

IKHWĀN AṢ-ṢAFĀ AND THEIR RASĀ'IL

A Critical Review of a Century and a Half of Research

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I

THE subject of Ikhwān aṣ-Ṣafā¹ has not ceased to engage the attention of scholars in the East and West since the awakening of interest in the preservation, publication, and study of the surviving Arabic manuscript. But in spite of all efforts the field is still bristling with a number of question-marks and interspersed with unexplored corners. Therefore a critical review of the most important studies coupled with suggestions as to what aspects deserve re-examination or fresh exploration may be of service to future students. This paper is an attempt to do both.

There is perhaps no need to examine the early attempts by Pococke, d'Herbelot, Casiri, Uri, Nicoll, de Sacy, Nauwerk, and Dozy. All of these, valuable in their time, have been superseded by the more detailed and substantial contributions of Sprenger, Flügel, and Dieterici, which were based on all the *Rasā'il*, except the one entitled *al-Jāmi'a*, and also on new historical evidence unavailable to their predecessors. It is essential, however, to relate the efforts of European scholars to the early attempts to make known the original text of the *Rasā'il* or parts of it by native scholars. For in 1810 Ikrām 'Alī published in Calcutta, under the title of *Ikhwānuṣ-Ṣafā*, a Hindustani translation of a fragment of the allegorical controversy between Man and Animals which, though only a part of one tract, forms a complete subject by itself. In 1812 the same fragment was published in Arabic also in Calcutta by Shaikh Ahmad b. Muḥammad Shurwān, al-Yamāni (Yumunee), under the title of تحفة اخوان الصفا, with a short English preface by T. T. Thomason.²

I acknowledge with gratitude Professor A. S. Tritton's kindness in reading this paper and suggesting certain emendations.

¹ There is no agreed translation of this term into English; 'the Brethren of Purity', 'the Brethren of Sincerity', 'the Pure Brethren', and 'the Sincere Brethren' are the main common renderings; cf. H. A. R. Gibb, *Arabic Literature* (O.U.P., 1926), p. 68; R. A. Nicholson, *Literary History of the Arabs* (Cambridge, 1941), p. 370. The same lack of uniformity is also found in German, where *die lautern Brüder* has long been considered inaccurate, and in French, where *des Frères de la Pureté* has been challenged. Vide Goldziher, *Mohammedanische Studien*

(Halle, 1888), i, p. 9, note 1; and Casanova, *Journal asiatique*, v, 1915, p. 6. There is even less uniformity in transliterating the term. More will be said on the question of translation, and the various forms of transliteration will reveal themselves in the text and the footnotes of this study where, however, the Arabic short term 'Ikhwān' is preferred, and the tracts are often referred to as *Rasā'il*.

² The word تحفة 'masterpiece' or 'gift' appears to be the editor's own addition. This was the occasion for Nauwerk's *Notiz über das arabische Buch tūḥfat Iḥwan assafa d. h. Gabe der aufrichtigen Freunde nebst Probe desselben arabisch und deutsch* (Berlin, 1837).

RASĀ'IL

A Study of Research

Despite its interesting subject, such a portion of only one of the tracts was no doubt a poor guide to the other fifty, and wrong conclusions were drawn from it, as in Nauwerk's *Gabe der aufrichtigen Freunde*. It was therefore fortunate that Sprenger was able, some ten years later, to see in India four different manuscripts of the tracts, one complete and three in fragments, which he used for his 'Notices of some copies of the Arabic work entitled *Rasā'il Ikhwān al-Ṣafa* وِخْلَانِ الصِّفَا'.¹ The value of Sprenger's contribution lies in the publication, for the first time, of the titles of the tracts with short descriptions of the contents of each tract. The Arabic text of the forty-fourth tract, however, is published in full together with an English translation of its first part. But it is unfortunate that his account is marred by loose translation and too many misreadings of or misprints in the Arabic, and his collection omits the fourteenth tract, merges the eighth with the ninth, and leaves the text of the twelfth and thirteenth confused.

Obviously unaware of the contemporary evidence of Abū Ḥayyān at-Tauḥīdī on the Ikhwān and their tracts, Sprenger reproduces the later testimony of Shahrazūri from *Tawārikh al-Ḥukamā'*.² At least three of the early European scholars ascribed the authorship of the tracts to al-Majrīṭī. Sprenger, however, accepted Shahrazūri's statement that the tracts were a corporate work of five philosophers, though the language was that of al-Maqdisī, one of five named members of the organization.³ Sprenger further assigned the date of the tracts to the fourth century A.H.

The next more serious study is by Flügel, whose paper⁴ forms the fullest and most scholarly of the early studies. A list of the fifty-one tracts, again with the exception of *al-Jāmi'a*, with their Arabic titles and German translation is given, together with a discussion of the contents of the tracts and the identity of their authors, the organization of the group, and the sources of their philosophy. An appraisal of the philosophy of the group was comparatively easy with the full text of the tracts available, but what about determining the authorship on the basis of meagre and conflicting evidence? The authors deliberately concealed their names and circulated their tracts anonymously, or rather, secretly. Flügel's attempt to solve this difficult problem is not only based on late sources such as Ibn al-'Ibrī, Shahrazūri, and Ḥajjī Khalīfa used by his predecessors but also on the then newly discovered Ibn al-Qiftī, supplemented by al-Amīr aṣ-Ṣafadī's work with a bombastic title.⁵ Qiftī's account includes a

¹ *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal*, 1848, part i, pp. 501-7; part ii, pp. 183-202.

² Ḥajjī Khalīfa (ed. Flügel), vi, p. 321.

نزهة الأرواح وروضة الأفراح في تواريخ الحكماء

³ وألغاف هذا الكتاب للمقدسي

⁴ 'Über Inhalt und Verfasser der arabischen Encyclopädie رسائل اخوان الصفا وِخْلَانِ الصِّفَا in *Z.D.M.G.* xiii (1859), 1-43.

⁵ ديوان الفصحاء وترجمان البلغاء وتذكرة درة غرة اِبْكَار افكار الشعراء

engage the attention of the reader, and the awakening of interest in the surviving Arabic literature. Dealing with a number of corners. Therefore, the work is filled with suggestions and corrections. The author's explanation may be of great value to do both.

