His most beautiful attributes. The whole world is a book whose letters are His speech; those who are endowed with perceptive vision (*al-mustabṣirūn*) read it.
>
> Everything that [Allāh] created is an object of thought (*fikra*) and a matter for instruction (*dalāla*).
>
> In His book [the Quran], [Allāh], powerful and mighty is He, roused [our] attention, urged and encouraged [us], time and again, to reflect, to remember and to consider (*al-tabaṣṣur*).

Ibn Masarra further explains that "the external-manifest signs" (*al-āyāt al-ẓāhira*), which are scattered throughout creation, point to "the inner-hidden matters" (*al-umūr al-bāṭina*). These "inner-hidden matters" pertain to cosmological knowledge, i.e., the hierarchal structure of the universe, in accordance with Neoplatonic philosophy: the sub-lunar world, the universal soul, the universal intellect and the one and only God who presides over this magnificent cosmic hierarchy.[119] Moreover, like the Ismāʿīlī

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[117] See, for example, Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ, *Rasāʾil* ii, 457, 463, 472, iv, 235; Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ, *al-Jāmiʿa* i, 239, 241, 333.

[118] See, for instance, Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ, *Rasāʾil* ii, 475–6, iv, 167–8, 237; Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ, *al-Jāmiʿa* i, 170–2, 579–81, 592, ii, 332–3.

[119] See Ibn Masarra, *al-Iʿtibār* 175 ("*Thumma jaʿala ʿazza wa-jalla kull mā khalaqa min samāʾihi wa-arḍihi āyāt dāllāt ʿalayhi muʿriba bi-rubūbiyyatihi wa-ṣifātihi l-ḥusnā fa-l-*

authors, Ibn Masarra views the hermeneutical activity of the believer as entailing a mystical-philosophical ascension through the various echelons of creation; he too envisages the eschatological salvation of man at the end of this process; and finally, he links the hermeneutical ascension, with its eschatological climax, to the notion of *walāya* and *awliyā'*.[120]

The general aim of *Risālat al-iʿtibār*, according to Ibn Masarra himself, is to prove the correspondence between prophecy and *iʿtibār*. In the course of his contemplation, man focuses his mental attention on creation and its diverse phenomena. Commencing in the lower echelons of reality, he gradually climbs from one level to the next one, until, eventually, he reaches God Himself, who is situated at the top of the cosmic hierarchy. During his mystical-intellectual ascension, the believer slowly gains knowledge of those inner-hidden matters referred to above.[121] This process is meant to prove the existence of God and His unity in the same way that prophecy does, albeit in the opposite direction—that is, from the lower, corporeal worlds to the upper, spiritual ones. Ibn Masarra—like the Ismāʿīlī authors—maintains that religion corresponds perfectly with the hierarchal structure of the universe and *vice versa*:

> At first, the prophetic information (*khabar al-nubuwwa*) comes from the direction of the throne [= the universal intellect], and then it descends unto earth. It thus corresponds (*wāfaqa*) exactly with contemplation, which climbs from the direction of the earth towards the throne; there is no difference [between the two]. Every clear item of information (*naba'*), coming from Allāh, has a sign (*āya*) within the world that indicates it; and every sign within the world, indicating an item of [Divine] information—prophecy has

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ʿālam kulluhu kitāb ḥurūfuhu kalāmuhu yaqra'uhu l-mustabṣirūna […]"), 176 ("[…] *Kull mā khalaqa min shay' mawḍūʿ lil-fikra wa-maṭlab lil-dalāla*"; "*Wa-nabbaha ʿazza wa-jalla wa-ḥaḍḍa wa-karrara wa-raghghaba fī kitābihi ʿalā l-tafakkur wa-l-tadhakkur wa-l-tabaṣṣur*"; "*Wa-baʿatha l-anbiyā' ṣalāt allāh ʿalayhim wa-barakātuhu yunabbi'ūna l-nās wa-yubayyinūna lahum al-umūr al-bāṭina wa-yastashhidūna ʿalayhā bi-l-āyāt al-ẓāhira* […]"); see also ibid. 189. For a general discussion of the concept of *iʿtibār* in Ibn Masarra's thought, see Gril, L'Interprétation 149–52.

[120] See below pp. 221–9. On the eschatological dimension in Ibn Masarra's thought, see also Stroumsa and Sviri, Beginnings 212, 228, 231, 243–4.

[121] In addition to *iʿtibār*, Ibn Masarra also employs the terms *naẓar* and *istidlāl* in order to designate the process described here; see Ibn Masarra, *al-Iʿtibār* 175–6, 179–81, 184–7, 189; Ibn Masarra, *Khawāṣṣ al-ḥurūf* 130, 133, 135–6, 140–1. Other relevant terms are *fikra* and *tafakkur*; see *al-Iʿtibār* 175–6; *Khawāṣṣ al-ḥurūf* 130. As is clear from the discussion in this chapter, all these various terms are quite common in Ismāʿīlī literature, in contexts which are similar to those found in Ibn Masarra's works.

> already informed [us] of it and has roused [our] attention to it, whether in a detailed or a general way.[122]

The correspondence between religion and the structure of the universe may explain why Ibn Masarra and the Ikhwān assume such a close link between the knowledge of the Quran and the study of creation. Both the Quran and the universe are Divine texts; hence, the interpretation of one inevitably leads to the deciphering of the other. This idea may also explain why Ibn Masarra and the Ikhwān chose to interpret the Quranic *fawātiḥ* in line with Neoplatonic cosmology and the notion of parallel worlds, and why they both perceive this interpretation as an act of human contemplation, *iʿtibār*.[123]

Mystical Ascension

Mystical ascension is a common theme in the mystical writings of all three Abrahamic religions—Judaism, Christianity and Islam. There are many questions pertaining to this theme: for instance, who is granted the privilege of performing such an ascension, and which part of man participates in it (the soul, the intellect or the physical body as well)? What is the final destination or limit of the mystical ascension? When does the ascension take place (during sleep, or in the state of wakefulness; before death, or thereafter)? And what is the ultimate goal of the ascension (a vision of the upper worlds, the obtainment of Divine secrets, union with God, etc.)?[124] I will limit myself here to a discussion of the link between

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[122] Ibn Masarra, *al-Iʿtibār* 189–90 ("*Fa-jāʾa khabar al-nubuwwa mubtadiʾan min jihat al-ʿarsh nāzilan ilā l-arḍ fa-wāfaqa l-iʿtibār al-ṣāʿid min jihat al-arḍ ilā l-ʿarsh sawāʾan sawāʾan lā farq lam yaʾti nabaʾ ʿan allāh bayyinan illā wa-fī l-ʿālam āya dālla ʿalā dhālika l-nabaʾ wa-laysa fī l-ʿālam āya dālla ʿalā nabaʾ illā wa-l-nubuwwa qad nabbaʾat bihi wa-nabbahat ʿalayhi immā tafṣīlan wa-immā mujmalan*"); see also ibid. 175, 178. Note that in a discussion of his concerning the structure of the universe (in line with Neoplatonic cosmology), and the way in which this structure is reflected in the *basmala*, Ibn Masarra emphasizes the compatibility of prophetic knowledge with the knowledge of Divine unity that was attained by "the philosophers and the ancient ones from among the erring nations (*al-umam al-ḍālla*), those who lived in the periods of intervals [between the prophets, *ahl al-fatarāt*]"; see *Khawāṣṣ al-ḥurūf* 133. This positive, albeit condescending attitude of Ibn Masarra towards the philosophers brings to mind the positive attitude of the Ismāʿīli Neoplatonists towards philosophers, particularly that of the Ikhwān; see, for example, El-Bizri, *Epistles* 10–13; Netton, *Muslim Neoplatonists* 6–52. On the other hand, Ibn Masarra is also quite critical of the philosophers; see *al-Iʿtibār* 187–8; see also Stroumsa and Sviri, Beginnings 212, 230–1, 241; and cf. Tornero, A report, especially pp. 134–5.