Attempts by Pococke, Dozy. All of these, however, are more detailed and accurate, which were not the case, and also on new evidence. It is essential, however, to refer to the early attempts to study the tracts by native scholars. The title of *Ikhwān al-Ṣafa* and the historical controversy surrounding one tract, forms a part of the work published in *Das arabische Buch tuhsat der aufrichtigen Freunde nebst deutsch* (Berlin, 1837).

and Casanova, *Journal* of the Asiatic Society of Bengal, 1848, part i, pp. 501-7; part ii, pp. 183-202. More will be said on the various forms of the tracts and themselves in the text and in the introduction, wherever, the title of *Rasā'il* is preferred, and the title of *Rasā'il*.

'interpiece' or 'gift' appears in the title. This was the occasion of the publication of *Das arabische Buch tuhsat der aufrichtigen Freunde nebst deutsch* (Berlin, 1837).

reference to two of the theories about the authors of the tracts: that they were composed by an 'Alid *imām* or by a Mu'tazilite. Then it reproduces the contemporary testimony of Abū Ḥayyān at-Tauhidī. We now know that it comes from a fuller account in Abū Ḥayyān's own work *al-Imtā' wal-Muānasa* to which Flügel had no access, and even quotes its title inaccurately as الامتاع والموانسة. This important book has recently been published in Cairo in three volumes, 1939-44, edited with notes and indexes by Aḥmad Amīn and Aḥmad az-Zain, with an introduction by the former.

From the evidence discovered up to Flügel's time it was established that five thinkers, namely Abū Sulaimān Muḥammad b. Ma'shar (or Mushīr) al-Bayustī or Bustī (known as al-Maqdisī or Muqaddasī), Abū al-Ḥasan 'Alī Harūn (or Zahrūn) az-Zanjānī, Abū Aḥmad al-Mihrajānī, al-'Aufī,¹ and Zaid b. Rifā'a, and others unnamed, had established a secret association in Basra which published some fifty tracts (the exact number is an open question, as we shall indicate later on), a number of which were known in A.H. 373. The purpose of the association appears to have been the reform of Muslim society through diffusion of a core of knowledge formed through the integration of 'Greek Philosophy with the Arabian Shari'a', which the tracts profess to have achieved.

Once the tracts were made known it was not difficult to go deeper into a study of the philosophy and purpose of the association, but it was not easy to determine the identity of the authors or their association with contemporary streams of Muslim thought. Scholars were, up to the late eighties of the last century, labouring under serious limitations. The tracts, and even, at first, the very few known sources of information on the association and its members, were available only in manuscript. The text used by the early scholars must have been very defective or their acquaintance with the subject not very thorough, for the mistakes even in Flügel are many.

A great advance was made during the second half of the nineteenth century, chiefly thanks to the labours of Dieterici and to the publication of the whole Arabic text of the tracts (still without *al-Jāmi'a*) in Bombay in A.H. 1305-6. Dieterici's contributions remain outstanding to the present day. For some thirty years he published texts, translations, and studies on Arab philosophy in the tenth century with the *Ikhwān* and their tracts as the main object of his attention. In dealing with the authorship of the tracts and determining the date of their compilation Dieterici's contributions are not widely different from those of his predecessors,² largely because in this matter he was, like them, restricted to the same sources:

¹ He is the only one without a first name. It is written العرفي in certain sources and manuscripts.

² Cf. *Die Philosophie der Araber*, i (Leipzig, 1876), pp. 141 et seq.

Qiftī, Ḥajjī Khalīfa, Ibn al-'Ibrī. In using a Berlin manuscript of the first work Dieterici translated that Abū Ḥayyān answered a question by the 'Vizier Ṣamsāmād-Daula' about Zaid b. Rifā'a, whereas the questioner was Ibn Sa'dān, the Vizier of Ṣamsām.¹ The same error is repeated in a British Museum catalogue² and by two Arab scholars.³

It is in the sphere of publication and translation, however, that the value of Dieterici's contributions lie. Like some of his predecessors he was first attracted by that part of the tract which deals with the controversy between Man and Animals which he translated into German under the title of *Der Streit zwischen Mensch und Thier* in 1858, and followed some twenty years later by the publication of the Arabic text.⁴ Another text which he published was a recension of some forty tracts (not arranged in the usual order) under the title of *Die Abhandlungen der Ichwan es-Safa in Auswahl* خلاصة الوفاء في اختصار رسائل اخوان الصفاء. The other studies are translations of tracts into German with prefaces, repetitive on the whole, but serving to make each translated section more or less complete in itself. Some of the translations are accompanied with glossaries and explanatory notes. But the prefaces together with occasional discussion scattered in a number of volumes deal with what was known about the authors and give details of the organization of the Ikhwān, the contents of the tracts, and the sources used by their authors, almost entirely based on internal evidence. There are also cursory attempts to relate the contents of the tracts to their sources.

Dieterici's translations are not literal,⁵ but on the whole are reliable in giving the essential points of the original, or to put it in his own words, '... das Hauptsächlichste wiederzugeben'. He was truly, as he himself pleads, treading on virgin soil, and the manuscripts he used were loaded with misreadings and alterations.⁶ The tracts covered by the summary translations are 1-6, 7-13, 14-21, 22-30, 31-40, 41-44, and 50. The remaining eight, all in the fourth and most abstract part of the tracts, cover among other subjects such fundamentals as 'creeds and religions', 'definition of faith', and 'the way to God'.

¹ Ibid., p. 144: '... in einer Antwort auf seine Frage des Vezir Szemszem ed Daula ...'

² Supplement to the *Catalogue of Arabic Manuscripts*, compiled by Charles Rieu, 1894, p. 483.

³ Muḥammad Kurd 'Alī, *مجلة المجمع العلمي*, vol. viii, No. 4, p. 211: "سأل الوزير صحصام" الدولة بن عضد الدولة أبا حيان في حدود سنة ٣٧٢ (كذا)", and Aḥmad Zaki Pāshā, Introduction to the Cairo edition of the *Rasā'il*, p. 21; cf. p. 22, where the error is made to come from Qiftī.

⁴ The Arabic title as framed by Dieterici himself

is not without interest: في تداعي الحيوانات على الإنسان عند ملك الجن، وهي قصة مأخوذة من رسائل اخوان الصفا تأليف العبد الحقير الشيخ المعلم بالمدسة الكلية البرلينية فريدريخ ديتريصي. طبع في مدينة برلين المحروسة سنة ١٨٧٩ المسيحية

⁵ Cf. *Die Logik und Psychologie der Araber* (Leipzig, 1868), p. ix; *Die Anthropologie der Araber* (Leipzig, 1871), p. viii.

⁶ *Philosophie der Araber*, ii (Leipzig, 1879), p. vii; *Die Abhandlungen* (Leipzig, 1886), p. 635.

As already stated, the full unabridged Arabic text of all the tracts (without *al-Jāmi'a*, which was apparently still unknown) was published in Bombay in A.H. 1305-6. This edition was issued by Nūru-d-Dīn Jiwa Khān, who was an Ismā'īlī acquainted with some of the unpublished literature of the sect, among it '*Uyūn al-Akhbār*' by Idrīs 'Imādu-d-Dīn (d. 872/1467), who assigns the authorship of *Rasā'il Ikhwān aṣ-Ṣafā* to the concealed *imām*, Aḥmad b. 'Abdullah, a contemporary of the Caliph Ma'mūn. Accordingly the Bombay edition states definitely that the author was this same *imām*.² This bold assertion lends colour to one of the theories about the authorship of the tracts, namely that they were written by an 'Alid *imām*, though there is no agreement on his name. Without supporting or questioning the theory as such, the claims of a contemporary of al-Ma'mūn can easily be disproved. Certain ideas expressed in the *Rasā'il* and a number of lines of poetry quoted in them were either unknown or their authors not yet born when al-Ma'mūn and Aḥmad b. Abdullah were alive. Further, an editorial note at the end of the fourth volume of the Bombay edition itself (pp. 411-12) by Muḥammad Bahā'u-d-Dīn, a proof reader, states that the *Rasā'il* were written by Imām Aḥmad but adds significantly: 'and it is also said that it [i.e. the *Rasā'il*] was written by a group of notable men in the second century or the fourth century A.H. who were loving brothers and pure equals.'

Needless to say the Bombay edition is far from being a critical one, but judged according to the standards of Arabic publication of the day it seems to have remarkably few lapses. We are not told on what manuscript or manuscripts it was based,³ but it was the fullest so far issued, certainly fuller than Dieterici's *Auswahl*. There is a reasonably detailed table of contents for every part, but there are no indexes. It is hardly expected in such an edition at such a time and place to contain glossaries, technical terms, foreign words, proper names, &c.

Almost immediately after the publication of this edition Shaikh 'Alī Yūsuf issued in Cairo in A.H. 1306 the first of the four parts of the tracts in one volume with a short introduction which is a confused adaptation without acknowledgement of Qifṭī's account. In an article⁴ written a year later Aḥmad Zakī (well known as Pāshā) noted these two editions and denied that there was ever such an *imām* as Aḥmad b. Abdullah, and

¹ Hamdāni, *Baḥth Tārīkhī fī Rasā'il Ikhwān aṣ-Ṣafā* (Bombay and Cairo, 1935), p. 20.

² The phrase اللهم الهمام قطب الاقطاب مولانا is repeated on the title-page of every volume of the four that form the *Rasā'il* in this edition.

³ Jiwa Khān in his notice on the title-page merely says: قد اسعدتنا الأيام بنسخة قديمة

صحيفة. Cf. notice at end of vol. iv, p. 411, by Shaikh Muḥammad 'Alī Rampūri: لم يجد (اي جواخان) مع اجتهاده في جميع النسخ من هذا الكتاب حين الطبع نسخة صحيفة

⁴ Published in 1928 as one of two introductions to a new edition of the *Rasā'il* to be noted below.

declared '*Uyūn al-Akhbār* a fictitious book. At the same time he exposed mercilessly the plagiarism of Shaikh 'Alī Yūsuf. But the significance of Zakī Pāshā's article, which is characteristically rambling and chaotic in places, lies in the fact that it is the first serious attempt by an Arab scholar to share in the research which had been in progress in Europe for over fifty years. A third of the article is a verbatim reproduction of Qiftī, and the other two-thirds bring out two main points: the possibility of a relationship between the Ikhwān and the Ismā'īlī sect, and the rejection of the theory that al-Majrīṭī was the author of the *Rasā'il*.

There is sufficient evidence in the tracts themselves to prove Ismā'īlī sympathies. Indeed, such sympathies have long been pointed out by Muslim authors, medieval and modern, who tried to turn sympathy into actual relationship. However, the balance of evidence tends to show that such relationship was a later development. There is as yet no proof that the formation of Ikhwān aṣ-Ṣafā and the publication of their *Rasā'il* was an Ismā'īlī movement, or even a movement concerted with any of the contemporary agitation of the Shī'a. Thus, Hamdānī says that he has seen no mention of the *Rasā'il* in the writing of Faṭimid chief missionaries.¹ Ivanow states that he has been unable to ascertain whether the *Rasā'il* were quoted in Ismā'īlī works earlier than al-Ḥakīm's time.² On the other hand, there is evidence of the popularity of the *Rasā'il* with later Ismā'īlī missionaries.

Guyard was among the first Orientalists to collect substantial evidence of this relationship,³ but at the turn of the century Casanova⁴ tried, on the basis of a manuscript (No. 2309 in De Slane's Catalogue), to prove the identity of Ikhwān aṣ-Ṣafā with Ismā'īlism. The title and the first pages of the manuscript are missing and it actually starts on page 6 with this sub-title فصل من رسائل اخوان الصفا. In content it represents mere fragments of the *Rasā'il* with a fragment which is called *al-Jāmi'a*. The fuller *al-Jāmi'a* is referred to occasionally in various parts of the *Rasā'il*, and is specifically mentioned in the *fihrist* composed by the authors as an introduction to the whole series. In Casanova's time this fuller version was not utilized, but since then many copies of it—some of them ascribed to al-Majrīṭī—have been found and are now preserved in public and private libraries in the East and West. A recent edition appeared in Damascus and will be noted later on.

In the light of our present knowledge Casanova's conclusion 'surtout je crois être dans le vrai en affirmant que les doctrines philosophiques des Ismailiens sont contenues tout entières dans les Épitres des Frères de la

¹ *Baḥth*, pp. 14, 21; cf. also *Der Islam*, xx. 294.

² *The Alleged Founder of Ismā'īlism* (Bombay, 1946), p. 147 and n. 2.

³ *Fragments relatifs à la doctrine des Ismaélis*, tome xxii, part 1 (1874), pp. 177-428: 'Notices et extraits

des manuscrits de la Bibliothèque nationale et autres bibliothèques (publiés par l'institute national de France).'

⁴ *Journal asiatique*, tome xi (1898), pp. 151-9: 'Notice sur un manuscrit de la secte des Assassins.'