[123] See above pp. 103–8.

[124] On the theme of mystical ascension, mainly in Judaism and Islam, see Idel, *Ascensions*; Idel, *Kabbalah* 88–96, and the references given there in n. 88–94; Altmann,

the theme of mystical ascension and the hermeneutical process described above—i.e., the deciphering of the Divine signs in creation and the reading of the human and cosmic books.

In Ismāʿīlī Neoplatonic literature, the deciphering of the signs within creation is perceived as accompanied by a mystical ascension through the echelons of the cosmic hierarchy. This perception is particularly characteristic of Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ's thought, yet its origins go back to Plotinus. The latter viewed the study of philosophy, combined with a proper moral conduct and ascetic practices, as a means by which man may ascend to the worlds of the universal soul and intellect, and perhaps even unite with the One.[125] Similarly, according to the *Theology of Aristotle*—the Arabic adaptation of Plotinus's *Enneads*[126]—observing the physical phenomena in this world leads man to a mystical-intellectual ascension to the spiritual world of the universal intellect.[127]

In Ismāʿīlī Neoplatonic writings, Abraham the patriarch is presented as the prototype of the believer who contemplates creation and succeeds in deciphering the signs scattered therein. According to the Quranic story, which echoes motifs from the Jewish Midrash, Abraham discovered the existence of the one and only God by observing natural phenomena, namely, the daily rising and setting of the sun, the moon and the stars. In the Quran's own words, Abraham was granted the privilege of seeing the kingdom of the heavens and the earth (*malakūt al-samawāt wa-l-arḍ*).[128] The Ismāʿīlī Neoplatonic author al-Nasafī, who lived during the first half

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Ladder; Amir-Moezzi, *Le Voyage*; Colby, *Subtleties*, especially pp. 1–27; Colby, *Narrating Muḥammad's night journey*; Chodkiewicz, *Seal of the saints* 147–82; Morris, Spiritual ascension; Bar-Asher and Kofsky, *Nuṣayrī-ʿAlawī religion* 75–88; Gruber and Colby, *Prophet's ascension*; Vuckovic, *Heavenly journeys*; Van Bladel, *Arabic Hermes* 164–84; Halperin, Hekhalot and Miʿraj.

[125] See, for example, Plotinus, *Enneads* i, 258–63 (= Ennead i, 6, 9), iv, 140–3, 396–401 (= iv, 4, 2; iv, 8, 1), v, 14–21, 72–135, 268–77, 286–91 (= v, 1, 2–3; v, 3; v, 8, 10–11; v, 9, 1–2), vii, 181–201, 301–45 (= vi, 7, 31–36; vi, 9); see also the references above in p. 24 n. 71.

[126] On this work, see above pp. 36–40.

[127] See, for instance, Badawī (ed.), *Theology of Aristotle* (*the shorter version*) 110 ("*Fa-idhā raʾā hādhihi l-ashyāʾ al-ḥissiyya l-latī fī hādhā l-ʿālam al-suflī l-ḥissī fa-l-yarqa bi-ʿaqlihi ilā l-ʿālam al-aʿlā l-ḥaqq* […] *wa-yulqi baṣarahu ʿalayhi fa-innahu sa-yarā l-ashyāʾ kullahā l-latī raʾāhā fī hādhā l-ʿālam ghayr annahu yarāhā ʿaqliyya dāʾima muttaṣila bi-faḍāʾil wa-ḥayāt naqiyya* […] *wa-yarā hunāka l-ʿaql al-sharīf qayyiman ʿalayhā wa-mudabbiran lahā bi-ḥikma lā tūṣafu* […] *wa-yarā hunāka l-ashyāʾ mumtaliʾa nūran wa-ʿaqlan wa-ḥikma* […]"), 111.

[128] See Q 6:75–9. For the Jewish *midrash*ic motifs, see the references in Stroumsa and Sviri, Beginnings 211 n. 43.

of the 10th century,[129] incorporated these themes into the distinctive cosmological scheme of Ismāʿīlī Neoplatonism:

> When [Abraham] discovered the rank of *al-Jadd*[130] and saw (*fa-raʾā*) its light, its beauty and its majesty, he considered [it] extraordinary, deemed [it] great and assumed that it was the Creator. Yet when he looked closely at it (*taʾammalahu*), he found that it ultimately reached that which was above it [or: that it reached its end by that which was above it, *mutanāhiyan ilā mā fawqahu*].

Then, according to al-Nasafī, when Abraham

> saw the [universal] soul, which had appeared before him in its very own being (*qad tarāyā lahu bi-huwiyyatihi*), and he saw its light, its beauty and its greatness, he became submissive, acknowledged that this was the Creator and said: 'this is my Lord [see Q 6:77]'. However, when he finally reached (*tanāhā*) the boundary of the preceding one [*ḥadd al-sābiq*, i.e., the level of the universal intellect], he discovered that the [universal soul] is [likewise] finite (*mutanāhiyan*) […] [And when Abraham] discovered the boundary of the preceding one, he deemed it great, acknowledged [his own] servitude and said, 'this is my Lord, this is bigger [Q 6:78]'. He said concerning it what he had said concerning *al-Jadd* and the [universal] soul.

Having realized that all created beings, in their very nature, are finite, Abraham eventually came to recognize the one supreme God.[131] In this passage, the contemplation of the structure of creation is perceived not only as a mental-intellectual activity, but also as a mystical ascension through the various levels of the cosmos—the angelic hypostases *al-Jadd*, *al-Fatḥ* and *al-Khayāl*, situated (according to Ismāʿīlī Neoplatonic cosmology) beneath the universal soul; the universal soul; the universal intellect; and, finally, God. In the course of this ascension, man reaches (*tanāhā* in al-Nasafī's text) the uppermost spiritual worlds—perhaps even God

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[129] On him see above p. 44.

[130] On the angelic being *al-Jadd*, located (according to Ismāʿīlī Neoplatonic cosmology) beneath the universal soul, see above p. 153 n. 95.

[131] Quoted in al-Rāzī, *al-Iṣlāḥ* 183–4 ("[…] *Lammā ṭṭalaʿa ʿalā darajat al-jadd fa-raʾā nūrahu wa-bahāʾahu wa-jalālatahu taʿajjaba wa-staʿẓama wa-qaddara fī nafsihi annahu l-mubdiʿ fa-lammā taʾammalahu wajadahu mutanāhiyan ilā mā fawqahu* […] *fa-lammā* […] *raʾā l-nafs qad tarāyā lahu bi-huwiyyatihi fa-raʾā nūrahu wa-bahāʾahu wa-ʿaẓamatahu khaḍaʿa wa-aqarra annahu l-mubdiʿ fa-qāla hādhā rabbī fa-lammā tanāhā ilā ḥadd al-sābiq wajadahu mutanāhiyan* […] *fa-lammā* […] *iṭṭalaʿa ʿalā ḥadd al-sābiq wa-staʿẓamahu wa-aqarra bi-l-ʿubūdiyya wa-qāla hādhā rabbī hādhā akbar wa-qāla fī dhālika mithla mā qāla fī shaʾn al-jadd wa-l-nafs*"); see also Halm, *Kosmologie* 70–1.