Pureté . . . ' seems to be unwarranted even by the contents of his رسالة الجامعة.¹ The manuscript which he used contains, up to page 122, portions of the *Rasā'il*, but on page 123 the subject is completely changed to تواريخ ملوك الاسلام which in turn is quickly abandoned to start on page 125 a subject which must have provided Casanova with a strong clue for his thesis, namely الدعوة الهادية (sic) الحصون في ابتدى giving minute details of events in Maşyaf, which suggests that the writer was living there.

A document with such a variety of content invites suspicion of its value and caution in drawing definite conclusions from it. It tends, however, to prove one thing, namely, that the *Rasā'il* were popular with later Ismā'īlī missionaries who read, copied, and summarized them to suit their own purposes. But, as stated above, it has yet to be proved that the Ismā'īlī bent of the tracts and of the genuine *ar-Risāla al-Jāmi'a* was itself a proof of early Ismā'īlī connexion. Indeed, the tracts speak in two voices on this Ismā'īlī bent. We will give illustrations not of the pro-Ismā'īlī tendencies, which practically need no proof, but of the instances, admittedly few, where the *Ikhwān* appear to be anti-Ismā'īlī or at least more orthodox than expected. To explain this as *taqiyya* (dissimulation) in a secret work supposed to be given only to the convinced or nearly convinced convert does not appear to be a valid explanation of strong evidence.

A glaring example of the *Ikhwān's* independence is their advocacy of the principle that the office of *imām* need not be hereditary, for they argue that if the desired good qualities are not found in one single person but scattered among a group, then the group and not the individual should be 'the lord of the time and the *imām*'.² More surprising still is the denunciation of the belief in a concealed *imām* as painful to those who hold it³ and the discredit of the significance of 'number seven' and those who believe in it as contrary to the *Ikhwān's* creed.⁴ We do not propose to pursue the matter any farther here, but such a problem deserves close and detailed study.

II

The results of a century of research and publication were used in two well-written accounts of the *Ikhwān*, the one by Lane-Poole⁵ and the other by De Boer.⁶ Both are readable and have the rare merit of scholarly work unburdened with footnotes. But work on the *Ikhwān* has slackened

¹ Note that رسالة الجامعة is used for الرسالة القول على السر المخزون: رسالة الجامعة والعلم المصون من باطن رسالة الجامعة من رسائل اخوان الصفا

² *Rasā'il* (Cairo edition, 1928), iv, p. 179.

³ *Ibid.* iii. 86; iv. 58. (Umar Farrūkh in his

Ikhwan aṣ-Ṣafā (Beirut, 1945), pp. 5 and 13, took this to mean that the *Ikhwān* were not even Shī'a).

⁴ *Rasā'il*, i, pp. 159-61.

⁵ *Studies in a Mosque* (London, 1893), pp. 186-207.

⁶ *Geschichte der Philosophie in Islam* (English translation, London, 1903), pp. 81-96.

towards the end of the last century and during the first years of the present century. However, Brockelmann in his work and its supplements has noted the most important studies and the various manuscripts of the *Rasā'il* preserved in public libraries.¹ Like most scholars he also is inconsistent in translating the name. Thus in the first volume of his work *Ikhwān aṣ-Ṣafā* is *die lautern Brüder* and in the first supplement *die treuen Freunde*. Obviously there is no end to the resourcefulness of scholars in increasing our confusion in this particular case. Goldziher, who had already questioned *die lautern Brüder*,² has now made a plausible suggestion that the story of the ring-dove in *Kalīla wa Dimna*, which tells how the animals escaped the snares of the hunter by being sincere brethren (*ikhwān ṣafā*) to one another suggested the choice by the Basra group of that name for themselves.³ Of other possible reasons which determined the choice of the name more will be said later on. But two more contributions deserve to be noted here.

In a note of one paragraph which he contributed to *Der Islam* in 1913 Massignon⁴ called attention to certain fragments of Arabic and Persian poetry or single lines scattered in the tracts⁵ and to the definition therein given of the trigonometrical *al-jaib*, and suggested the use of such evidence to determine more exactly the date of the composition of the tracts. Casanova returned in 1915 to the subject of the *Ikhwān* with a similar idea.⁶ Interpreting certain astronomical terms in an obscure passage,⁷ he found that the *Rasā'il* were composed between A.H. 418 and 439. Then interpreting a rhetorical reference to the concealed *imām* that he is really apparent *ظاهر بين ظهراينهم*⁸ he found that it refers to the Fāṭimid *aḏ-Zāhir* (411-27). On the basis of his interpretation of both he is inclined to believe that the *Rasā'il* were written between A.H. 418 and 427.

But to accept Casanova's conclusion it is necessary to disregard reliable and contemporary evidence. It is of course conceivable that the tracts were not all composed at the same time, but it is stretching the imagination too far to assume that the *Ikhwān* wrote their *Rasā'il* over a period of

¹ *Geschichte der arabischen Litteratur* (Weimer, 1898), pp. 213-14; Erster Supplementband (Leiden, 1937), pp. 379-81.

² The expression *die aufrichtigen Brüder und treuen Freunde* used by Flügel in 1859 and others after him has also been abandoned.

³ 'Über die Benennung der 'Ichwān al-Ṣafā' (*Der Islam*, i, pp. 22-26).

⁴ 'Sur la date de la composition des "Rasā'il Ikhwān al-Ṣafā"', vol. iv, p. 324.

⁵ Some of the lines of poetry in the *Rasā'il* look like interpolations. For example, consider the three lines after the words *المحقق شعرا*: vol. iv, p. 136. A clearer example is perhaps provided in the line after *قال القائل*: *ar-Risālah al-Jāmi'a*,

vol. i (Damascus, 1948), p. 464, which is not found in either the Taimuriya or the Teheran manuscripts of the tract.

⁶ 'Une date astronomique dans les Épîtres des Ikhwān aṣ-Ṣafā' (*Journal asiatique*, onzième série, tome v, pp. 5-17.)

⁷ *Rasā'il*, iv, p. 196, which reads:

استئناف دور الكشف . . . بانتقال القران من برج
مثلثات النيران الى برج مثلثات النبات والحيوان في
الدور العاشر الموافق لبیت السلطان وظهور
الاعلام

⁸ *Rasā'il*, iv, p. 199.