Himself[132]—and observes them closely (*fa-raʾā, taʾammalahu*). Gradually he obtains knowledge of the universe: he understands that every level in the cosmic hierarchy is subordinate to the level which is located above it and realizes that God alone is unlimited and infinite.[133]

In the Epistles of Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ, the contemplation of reality and the deciphering of its Divine signs are likewise seen as entailing a mystical ascension through the strata of the universe. "The way of our brothers", the Ikhwān explain,

> is to observe (*al-naẓar*) all existents; to pursue their first principles, the cause of their existence and the levels in which they are arranged; and to discover the way in which their effects are connected to their causes.
>
> By observing this world, the concentrated intentions of our souls (*himam nufūsinā*) will ascend (*taraqqī*) to the world of the celestial spheres, the loftiest abode [*maskin al-ʿilliyyīn*; see Q 83:18], and our thoughts will roam where the angels dwell. As a result, our souls will wake from the sleep of neglectfulness and the slumber of ignorance; they will then be driven to rise and pass from the world of generation and corruption to the world of everlasting and permanent [existence]; and this will awaken the desire in them to set out for a journey from the world of bodies, where the devils reside, to the world of spirits, where the angels live close [to God].

Like a al-Nasafī, the Ikhwān link this mystical experience to the figure of Abraham: they address the passage quoted here to

> those who reflect (*al-mutafakkirīn*) on the kingdom of the heavens and the earth, who say: 'our Lord, you have not created this in vain [Q 3:191]' [...] Allāh, may He be exalted, said: 'and there are signs (*āyāt*) on earth for those who possess certitude in their knowledge [Q 51:20]', and 'thus We have shown Abraham the kingdom of the heavens and the earth, so that he may be among those who possess certitude in their knowledge [6: 75]'.[134]

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[132] This may be inferred from al-Rāzī's criticism of al-Nasafī. According to the former, the vision of God is not at all possible, while the vision of the universal soul and intellect in this world amounts only to intellectual knowledge; see *al-Iṣlāḥ* 184–9, especially p. 185: ("*Fa-inna hādhihi manzila lā yanālūnahā fī hādhā l-ʿālam innamā yaʿrifūna nūrahu wa-bahāʾahu maʿrifa wa-ʿilman lā ruʾya bi-huwiyyatihi wa-lā yajūzu an yaʿtaqida annahum yanālūna ruʾyat al-aṣlayni bi-huwiyyatihimā fī hādhā l-ʿālam* [...]").

[133] Compare the passage analyzed here to the description of the mystical ascension in Plotinus, *Enneads* v, 286–91 (= Ennead v, 9, 1–2).

[134] Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ, *Rasāʾil* i, 158 ("[...] *Anna madhhab ikhwāninā* [...] *huwa l-naẓar fī jamīʿ al-mawjūdāt wa-l-baḥth ʿan mabādiʾihā wa-ʿan ʿillat wijdānihā wa-ʿan marātib niẓāmihā wa-l-kashf ʿan kayfiyyat irtibāṭ maʿlūlātihā bi-ʿilalihā*"), 159 ("[...] *Fa-inna l-naẓar fī hādhā l-ʿālam yakūnu sababan li-taraqqī himam nufūsinā ilā ʿālam al-aflāk maskin al-ʿilliyyīna wa-yakthuru jawalānu afkārinā* [or: *wa-yukaththiru jawalāna afkārinā*] *fī maḥall al-rūḥāniyyīna wa-kathrat afkārinā fī ʿālam al-aflāk takūnu sababan li-ntibāh nufūsinā min nawm al-ghafla wa-raqdat al-jahāla wa-yadʿūhā dhālika ilā l-inbiʿāth min ʿālam al-kawn*

In other passages as well, the Ikhwān link the figure of Abraham and the motif of "the kingdom of the heavens and the earth" to the hermeneutical-mystical process whereby the believer studies reality, deciphers its signs and reads the microcosmic and macrocosmic books.[135] Throughout their Epistles, the Ikhwān emphasize the eschatological outcome of this process: the contemplation of reality is indispensable for man's spiritual salvation, and it guarantees his final passage, following his physical death, to the world of the celestial spheres, where he becomes an actual, living angel.[136]

In *Rasā'il ikhwān al-ṣafā'*, studying "the kingdom of the heavens and the earth", reflecting on the Divine signs within creation and reading the cosmic book are perceived as a religious-mystical ritual which involves the observance of the heavenly bodies, ablution and prayer.[137] Moreover, according to the Ikhwān, by contemplating reality and reading the microcosmic and macrocosmic books, man experiences not only a mystical-intellectual ascension, but also a profound change in his very own personality. In one passage, the Ikhwān urge the believer to read the four types of books which form the basis of their religious-spiritual path: the philosophers' books; the holy books delivered by the prophets; "the books of nature" (*al-kutub al-ṭabī'iyya*), that is, the world of the celestial spheres and the sub-lunar world with all its inhabitants; and, finally, "the Divine books" (*al-kutub al-ilāhiyya*)—the human souls, their modes of operation, the hierarchy in which they are organized and their eschatological fate. The Ikhwān assure the believer that if he were to join their company, assimilate their moral traits (*al-takhalluq bi-akhlāqihim*) and awaken his soul from its "sleep of neglectfulness and slumber of ignorance", then

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wa-l-fasād ilā 'ālam al-baqā' wa-l-dawām wa-yuraghghibuhā fī l-riḥla min 'ālam al-ajsād wa-jiwār al-shayāṭīn ilā 'ālam al-arwāḥ wa-jiwār al-malā'ika l-muqarrabīna"; "[…] *Lil-mutafakkirīna fī malakūt al-samawāt wa-l-arḍīna l-ladhīna yaqūlūna rabbanā mā khalaqta hādhā bāṭilan* […] *wa-qāla llāh ta'ālā wa-fī l-arḍ āyāt lil-mūqinīna wa-qāla wa-kadhālika nurī ibrāhīm malakūt al-samawāt wa-l-arḍ wa-li-yakūna min al-mūqinīna*"). Concerning the expression "to roam" (*jawalān*) in this context, cf. Ibn Masarra, *al-I'tibār* 182; and see also Stroumsa and Sviri, Beginnings 234–5.

[135] See Ikhwān al-Ṣafā', *al-Jāmi'a* i, 170–1, 212–3, 360–3; see also Ikhwān al-Ṣafā', *Rasā'il* iv, 251–2.

[136] See, for example, Ikhwān al-Ṣafā', *Rasā'il* i, 167–8 (where the terms *i'tibār, naẓar, tafakkur* and *āyāt* are mentioned), iv, 68 (*tafkīr* and *i'tibār*), 237 (where *ta'ammul, naẓar, tafakkur* and *āyāt* are mentioned with the motifs of the book and mystical ascension).