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philosophie in Islam (English trans-
03), pp. 81-96.

fifty-four years, since according to Abū Ḥayyān several of the *Rasā'il* were in circulation in A.H. 373 and he and his master, Abū Sulaimān al-Mantiqī as-Sijistānī, read them.¹ Moreover, from the latter's description of their contents he must have seen a fair sample of them covering the four different sections. Indeed, Abū Ḥayyān's statement that the *Ikhwān* wrote fifty tracts رسالة خمسين may even be taken to mean that all the fifty were already written in A.H. 373.²

However, by the end of the second decade of this century considerable ground had been covered: all the tracts except *al-Jāmi'a* were available in print; full summaries of the contents of most of them had been published in German; some concrete historical evidence about their authors had been collected and utilized; several learned explorations of individual aspects had been made by scholars; and at least two readable popular accounts on the place of the *Rasā'il* in the history of Muslim philosophy had been published in English and German.³ But there was still much to be done or re-done: a critical or more authoritative edition of the tracts was unquestionably necessary; the genuine *al-Jāmi'a* tract was still to be published; more detailed analysis of the subject-matter of the tracts and its relation to its various sources, together with comparison, where comparison is legitimate, with previous or contemporary philosophy was desirable; and a greater knowledge of the authors and their background was more than ever imperative. During the last three decades much has been achieved in some of these directions, and we will now turn to review and assess what has been done.

Another edition of the *Rasā'il* was issued in 1928,⁴ but, like the earlier Bombay one, it is far from being critical. According to *Khairu-d-Dīn az-Zirkilī*,⁵ who was in charge of the correction, neither he nor the other redacteurs could compare their text with other texts, of which they specifically mention a manuscript in the National Library in Cairo. But the Cairo editors do not, and on request made at the time refused to, disclose the origin of their copy. In fact, however, they have given us something very similar to the Bombay edition printed on better paper and divided into paragraphs with some punctuation. As a detailed critical review of this edition was published by the present writer elsewhere,⁶ no

رأيتُ جملة منها . . . حملتُ عدة منها الى شيخنا . . .

² *Al-Imta*, ii, p. 5.

³ As a result, the subject of the *Ikhwān*, or rather their ideas, gained a wide publicity not only in learned books, as Browne's *Literary History of Persia*, i. 292-4, 378-81, Nicholson's *Literary History of the Arabs*, pp. 370-2, and Gibb's *Arabic Literature*, p. 68, but also in general works on philosophy, history, and education. Thus, for example, the *International*

Journal of Ethics published in 1898 an article by Davidson on 'The Brothers of Sincerity', which reappeared in another form in its author's *History of Education* (London, 1912), pp. 133-50.

⁴ Published by al-Maktaba at-Tijariyya al-Kubra, Cairo, and printed at al-Matba'a al-'Arabiyya (Cairo, 1347/1928) with two introductions, the one by Ahmad Zakī Pāshā, already noted, and the other by Dr. Ṭāha Ḥusain.

⁵ Concluding Note, *Rasā'il*, iv, p. 479.

⁶ *Al-Kashshāf*, Beirut, vol. iii, Oct. 1929.

more will be said about it here, but he ventures to refer to another of his contributions.

The monograph entitled *Jamā'atu Ikhwān aṣ-Ṣafā*,¹ which was awarded the first Howard Bliss prize by the American University of Beirut in 1929, was subsequently published serially in the journal of that institution.² That it has been quoted quite frequently³ encourages its author to incorporate in this essay some of its conclusions and suggestions which do not seem to have been challenged or superseded in the meantime. Of these conclusions the first is that the name 'Ikhwān aṣ-Ṣafā' was chosen both as a protest against the treachery and lack of social cohesion of their time and as an imitation of the Ṣūfī tendency to associate their name with *ṣafā* (purity), an imitation which is supported by the Ikhwān's description of themselves in the *Rasā'il* as Ṣūfis. Secondly, reasons are given for suggesting A.H. 338 as a *terminus a quo* and A.H. 373⁴ as a *terminus ad quem* for the formation of the group and the circulation of a large number of their tracts.⁵

Thirdly, on the subject of authorship, the thesis is advanced that the subject-matter of the *Rasā'il* is very much like the material that emerges from the deliberations of a learned society and that the language and style are similar to an approved draft by a well-qualified secretary of such a society. There is obviously a general plan for the whole work and its execution is logically done in words which, on close examination, betray a single writer who occasionally forgets his role and lapses into 'I' instead of the usual 'we'.⁶ From external evidence this writer was probably

¹ The use of the word جماعة was suggested by Abu Ḥayyān's words in reference to Zaid b. Rifaa, *Inta*, ii. 4.

² *Al-Kulliyā*, vol. xvii, 1930-1. Reprinted, pp. ix + 80. After an introductory chapter giving an outline of the development of Muslim thought down to the emergence of the Ikhwān, the monograph deals with the meaning of the name of the group, the date and place of the publication of their tracts (chapter 2), the number of the tracts and the identity of the authors (chapter 3), the philosophy and aims of the group (chapter 4), the organization of the group (chapter 5), the place of the *Rasā'il* in the history of Muslim thought (chapter 6), and a bibliography with a note (chapter 7).

³ e.g. Hamdānī, in his *Baḥṭh Tārikhī fī Rasā'il Ikhwān aṣ-Ṣafā*, published in Cairo; 'Adel 'Awā, in his Paris doctorate thesis entitled *L'Esprit critique de Frères de la Pureté*, published in Beirut; Jamīl Salība, in his introduction to *ar-Risāla al-Jāmi'a*, published in Damascus, and others.

⁴ According to the *Rasā'il* (i. 106; iii. 258; iv. 237) dynasties rise and fall, and rule passes from one to another, in every 240 years. If so, the 'Abbāsids who came to power in A.H. 132 were due to go in 372, so close to the most probable date of the publication of the *Rasā'il* and the proclamation thereby of the

Realm of the Righteous (دولة اهل الخير) in place of the Realm of the Evil (دولة اهل الشر).

⁵ A typical example of the difficulty of fixing dates for a work of this nature is provided by a line of poetry which is quoted in the tracts (ii. 52) without the name of the poet:

أَجْهَدُ عَلَى النَّفْسِ وَاسْتَكْمَلُ فِضَائِلَهَا

فَأَنْتَ بِالنَّفْسِ لَا بِالْجِسْمِ إِنْسَانٌ

The line is, of course, by Abū al-Faṭḥ al-Bustī, who apparently hails from the same place as al-Maqdisī (who is also called al-Bustī), in whose words the tracts of the Ikhwān are stated to be couched. The poet was born in A.H. 360 and died in 401. The line in question occurs in tract No. 17, just at the end of the first third, which presumably was in circulation in A.H. 373. Was Abū al-Faṭḥ already a famous poet at thirteen? See my monograph, pp. 17-18. On al-Bustī see the *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, i (part 2), p. 806.