[137] See Ikhwān al-Ṣafā', *Rasā'il* iv, 264. For the Ḥarrānian-Ṣābi'ian background of this ritual, see Marquet, Sabéens 96–103; see also Corbin, Sabian temple.

> your chest will become expanded, your sagacity will become pure and the eye of inner vision (*ʿayn al-baṣīra*) will open from within your heart. You will see (*fa-tarā*) what they [the Ikhwān] have visualized with the eyes of their hearts (*mā qad abṣarūhu bi-ʿuyūn qulūbihim*); you will watch (*wa-tushāhidu*) what they have viewed with their own eyes (*ʿāyanūhu*) through the purity of the substances of their souls; you will observe (*wa-tanẓuru*) what they have observed through the light of their intellects (*bi-nūr ʿuqūlihim*); and you will understand the meanings of these four [types of] books as they have understood. Then you will be given support with the spirit of life; you will live as the learned ones live and as the martyrs live; and you will be given the ability to climb up to the kingdom of heaven (*wa-tuwaffaqu lil-ṣuʿūd ilā malakūt al-samāʾ*), where you will observe the supreme assembly, 'the [angels] who circle round the throne, praising their Lord [Q 39:75]' [...][138]

The experience which is described so beautifully in this passage is both of an intellectual nature (*bi-nūr ʿuqūlihim*) and of a visionary-mystical one (*wa-tushāhidu, ʿāyanūhu, wa-tanẓuru, ʿayn al-baṣīra, bi-ʿuyūn qulūbihim*). The link between the intellect and the heart as well as the notion of inner vision are already found in early Shiʿi traditions to which I have referred above.[139] Yet in this passage of the Ikhwān, the figure of the *imām*, which serves as the focal point of the Shiʿi spiritual-mystical experience, is here replaced by man in general, "the Divine book". The climax of the contemplative experience is described by the Ikhwān in clear mystical terms:

> Oh brother, observe this Divine, universal providence and the wise governance of the Lord, reflect on it, contemplate it—and perhaps your soul will waken from the sleep of neglectfulness and the slumber of ignorance. The eye of inner vision will then open up for your soul, and through the light of the intellect you [or: your soul] will observe this wise Maker (*al-ṣāniʿ*), who manages these affairs, in the same way that you have observed with the physical eye the objects of [His] making (*al-maṣnūʿāt*) [...][140]

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[138] Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ, *Rasāʾil* iv, 168 ("[...] *Wa-yanshariḥu ṣadruka wa-yaṣfū dhihnuka fa-tuftaḥu ʿayn al-baṣīra min qalbika fa-tarā mā qad abṣarūhu bi-ʿuyūn qulūbihim wa-tushāhidu mā qad ʿāyanūhu bi-ṣafāʾ jawāhir nufūsihim wa-tanẓuru ilā mā naẓarū ilayhi bi-nūr ʿuqūlihim wa-tafhamu maʿānī hādhihi l-kutub al-arbaʿa kamā fahimūhā wa-tuʾayyadu bi-rūḥ al-ḥayāt wa-taʿīshu ʿaysh al-ʿulamāʾ wa-taḥyā ḥayāt al-shuhadāʾ wa-tuwaffaqu lil-ṣuʿūd ilā malakūt al-samāʾ wa-tanẓuru ilā l-malaʾ al-aʿlā l-ḥāffīna min ḥawli l-ʿarsh yusabbiḥūna bi-ḥamd rabbihim* [...]"). On the four books mentioned here, see also ibid. 42.

[139] See p. 180.

[140] Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ, *Rasāʾil* ii, 73 ("*Fa-nẓur yā akhī ilā hādhihi l-ʿināya l-ilāhiyya l-kulliyya wa-l-siyāsa l-rabbāniyya l-ḥakīma wa-tafakkar fihā wa-ʿtabirhā laʿalla nafsaka tantabihu min nawm al-ghafla wa-raqdat al-jahāla wa-tanfatiḥu lahā ʿayn al-baṣīra fa-tanẓuru bi-nūr al-ʿaql ilā hādhā l-ṣāniʿ al-ḥakīm al-mudabbir li-hādhihi l-umūr kamā naẓarta bi-ʿayn al-jasad ilā hādhihi l-maṣnūʿāt* [...]").

Thus, the contemplation of reality and the deciphering of the Divine signs reveal the figure of the Maker to "the eye of inner vision". This figure is veiled (*muḥtajib*) or hidden from the majority of human beings; discovering it becomes possible when one follows "the traces of the handiwork (*athar al-ṣanʿa*) in the manufactured objects themselves (*al-maṣnūʿāt*)", in other words, when one deciphers the signs that testify to the existence of the Maker or "the Manufacturer". The believers who manage to do so and are granted the vision of God are described by the Ikhwān as "those who possess Divine knowledge" (*al-ʿārifūn*), "those who are endowed with perceptive vision" (*al-mustabṣirūn*) and "the friends of Allāh" (*awliyāʾ allāh*). They are likewise given appellations that are typically reserved for the prophets and the *imāms*—"the chosen ones" (*al-muṣṭafawna*) and "Allāh's elect" (*aṣfiyāʾ allāh*).[141] Their mystical knowledge and vision of God are permanent and everlasting:

> They see Him and watch Him in all their states and in everything that they do, night and day; He does not conceal Himself from them, not even for a single moment.

Having fathomed the Divine signs in creation,

> Allāh expands their hearts, illuminates their inner vision (*abṣārahum*) and removes the covering from them, so that they finally see Him and watch Him with their inner vision, in the same way that they have known Him with their hearts.[142]

The Divine knowledge which these *awliyāʾ* obtain pertains primarily to cosmological and cosmogonic matters—all expressed in Neoplatonic terms.[143]

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[141] See Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ, *Rasāʾil* iii, 336 ("*Faṣl fī bayān mushāhadat al-ʿulamāʾ al-ḥukamāʾ al-ʿārifīna l-mustabṣirīna l-ladhīna hum awliyāʾ allāh al-muṣṭafawna l-ladhīna yarawna ṣāniʿ al-ʿālam bi-ʿayn al-baṣīra*"; "*Fa-ʿlam anna ṣāniʿ al-ʿālam lammā kāna muḥtajiban ʿan abṣār al-nāẓirīna l-ladhīna hum bihi jāhilūna kāna athar al-ṣanʿa fī maṣnūʿātihi ẓāhiran jaliyyan bayyinan lā yakhfā ʿalā kull ʿāqil munṣif li-ʿaqlihi* […] *fa-mushāhadatuhum athar al-ṣanʿa fī l-maṣnūʿ* […] *dalāla ʿalā annahā kullahā bi-qaṣd qāṣid wa-ṣanʿ ṣāniʿ wa-fiʿl ḥakīm qādir* […]"). See also ibid. ii, 152.

[142] Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ, *Rasāʾil* iii, 336 ("*Wa-ammā awliyāʾ allāh wa-aṣfiyāʾuhu wa-l-ʿulamāʾ al-ʿārifūna l-mustabṣirūna fa-innahum yarawnahu wa-yushāhidūnahu fī jamīʿ aḥwālihim wa-mutaṣarrafātihim laylahum wa-nahārahum lā yaghību ʿanhum ṭarfat ʿayn* […]"), 337 ("*Wa-lammā taḥaqqaqa awliyāʾ allāh taʿālā fahm hādhihi l-āyāt wa-ʿarafūhā ḥaqq maʿrifatihā sharaḥa llāh qulūbahum wa-nawwara abṣārahum wa-kashafa l-ghiṭāʾ ʿanhum ḥattā raʾawhu wa-shāhadūhu bi-abṣārihim kamā ʿarafūhu bi-qulūbihim* […]"). See also ibid. iii, 310–2; Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ, *al-Jāmiʿa* i, 452–5. Regarding the term *al-mustabṣirūn*, cf. ibid. 200 (*ahl al-baṣāʾir*), 360 (*ūlī l-abṣār*), ii, 356 (*dhawī l-baṣāʾir*).

[143] See Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ, *Rasāʾil* iii, 342–3, and note the use of the term *iʿtibār* on p. 342.

Mystical ascension is also a central theme in *Risālat al-iʿtibār* of Ibn Masarra. Like al-Nasafī and Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ, Ibn Masarra too views the contemplation of reality as occasioning a mystical-philosophical ascension through the hierarchal levels of the universe, organized in accordance with Neoplatonic cosmology.[144] Ibn Masarra writes that

> the world, all its created beings and its signs are rungs through which the contemplators climb up (*yataṣaʿadu*) to the greatest signs of Allāh (*āyāt allāh al-kubrā*) in the upper realm. For whoever ascends (*wa-l-mutaraqqī*) ascends from the lowermost level to the uppermost level, and so, those [who contemplate] ascend by the climbing of the[ir] intellects from their station in the lower realm until they reach the upper signs, in accordance with the descriptions/attributes of the prophets.[145]

Moreover, Ibn Masarra likewise links this mystical ascension to the figure of Abraham and to the motif of "the kingdom of the heavens and the earth". Abraham, according to Ibn Masarra, contemplated "the created beings in [God's] kingdom, in order to learn about (*lil-dalāla ʿalā*) his Creator".[146]

The close affinity between Ibn Masarra's worldview and that of the Ikhwān is particularly evident in the common terms which they employ in order to designate the spiritual organs that take part in the mystical ascension. Ibn Masarra, for example, holds that it is man's "concentrated intention" (*himma*) which ascends (*taraqqī, irtiqāʾ*) to the upper worlds.[147] The light of the intellect as well as "the inner vision of the heart" (*baṣar al-qalb*) are the means which enable the ascension and the mystical-philosophical vision accompanying it.[148] On the whole, the verbs and terms which are derived from the root b.ṣ.r., and which pertain to the

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[144] See also Stroumsa and Sviri, Beginnings 204–7, 229–30.

[145] See Ibn Masarra, *al-Iʿtibār* 177–8 ("*Fa-l-ʿālam wa-khalāʾiquhu kulluhā wa-āyātuhu daraj yataṣaʿadu fihā l-muʿtabirūna ilā mā fī l-ʿulā min āyāt allāh al-kubrā wa-l-mutaraqqī innamā yataraqqā min al-asfal ilā l-aʿlā fa-hum yataraqqawna bi-taṣaʿud al-ʿuqūl min maqāmihim suflan ilā mā ntahat ilayhi min ṣifāt al-anbiyāʾ min al-āyāt al-ʿulā"). Concerning the expression *āyāt allāh al-kubrā*, see Q 20:23; 53:18; 79:20; and regarding the Shiʿi context of this expression, see above n. 94.

[146] Ibn Masarra, *al-Iʿtibār* 188 ("[…] *Nubuwwat ibrāhīm ṣallā llāh ʿalayhi wa-sallama fī ʿtibār khalāʾiq al-malakūt lil-dalāla ʿalā bāriʾihi* […]"). For the motif of the kingdom, see also ibid. 176–7, 187; see also Stroumsa and Sviri, Beginnings 211–2.

[147] See Ibn Masarra, *al-Iʿtibār* 181 ("*Fa-rtaqat al-himma l-bāḥitha ilā l-samāʾ al-ūlā* […]"); see also ibid. 176, 190.

[148] The light of the intellect: ibid. 175 ("[…] *Anna llāh ʿazza wa-jalla innamā jaʿala li-ʿibādihi l-ʿuqūl al-latī hiya nūr min nūrihi li-yubṣirū bihā amrahu wa-yaʿrifū bihā qadrahu*"). The inner vision of the heart: ibid. ("[…] *Wa-abṣār qulūbihim tuqallabu fī l-aʿājīb* […]") and 178 ("[…] *Wa-ʿāyanū l-ghayb bi-abṣār qulūbihim* […]"), 181 ("*Wa-an yartaqiya*(?) *bi-baṣar*

inner mystical-philosophical perception of man, are quite central to the writings of both the Ikhwān and Ibn Masarra. Accordingly, Ibn Masarra too defines the friends of God, who have performed the mystical-hermeneutical ascension described here, as "those who are endowed with perceptive vision" (*al-mustabṣirūn*).[149] They achieve friendship with God (*walāya*) and proximity or closeness to Him (*iqtirāb*).[150] Furthermore, Ibn Masarra maintains that God, who is hidden from most people, discloses Himself to His friends through the "traces" (*āthār*) which are scattered throughout creation and which indicate His existence and unity.[151] As in the Ikhwān's account, so too in Ibn Masarra's *Risālat al-iʿtibār*, the *awliyāʾ*—having completed their mystical-philosophical voyage—are granted a beatific vision:

> It is then that you will find your Lord and Creator, and will meet Him yourself; you will visualize Him with your inner vision (*wa-abṣartahu bi-baṣīratika*); you will overlook the courtyard of His closeness (*sāḥat qurbihi*), by ascending to Him from the path which He has opened up for you towards Him; and He will show you His whole kingdom […][152]

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qalbihi […]"; cf. Garrido Clemente's reading (Edición crítica de la *Risālat al-iʿtibār* 95): يفرعنها instead of يرتقي).

[149] Ibn Masarra, *al-Iʿtibār* 175, 176 ("*Awliyāʾihi l-mustabṣirūna*"), 189; see also the term *baṣīra* (and its plural form *baṣāʾir*) in ibid. 176, 178, 184. In addition, compare the description found on p. 189 ("*Kullamā zdāda l-muʿtabir naẓaran izdāda baṣaran wa-kullamā zdāda baṣaran izdāda taṣdīqan wa-tawfīqan wa-yaqīnan wa-stibṣāran*") to that found in Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ, *Rasāʾil* iii, 505 ("*Fa-idhā akhadha l-insān yufakkiru fī kulliyyātihā wa-yaʿtabiru aḥwālahā wa-taṣārīfahā* […] *fa-kullamā taqaddama fihi zāda hidāya wa-yaqīnan wa-nūran wa-stibṣāran wa-taḥaqquqan wa-zdāda min allāh qurban wa-karāma*").

[150] Ibn Masarra, *al-Iʿtibār* 178, 190. For the notion of proximity or closeness to God in this context, see also Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ, *al-Jāmiʿa* i, 199–200.