⁶ *Jamā'atu Ikhwān aṣ-Ṣafā*, pp. 24-25. Cf. Ivanow, *A Guide to Ismā'īlī Literature* (London, 1953), p. 31, who says, however: 'It is as difficult to believe that this encyclopedia is the work of a single scholar as it is to think that such a learned society could exist

Several of the *Rasā'il* were
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ote, *Rasā'il*, iv, p. 479.
eirut, vol. iii, Oct. 1929.

al-Maḡdisī. But as already stated, the *Rasā'il* as a whole and also *ar-Risāla al-Jāmi'a* are ascribed to Maslama al-Majrīṭī (d. A.H. 395 or 398). Again, the authorship of the *Rasā'il*, but not *al-Jāmi'a*, was ascribed to his disciple, Abd ul-Ḥakīm al-Kirmānī (d. 462).¹ While a number of surviving manuscripts are indeed ascribed to the former, none, so far as the present writer is aware, are ascribed to the latter. Majrīṭī made the customary *riḥla* to the East and brought with him copies of the *Rasā'il*² and may have claimed the authorship, or more probably made a recension or composed similar tracts himself. Ḥajjī Khalīfa, who gives the usual names of the Basra authors of the *Rasā'il*, lists another copy of *Ikhwān aṣ-Ṣafā* as by al-Majrīṭī but adds that 'it is a different copy modelled on *Ikhwān aṣ-Ṣafā*'.³

Fourthly, internal evidence as to the exact number of the tracts is conflicting. While it is clearly stated in certain places that the number is fifty-two excluding *al-Jāmi'a*,⁴ it is stated also equally clearly that the number is fifty-one excluding *al-Jāmi'a*.⁵

External evidence makes the problem still more complicated. Purporting to be a reproduction of Abū Ḥayyān's statement, Al-Qiftī's statement makes the number fifty, with *al-Jāmi'a* as the fifty-first.⁶ (Since the publication of Abū Ḥayyān's original statement⁷ it is clear that Qiftī did not quote him faithfully, for, according to Abū Ḥayyān, who does not mention *al-Jāmi'a*, the number is only fifty. According to Ḥajjī Khalīfa the number is fifty-one, but he does not mention *al-Jāmi'a*.⁸

But for the contradiction of the *Rasā'il* themselves on this subject, one would have ventured the opinion that fifty-two is the right number, exclusive of *al-Jāmi'a*, not only because this is the actual number in the complete copies we have but also because it could be explained as in line

and produce an anonymous work of such importance.' Then he says that the work was probably produced towards the end of the fourth (tenth) century under Fāṭimid patronage as a part of some general work on the philosophy of Ismā'ilism. Giving no evidence for this statement the author, who starts with 'most probably', tunes it down to 'a mere guess'.

¹ Al-Qādi Ṣā'id, *Tabaqāt al-Umam* as quoted by Jamil Saliba in the Introduction to *ar-Risāla al-Jāmi'a* (Damascus, 1948), p. 7.

² Gayangos, *The History of the Muhammedan Dynasties in Spain*, i. 427-9, as quoted by Hamdānī, *Der Islam*, xx. 282.

³ Vol. iii, p. 460 وهي نسخة مفايرة على نمط اخوان الصفا. Jamil Saliba, in his Introduction to *ar-Risāla al-Jāmi'a* (Damascus, 1948), vol. i, pp. 8-13, conjectures that this copy is *ar-Risāla al-Jāmi'a* itself.

⁴ *Rasā'il* vol. i, pp. 1, 19, 48. On page 19 it is stated: الرسالة الجامعة . . . لا ينكشف مستور غامضها الا لمن تهذب بهذه الرسائل الاثنتين

والخمسین

⁵ Ibid., vol. iv, pp. 221, 290. On this last page it is stated: لخصنا ما قد اوردناه في رسائلنا الاحدى والخمسین في رسالة مفردة عن الرسائل سميناها الجامعة

⁶ *Akhbār al-Hukamā'* (ed. Lippert; Leipzig, 1903), p. 82: رتبوه مقالات عدتها احدى وخمسون مقالة: خمسون منها في خمسین نوعا من الحكمة ومقالة حاوية وخمسون جامعة لانواع المقالات على سبيل الاختصار

⁷ *Al-Imtā'*, vol. ii, p. 5. صنفوا خمسین رسالة في جميع اجزاء الفلسفة علميها وعملها وأفردوا لها فهرستاً وسموها رسائل اخوان الصفا

⁸ *Kashf*, vol. iii, p. 460. . . . وزيد بن رفاعه كلهم حكماء اجتمعوا وصنفوا إحدى وخمسين رسالة

with the Ikhwān's belief in the significance of numbers: the year has fifty-two weeks symbolized by the fifty-two tracts plus one day symbolized by *al-Jāmi'a*.¹ Another and clearer symbolism is found in *ar-Risāla al-Jāmi'a*. The Ikhwān's service in writing the tracts is likened to that of one who opened a new road and planted at regular stages of it fifty-two gardens leading the traveller finally to 'the noblest abode and the grandest place'.² But, like the *Rasā'il*, this source is also inconsistent. Elsewhere it is definitely stated that the number of the *Rasā'il* is fifty-one plus *al-Jāmi'a*.³ There again the actual number of the *Rasā'il* summarized in *al-Jāmi'a* is fifty-two. The problem is small, but such discrepancy is examined only as an illustration of many others, trivial as well as important, which deserve further investigation.

However, the problem of the authorship of the *Rasā'il* perhaps more than any other problem continued to engage the attention of students. Hamdānī's contribution as an Ismā'īlī himself, with both a traditional and a Western education, is valuable in that he has access to hitherto unused literature in Yemen and India. The difficulty may be defined very briefly. There is hardly a work which has been ascribed to so many different authors as has the *Rasā'il*. The alleged authors will be found to belong to contrasting persuasions and to different periods spread over the first five centuries of Islam. Thus the authorship was attributed to an unnamed companion of the Prophet, to 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib, to the *imām* Ja'far aṣ-Ṣādiq, to other *imāms* named (e.g. Aḥmad b. Abdullah)⁴ and unnamed, to an unnamed Mu'tazilite, to Jābir b. Ḥayyān, to al-Ḥallāj, to a group called Ikhwān aṣ-Ṣafā, to Maslama al-Majrīṭī, to Abū al-Ḥakīm al-Kirmānī, and to al-Ghazālī. The authority for these claims need not be investigated in every case, certainly not the fantastic claim that a companion of the Prophet or his cousin 'Alī was the author, but there are good reasons for examining in detail certain other claims, especially the Bāṭinī-Ismā'īlī connexion.