[151] See Ibn Masarra, *al-Iʿtibār* 186 ("[…] *Wa-rtafaʿa ʿan al-jins kullihi illā bi-l-barāhīn al-dālla ʿalayhi wa-l-āthār al-latī wasamahā fī bariyyatihi shāhida lahu bi-rubūbiyyatihi*"); see also ibid. 175–6 ("[…] *Wa-abṣār qulūbihim tuqallabu fī l-aʿājīb al-ẓāhira l-maknūna l-makshūfa li-man raʾā l-maḥjūba ʿan man talahhā* […]"). For the motif of "the Maker/Manufacturer" (*al-ṣāniʿ*) and His "handiwork/manufactured objects" (*al-ṣanʿa*/*al-maṣnūʿāt*) which indicate His existence, see Ibn Masarra, *Khawāṣṣ al-ḥurūf* 138–40, 147–50; see also Ibn al-ʿArabī, *al-Tadbīrāt* 201 (where the terms *iʿtibārāt, afkār* and *baṣīra* are also mentioned). Finally, compare the Ikhwān's description of the contemplative process (*tafakkur, iʿtibār, taʾammul*), whereby man studies creation in order to discover the Maker (*Rasāʾil* ii, 150–4), to a very similar description in Ibn Masarra, *al-Iʿtibār* 179–82. For the many correspondences between the Ikhwān's *Rasāʾil* and Ibn Masarra's *Risālat al-iʿtibār*, see also Stroumsa and Sviri, Beginnings 226–44.

[152] Ibn Masarra, *al-Iʿtibār* 187 ("*Fa-ḥīnaʾidhin wajadta rabbaka wa-khāliqaka fa-laqītahu bi-nafsika wa-abṣartahu bi-baṣīratika wa-ṭālaʿta sāḥat qurbihi bi-taraqqīka ilayhi min al-sabīl al-ladhī fataḥa laka naḥwahu fa-arāka malakūtahu kullahu* […]").

CHAPTER SIX

CONCLUSION

This study set out to demonstrate the significant contribution of the Ismāʿīlī tradition to the development of mystical-philosophical thought in medieval al-Andalus. Five main topics were examined in this work: the word of God and the Divine will; letter speculations; the idea of *walāya*, "friendship with God", and the figure of the *awliyāʾ*, "the friends of God"; the concept of the perfect man; and the notion of parallel worlds. In all five topics, noteworthy similarities were found between medieval Ismāʿīlī literature and the writings of the Andalusī Sunni mystics Ibn Masarra (269/883–319/931) and Ibn al-ʿArabī (560/1165–638/1240).

These similarities become particularly evident when one compares classical Sufi works, composed in the central and eastern parts of the Islamic world prior to the rise of *al-Shaykh al-akbar*, to the writings of Ibn Masarra and Ibn al-ʿArabī. The teachings of the latter two embody a type of mystical discourse that can be characterized as theosophical. This discourse, focused on the tripartite relationship between God, the universe and man, is permeated with cosmogonic and cosmological speculations. Letters, in both their mythical-anthropomorphic and philosophical dimensions, occupy a central place in the discussions of Ibn Masarra and Ibn al-ʿArabī, as does the notion of parallel worlds. Notably in Ibn al-ʿArabī's oeuvre, the idea of *walāya* and the figure of the *awliyāʾ* constitute the main axis around which his thought revolves, and although these themes are indeed present in eastern Sufi literature, they are treated by Ibn al-ʿArabī in an unprecedented manner and are comprehensively conceptualized and theorized. Above all, it is Neoplatonic philosophy, in its unique form which is common to both the longer version of the *Theology of Aristotle* and Ismāʿīlī Neoplatonism, that dictates much of the terminology and ideas in the writings of Ibn Masarra and Ibn al-ʿArabī. The combination of all these various traits is, by and large, lacking in classical Sufi compilations,[1] or, for that matter, in Shiʿi-Twelver works predating

[1] The works of the 9th century Sunni mystic al-Ḥakīm al-Tirmidhī share several of the traits mentioned here—namely, a theosophical discourse, letter speculations and a developed theory of *walāya*. However, al-Tirmidhī can be defined neither as a classical Sufi

the writings of later authors such as Ḥaydar Āmulī.[2] On the other hand, these traits are all found in Ismāʿīlī literature.

The links and affinities between the Ismāʿīlī tradition and the thought of Ibn Masarra and Ibn al-ʿArabī are thus undeniable. However, their precise historical meaning is a matter of interpretation, and, most likely, of future dispute. Various scholars may indeed choose different ways of explaining the similarities between Ismāʿīlī literature and the writings of Ibn Masarra and Ibn al-ʿArabī. More specifically, two main historical explanations are plausible in this context:

- Ismāʿīlī thought, on the one hand, and the teachings of Ibn Masarra and Ibn al-ʿArabī, on the other, are best perceived as two parallel lines in the history of Islamic mysticism. Both derive from common sources—the pre-Islamic heritage (including the Gnostic and Hermetic traditions, as well as Hellenistic and Late-Antique Neoplatonism), the Quran and *Ḥadīth*, Arabic theology and philosophy and so on. Although one may speak of mutual influences between the Shiʿi-Ismāʿīlī tradition and Sunni mysticism in different points of time and in certain historical junctures, as a rule, the Ismāʿīlī authors and the Andalusī-Sunni mystics referred to here represent distinct branches in the world of Islamic mysticism, stemming from the same, common roots.
- The Ismāʿīlī tradition played a significant role in the formation of the intellectual world from which both Ibn Masarra and Ibn al-ʿArabī emerged. Despite the fact that these two authors were doubtlessly influenced by other, diverse sources—such as the Quran and *Ḥadīth*, Arabic theology and philosophy, and, in the case of Ibn al-ʿArabī, by Sufism as well—the Ismāʿīlī tradition helped shape the unique intellectual climate in North Africa and al-Andalus from which Ibn Masarra and Ibn al-ʿArabī derived.

As stated above, both approaches are plausible, and modern scholarship in the field of Islamic mysticism will only benefit from scholarly attempts to substantiate either of the two. As is clear by now to the reader, I favor the second approach—the one which points to the significant role of the Ismāʿīlī tradition in the development of mystical-philosophical thought in medieval al-Andalus. In my opinion, this approach is corroborated by various historical facts which are often ignored by scholars who study the works of Ibn Masarra and Ibn al-ʿArabī. To begin with, the

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author nor as a Neoplatonic mystic-philosopher. Accordingly, the historical and typological links between al-Tirmidhī, the Shiʿi-Ismāʿīlī tradition and Ibn al-ʿArabī merit a separate discussion. On al-Tirmidhī, see also above pp. 130–2, and, concerning letter speculations in his writings, Sviri, Words of power.

[2] On him see above p. 122 n. 153.

chronological-geopolitical framework in which Ibn Masarra, Ibn al-ʿArabī and the Ismāʿīlī Fāṭimīs operated makes it quite difficult to accept or favor the first approach mentioned above. Why did these two unique currents in Islamic mysticism—that is, Ismāʿīlī thought and the teachings of Ibn Masarra and Ibn al-ʿArabī—develop and crystallize in the western part of the Islamic world, in North Africa and al-Andalus, between the 10th and the 12th centuries?[3] Why did such a bold and revolutionary thinker like Ibn al-ʿArabī emerge in al-Andalus of all places? And why was it that Neoplatonism, combined with a theosophical outlook and occult tendencies, found its expression in the writings of Ibn Masarra and Ibn al-ʿArabī rather than in eastern Sufi compilations? It seems to me that the presence of the Fāṭimī-Ismāʿīlī Empire in North Africa during the 10th–12th centuries suggests that rather than being a product of sheer coincidence, the similarities between Ismāʿīlī literature and the works of Ibn Masarra and Ibn al-ʿArabī are the result of specific historical and geopolitical circumstances.