The results of recent research in this subject are sometimes cautiously expressed. Thus according to Lewis the *Rasā'il* 'if not actually Ismā'īlī, are closely related to Ismā'īlism'.⁵ But Hamdānī is definitely on the side

¹ However, Idrīs 'Imād ud-Dīn, in his book *Zahr al-Ma'āni*, says: *فتقام الإمام أحمد بن عبد الله... ووصف الرسائل وجعلها على العلوم الأربعة... ثم جعلها ثلاثة وخمسين رسالة شاهدة له ودالة عليه لأن اسمه بحساب الجمل ثلاثة خمسون...* From Hamdānī, *Baḥth Tarīkhī fī Rasā'il Ikhwān aṣ-Ṣafā*, p. 21.

² Damascus edition (1948), vol. i, pp. 18-20. يمر في مسيره باثنين وخمسين فرسخا على رأس كل فرسخ منها بستان... ثم ينتهي حينئذ إلى المنزل

الأكرم والمحل الأعظم...

³ *Ar-Risāla al-Jāmi'a*, vol. ii, p. 393: انتهى بنا القول... من شرح الأحدى والخمسين رسالة في هذه الرسالة الجامعة. Cf. pp. 399-400.

⁴ Hence Ismā'īlīs refer to the tracts as الرسائل الشخص الفاضل and to Imām Aḥmad as الشخص الشريفة صاحب الرسائل.

⁵ *The Origins of Ismā'īlism* (Cambridge, 1940), p. 17, cf. p. 44: 'a work the Bāṭinī inspiration of which is no longer in doubt'.

whole and also *ar-Risāla* A.H. 395 or 398). Again, is ascribed to his disciple, number of surviving manuscripts, so far as the present Qiftī made the customary *Rasā'il*² and may have a recension or composed the usual names of the *Ikhwān aṣ-Ṣafā* as by al-... ed on Ikhwān aṣ-Ṣafā'.³ number of the tracts is con-... ces that the number is... qually clearly that the

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which claims 'Alid authorship for the *Rasā'il*,¹ supporting his contention partly by the obvious evidence of the *Rasā'il* but also by the prominence given to them in the literature of the *Taiyibi Da'wat* in Yemen. But since, according to the same writer,² 'the earliest reference to the *Rasā'il* in this literature' is made by one who died in A.H. 557, we are back to where the previous discussion has taken us, namely, that the Ismā'īlī sympathy of the *Rasā'il* practically needs no proof, but that the identification in one way or another of the *Rasā'il* with contemporary Ismā'īlī movements has yet to be proved. Dā'i Idrīs 'Imād ud-Dīn, who assigned the authorship of the *Rasā'il* to the concealed Imām Aḥmad b. 'Abdullah, belongs to a late period when the connexion is not in doubt. Hamdānī's statement that 'It is curious that the *Rasā'il* are nowhere mentioned in the literature written under the patronage of the Fātimids in Egypt'³ is an appropriate starting-point for future detailed investigation.

III

Since the thirties various contributions to the subject of *Ikhwān aṣ-Ṣafā* were made, but no magnifying glass is required to detect that most of them are redundant. For they either summarize the contents of the tracts under various heads in a way which serves neither the scholar nor the general reader,⁴ or in addition try to cover briefly some of the ground already covered by previous studies.⁵ However, the publication of Abū Ḥayyān's *al-Imtā' wal-Mu'ānasa* has occasioned an article⁶ in support of the usual assertion that the *Rasā'il* were written by a group of learned men.

Because the story of the Magian and the Jew that occurs in the *Rasā'il*⁷ is quoted almost verbatim in *al-Imtā'*, preceded by the author's statement that he received it from al-Qādī Abū al-Ḥasan 'Alī b. Harūn az-Zanjānī, the writer concludes that Zanjānī was one of the authors of the *Rasā'il*. Then because a manuscript copy of *Ṣiwān al-Ḥikmah* by Abū Sulaimān al Mantiqī—the writer assumes that he is the same as Abū Sulaimān Muḥammad b. Ṭāhir b. Bahram as-Sijistānī, the master of Abū Ḥayyān, to whom some of the *Rasā'il* were submitted—contains at the end a few lines that Abū Sulaimān al-Maqdisī was the author of the *Rasā'il* as well as about a two-page fragment from the *Rasā'il*⁸ on the four grades of the

¹ 'Rasā'il *Ikhwān aṣ-Ṣafā* in the Literature of the Ismā'īlī Taiyibi Da'wat' (*Der Islam*, Band xx, Heft 4, 1932, pp. 281 et seq.).

² *Ibid.*, p. 292.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 294 cf. *Bahth*, pp. 14, 21.

⁴ e.g. 'Umar Farrūkh, *Ikhwān aṣ-Ṣafā* (Beirut, 1945).

⁵ e.g. 'Umar Dasūqī *Ikhwān aṣ-Ṣafā* (Cairo, 1947).

⁶ Stern, *Islamic Culture* (Oct. 1946, pp. 367-72, supplemented with a few notes in Oct. 1947, p. 403). This article has a number of slips which were not corrected in its supplement. The following are some

of them: Qifī nowhere says he was quoting Abū Ḥayyān's *al-Imtā'*; there is no member of *Ikhwān aṣ-Ṣafā* called Abū Ahmad al-Mihrajānī al-'Aufī (Mihrajānī and 'Aufī being two different persons); if at all, Abū Sulaimān al Mantiqī's *Ṣiwān al-Ḥikmah* mentions only one, not 'all' the authors of *Rasā'il Ikhwān aṣ-Ṣafā*; Bustī or Bayustī (but not Bistī) is the usual spelling of the name of one of the group.

⁷ Vol. i, pp. 237-9 (Cairo edition, 1928).

⁸ Vol. iv, pp. 119-20.