Moreover, evidence from the Jewish intellectual world that evolved in North Africa and al-Andalus during the 10th–12th centuries—the influence of *Rasāʾil ikhwān al-ṣafāʾ* ("The Epistles of the Sincere Brethren") on Jewish Andalusī authors;[4] the figure of Isaac Israeli, his activity in Fāṭimī Qayrawān and the tripartite relation between his thought, the longer version of the *Theology of Aristotle* and Ismāʿīlī Neoplatonism;[5] the presence of Shiʿi-Ismāʿīlī conceptions and terminology in Judah Ha-Levi's work;[6] and more—this evidence confirms the hypothesis presented here, namely, that the Ismāʿīlī tradition, among other sources, contributed to the formation of mystical-philosophical thought in North Africa and al-Andalus from the 10th century onwards. Under the political rule and religious aegis of the Fāṭimī Empire, the Ismāʿīlī milieu in North Africa functioned as a channel through which various ideas and concepts, ultimately originating in the Neoplatonic, Pythagorean/Neopythagorean, Hermetic and Gnostic traditions, passed into al-Andalus.[7] Yet the Ismāʿīlīs did not function merely as transmitters of this pre-Islamic, mystical-philosophical, esoteric

[3] Although the Ismāʿīlī tradition originated in Iraq and Syria, and despite the fact that its exponents were present throughout the Islamic world, many if not most of the significant developments in Ismāʿīlī thought during the 10th–12th centuries were connected, in one way or the other, to the Fāṭimī Empire and its religious-political fortunes.

[4] See above p. 28 n. 83.

[5] See above pp. 73–4.

[6] See above p. 74.

[7] See above pp. 4, 32 nn. 11, 94.

and occult knowledge; they skillfully adapted it to their own Shiʿi-Ismāʿīlī worldview. It is this unique product that exercised its influence on North African and Andalusī thought.

Tracing the intellectual history and the political fortunes of medieval Ismāʿīlism is thus important, perhaps even crucial, for understanding the emergence of figures such as Ibn Masarra and Ibn al-ʿArabī. The intellectual world of the latter two is quite different from that of the Sufi mystics in the east. This difference is mainly evident in the way in which the mystic views reality and the relationship between God, the universe and man, and, accordingly, it is manifested in the form of his writing, in the very nature of his discourse. This discourse, with its Neoplatonic, mystical-philosophical and theosophical colorings, is what sets Ibn Masarra, Ibn al-ʿArabī and the Ismāʿīlī authors apart from eastern Sufi writers.

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It is important to emphasize once again that the conclusions reached here regarding the affinities between the Ismāʿīlī tradition and Ibn Masarra and Ibn al-ʿArabī by no means imply that the latter two were Ismāʿīlīs or Shiʿis in any way.[8] Nowhere in their writings can one find an expression of the most essential and fundamental tenet of the Shiʿi-Ismāʿīlī belief—the recognition of ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib and his descendants, the *imām*s, as the sole legitimate leaders of the Islamic community. If one may speak of an Ismāʿīlī impact on the intellectual world from which Ibn Masarra and Ibn al-ʿArabī emerged, it is only in the nature of their mystical-philosophical discourse. Furthermore, in my eyes, Ibn Masarra and Ibn al-ʿArabī should be viewed as having successfully faced the Shiʿi and the Fāṭimī-Ismāʿīlī challenge to the Sunni tradition. Rather than simply adopting or plagiarizing concepts that ultimately originated in the Shiʿi-Ismāʿīlī world, Ibn Masarra and Ibn al-ʿArabī adapted these concepts to their Sunni heritage, incorporating them into their own original teachings. Whether or not Ibn Masarra and Ibn al-ʿArabī were aware of the Shiʿi-Ismāʿīlī provenance of various ideas and terms which they employed in their writings is a question that cannot be given a simple answer. Each case must be judged on its own.

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[8] See also above p. 8. For Ibn al-ʿArabī's criticism of the Shiʿa, see, for example, Ibn al-ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, ʿUthmān Yaḥyā's edition iv, 280 (chapter 55); and al-Ghorab, Muhyiddin Ibn al-ʿArabi 202–6, 213–6; Chodkiewicz, Ibn ʿArabī 87.

Although this study has focused on the common traits that link Ibn Masarra and Ibn al-ʿArabī to the Ismāʿīlī authors, the profound differences between their distinct worldviews and their originality should not be overlooked.[9] Essential differences are likewise found between Ibn Masarra and Ibn al-ʿArabī themselves, and perhaps it is not superfluous to reiterate here that the Ismāʿīlī world was also comprised of diverse and often rival factions. These factions, as I have mentioned earlier on in this study, differed on important doctrinal issues.[10]

Finally, one should bear in mind that the Ismāʿīlī tradition is but one source among many that helped shape the intellectual world of Ibn Masarra and Ibn al-ʿArabī. The latter in particular may be viewed as having integrated into his thought many different traditions which originated in a variety of sources. These sources—be they Sufi or Shiʿi-Ismāʿīlī, theological or philosophical—should all be given their due attention by scholars.

Rasāʾil Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ

As stated in the Introduction,[11] "The Epistles of the Sincere Brethren" had a profound impact on the mystical-philosophical thought in medieval al-Andalus. Many themes which are found in these Epistles—the Divine creative word in its Neoplatonic context; the hierarchal view of human society and of the universe at large; the figure of the perfect man; the notion of parallel worlds; or the perception of man and the cosmos as Divine books—resurface in the writings of both Ibn Masarra and Ibn al-ʿArabī, and thus point to the close affinity between these various authors. In fact, it is likely that Ibn al-ʿArabī himself read the Ikhwān's *Rasāʾil*;[12] an indication of this may be found in the blessing "may Allāh support you" (*ayyadaka llāh*) or in similar formulas derived from the Arabic root a.y.d., which are scattered throughout Ibn al-ʿArabī's writings and which seem to originate in

[9] See, for example, concerning *dhikr* in Ibn Masarra's thought (above p. 52), or the concepts of *nafas al-raḥmān* and *ʿamāʾ* in Ibn al-ʿArabī's writings (above pp. 53–7). Ibn Masarra and Ibn al-ʿArabī incorporated these original concepts into Neoplatonic schemes that are otherwise found in Ismāʿīlī sources as well. Note also, for example, the essential difference between Ibn al-ʿArabī's monistic vision of existence and the Ikhwān's view, in the context of their discussions concerning "the words of God" (above p. 55).

[10] See above p. 180.

[11] See above p. 28.

[12] On Ibn Masarra and the Ikhwān's Epistles see the discussion below.

the Epistles of the Ikhwān.[13] Alternatively, it is possible that Ibn al-ʿArabī became acquainted with Ikhwānian ideas and terminology through other, mediating sources, for example, through *Kitāb al-dawāʾir al-wahmiyya* ("The Book of Imaginary Circles", known as *Kitāb al-ḥadāʾiq*, "The Book of the Gardens") by the Andalusī author Ibn al-Sīd al-Baṭalyawsī (444/1052–521/1127).[14] Unfortunately, the Ikhwān's Epistles are the only Ismāʿīlī text known to have directly influenced the intellectual scene in al-Andalus. Andalusī authors would have otherwise been exposed to Ismāʿīlī concepts either orally or by reading other texts of an Ismāʿīlī provenance which may have circulated in al-Andalus or in North Africa. This, however, must remain a matter of speculation, at least for the time being.

What was the 'secret' of the Ikhwān's success in al-Andalus? Why were their Epistles so influential among Jewish and Muslim authors alike? As I have explained above,[15] the Ikhwān interpreted their own Shiʿi-Ismāʿīlī heritage in a humanistic-universal way. This humanistic-universal interpretation facilitated the reception of various Shiʿi-Ismāʿīlī ideas in al-Andalus. Moreover, contrary to the prevailing misconception in modern scholarship, the Epistles of Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ are not an 'encyclopedia'. Rather than simply offering the reader of their Epistles scientific-philosophical knowledge, the main goal of the Ikhwān is to provide the believer with the necessary means of achieving salvation, that is, by pursuing their intellectual, spiritual, ascetical and mystical path. The knowledge which the Ikhwān reveal to their reader is not merely scientific and philosophical, but is also religious, salvational and esoteric, often dealing with occult matters such as astrology, magic and alchemy, all in the framework of Neoplatonism.[16] It is this combination of mystical philosophy and esoteric-occult tendencies, originating in the Neoplatonic, Hermetic and Pythagorean/Neopythagorean traditions, that attracted the intellectual and spiritual attention of many Andalusī scholars, both Muslim and Jewish.

Nevertheless, the Ismāʿīlī contribution to the intellectual world of al-Andalus should not be restricted to *Rasāʾil ikhwān al-ṣafāʾ*. First, the thought of the Ikhwān cannot be detached from its Ismāʿīlī background,

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[13] See above p. 71.

[14] On him and Ibn al-ʿArabī see above p. 28 n. 83.

[15] See mainly pp. 179–88.

[16] See, for example, the last Epistle of the Ikhwān (Epistle 52). Note, in this context, the opinion of Schlanger concerning the influence of the Ikhwān's Epistles on Ibn Gabirol (see the references above in pp. 74–5 nn. 146–7). According to Schlanger, this influence only exists in relation to scientific matters and is therefore essentially insignificant, having nothing to do with the spiritual-mystical aspects of Ibn Gabirol's thought.

as is clear from this work and other studies as well.[17] Second, it is evident that various Ismāʿīlī teachings, other than those of the Ikhwān, likewise played their role in the formation of the mystical-philosophical thought in medieval North Africa and al-Andalus. Such is the conclusion one reaches when analyzing the subject of letter speculations: with one exception,[18] the Epistles of the Ikhwān do not contain any letter speculations of the mythical-anthropomorphic and Neoplatonic kind that are so central to the thought of Ibn Masarra and Ibn al-ʿArabī. Such speculations, however, are indeed found in other Ismāʿīlī works, such as the 10th century North-African *Kitāb al-ʿālim wa-l-ghulām, Kitāb al-kashf* and the writings of al-Rāzī and al-Sijistānī.

One last issue which deserves our attention here is the chronological problems related to the links between Ibn Masarra and the Ikhwān. In line with several previous studies,[19] this work has demonstrated the close affinity between Ibn Masarra's teachings and the thought of the Ikhwān. However, Ibn Masarra died in the year 931, whereas, according to most modern scholars, the Epistles were composed sometime during the second half of the 10th century.[20] Stroumsa and Sviri have suggested that Ibn Masarra may have derived his teachings from an intellectual-mystical milieu that was similar or even identical to the one that gave rise to the Ikhwān.[21] Another possible solution to this chronological problem would be to establish an earlier date—as some scholars have proposed[22]—for the compilation of the Brethren's Epistles or at least parts of them, i.e. the first three decades of the 10th century. This is the solution I favor. Several factors—the similarities between Ibn Masarra and the Ikhwān; the convincing arguments of Maribel Fierro regarding the early dating of *Ghāyat al-ḥakīm* and *Rutbāt al-ḥakīm* and the latters' relation to the Ikhwān's Epistles;[23] and the links between the *Rasāʾil* and the Jābirian corpus, which was composed during the second half of the 9th century and the first half of the 10th century—[24] these factors indicate, in my opinion, that the *Rasāʾil* were compiled at an earlier date than is commonly

[17] See the references given above in p. 180 n. 81.
[18] See above pp. 103–8.
[19] See Tornero, A report 148–9; and mainly Stroumsa and Sviri, Beginnings 210 n. 37, 214.
[20] See above pp. 28–9.
[21] See the reference above in n. 19.
[22] See above pp. 28–32.
[23] Ibid.
[24] Ibid.

assumed.[25] I will add that the Ismāʿīlīs in North Africa seem to have taken an interest in Neoplatonic philosophy long before its official adoption by the Fāṭimī Caliph-*imām* al-Muʿizz in the third quarter of the 10th century.[26] It is possible that Ibn Masarra became acquainted with Neoplatonic texts—perhaps even with the Epistles of the Ikhwān, or several of these Epistles—during his stay in Qayrawān, in the course of his visit to Mecca or maybe even after his return to al-Andalus. At any rate, the difficulties pertaining to the dating of *Rasāʾil ikhwān al-ṣafāʾ* are far from being resolved at this point in time. It is clear, though, that any future discussion of this matter will have to take into account the links between Ibn Masarra and the Ikhwān.

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The fact that in various aspects both Ismāʿīlī authors and Andalusī writers such as Ibn Masarra and Ibn al-ʿArabī represent a type of mysticism that is different from the classical, eastern Sufi type testifies to the richness and diversity of medieval Islamic mysticism. Crude typologies and simplistic definitions of Islamic mysticism, hitherto prevalent in modern scholarship, should be abandoned in favor of a more sophisticated approach. Islamic mysticism does not amount to Sufism alone. Furthermore, as previously noted by scholars such as Henry Corbin and Amir-Moezzi,[27] the Shiʿi and Ismāʿīlī traditions should be regarded as playing a central role in the development of Islamic esotericism and mysticism, not only in the later middle ages, but also—and perhaps more significantly so—in the formative periods of Islamic culture.

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[25] An earlier dating of the *Rasāʾil* is, of course, not without its own problems. Most significantly, it does not fit in with the later date (the second half of the 10th century) which various scholars have established on the basis of the well-known report by Abū Ḥayyān al-Tawḥīdī (who lived approximately between the years 310–320/922–932 and 414/1023), in his *Kitāb al-imtāʿ wa-l-muʾānasa*. In this report, al-Tawḥīdī mentions the names of several men, who, according to him, were responsible for composing the *Rasāʾil*; see Stern, Authorship; Stern, New information. However, the common understanding of this report has been called into question by certain scholars; see Marquet, Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ 1071–3; Hamdani, Abū Ḥayyān al-Tawḥīdī; Hamdani, The Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ 189–90, 197–8, 201, 203 n. 10; cf. Kraemer, *Humanism* 165–78, especially p. 168 n. 165. This issue should be readdressed in the future, especially in light of Fierro's study on the *Ghāya* and the *Rutba* and the findings in this work concerning Ibn Masarra and the Ikhwān.

[26] See above p. 76 nn. 149–50.

[27] See the references to their works in the bibliography.

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