Ikhwān, al-Maḡdisī is also declared to be one of the authors. But is the Qādī Zanjānī the same as the 'akhū safā' Zanjānī? Is Abū Ḥayyān's *haddathanī* ('related to me') a variant of *haddathanā* ('related to us')? Is it inconceivable that Abū Ḥayyān and the *Rasā'il* were both dependent for the story of the Magian and the Jew on a third source? Furthermore, a description of the manuscript of *Siwān al-Ḥikmah*¹ shows that it is an abridgement of or selections from the original with a continuation (*tatimma*) and a completion of the continuation (*itmāmu't tatimma*). So unless the whole of the original manuscript preserved in Istanbul could be examined, and not merely a photostat of the short conclusion on al-Maḡdisī, one may legitimately suspect this portion to be a later accretion.²

We now turn to consider the last two notable contributions, and both come from Damascus. 'Adel 'Awā's Paris doctorate thesis³ is a clear and comprehensive survey. In its first part the various theories as to the name of the group, the authorship of the *Rasā'il*, and the date of their composition are briefly surveyed and discussed. The second part, which is nearly half of the whole work, is devoted to a digest of the contents of the *Rasā'il*, while the third part is a discussion of the aims, beliefs, and organization of the group based partly on the preceding digest and partly on external evidence. The work concludes with a useful, if very brief, note on the influence of the Ikhwān on certain thinkers who lived in their time or the following centuries. So far as one is aware this work is the fullest single account of the subject in French, but it is doubtful if every reader who has considered the various studies discussed in this essay will agree with the statement that 'aucune étude sérieuse n'a été entreprise jusqu'ici'.⁴

The second notable contribution is the publication of *ar-Risāla al-Jāmi'a*, under the auspices of the Arab Academy in Damascus, in two volumes edited with a sixteen-page introduction and five pages of indexes by Jamil Ṣalība. This *risāla* is described by the Ikhwān as a tract that 'includes the (substance) of all these (fifty-two) previous tracts', written for the purpose of 'elucidating the realities' of all tracts which are mere introductions to it. It is therefore claimed that the obscurities of *al-Jāmi'a*, which is the ultimate aim of all the others, cannot be revealed except to those who have mastered the other fifty-two.⁵ No doubt its publication satisfies an overdue wish of all workers in this field, who had hitherto to rely on manuscript copies mostly at first in private ownership.

¹ *Islamica*, 1931, iv, pp. 534-8 (by Plesner).

² The British Museum copy (OR. 9033) of the *Siwān* is also a composite work of 149 folios covering selections from the *Siwān*, then the *Tatimma*, and finally a *Risāla* on poetry. On folio 90 (b) it is stated that 'Abū Sulaimān al-Maḡdisī is the author of the fifty-one tracts called Rasā'il Ikhwān aṣ-Ṣafā'. Then the fragment on the four grades (*marātib*) of the Ikhwān is reproduced preceded by the words *qāla*

Abū Sulaimān.

³ 'L'Esprit critique des "Frères de la Pureté", *Encyclopédistes arabes du IV^e/X^e siècle* (Beyrouth, Imprimerie Catholique, 1948).

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. xlviii.

⁵ *Rasā'il*, vol. i, p. 19 (*fihrist*). Elsewhere in the tracts *al-Jāmi'a* is referred to in similar terms, e.g. iv. 290, 309.

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(Cairo edition, 1928).
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Four copies were collated to produce the new edition, and a fifth (in the National Library, Cairo) was only partially used. The four copies are those of the Zāhiriya Library, Damascus, the Taimuriya Library, Cairo, a Teheran copy, and the Paris copy (No. 2306 in De Slane's Catalogue). Another abridged copy, examined but not used for collation, is in the private collection of an Ismā'īlī of Salimiya and ends with this note: تمت رسالة جماعة الجامعة التي هي مختصرة من رسائل اخوان الصفا.¹ None of these copies, however, was treated as a basic text by the editor, whose method was to read a text in one copy, compare it with the texts of the other copies, and then to 'choose what is more correct and trustworthy',² adding in footnotes the variant readings.

The Damascus text is ascribed to al-Majrīṭī, but the editor, who devotes nearly half of the eighteen-page introduction to a discussion of the life and works of al-Majrīṭī, concludes that he was neither the author of the *Rasā'il* nor of *ar-Risāla al-Jāmi'a*, and that the error in both cases is due to fraudulent copyists.³ It is a pity that the editor did not go into this matter. For like the *Rasā'il*, *al-Jāmi'a* is also ascribed to Aḥmad b. Abdullah,⁴ and this claim deserves at least to be recorded.

Much importance is claimed for *al-Jāmi'a* both by the *Rasā'il* and in its own pages. Indeed, its significance has been unduly exaggerated by scholars. It is variously described as the crown and essence of the tracts, a philosophic synopsis of their contents, a commentary on these, a residue of esoteric knowledge which should not be given except to the very select, a secret exposition of what has only been hinted at in the tracts, and other such description. Close examination of its contents tends to arouse a suspicion that most of these claims are deliberate psychological propaganda, to use the parlance of our own time. This propaganda was apparently meant to overawe the initiate or to stimulate his interest. Obviously the *Ikhwān's* prospects in gaining adherents to their cause depended to a large degree on the curiosity and eagerness of initiates to read the *Rasā'il* one after the other until they came to *al-Jāmi'a*. This device to hold the attention of the initiates is clearly seen throughout the tracts, but is *al-Jāmi'a* really a climax to these? Examined in detail this tract will be seen to contain, like the *fihrist* of the *Rasā'il* which comes as an introduction to the whole work, unequal summaries of every one of the fifty-two tracts together with two lengthy discourses. The first comes at the beginning and betrays signs of lack of continuity and interpolations. Its main theme, however, is unmistakable; it deals with Adam's

¹ Such a book as جامعة الجامعة is listed in Ivanow's *Guide*, p. 31, with the remark that 'the author is unknown', but elsewhere (p. 36) Ivanow says that the book is sometimes attributed to al-Mansūr (Billah) the third Fāṭimid Caliph (334-41).

² فنختار ما هو أصح وأصدق, vol. i, Introduction, p. 17.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 13.

⁴ Ivanow, *Guide*, p. 31.

sin and its allegorical interpretation. The second is more homogeneous, and its subject is the controversy between Man and Animals.¹ These two discourses amount to almost a quarter of the whole *risāla* and seem to have been designed to state, under a smoke-screen of peculiar phraseology, play on words, intentional ambiguity and digressions, beliefs and ideas which have already been expressed more or less in the *Rasā'il*. The claim that *al-Jāmi'a* reveals, by hints rather than explicit statement, the essence of wisdom and obscure knowledge² does not appear to be justified.

Further, a tract which purports to be a summary of some fifty other tracts would be expected to be free from repetitions and extravagance in the use of words. *Al-Jāmi'a* is guilty of both offences.³ No wonder that future generations found it necessary or convenient to make 'a summary of the summary'. Indeed, if one were to re-edit its present two volumes with a view to cutting out the redundant themes and to eliminate unnecessary rhyming words or phrases, the result should not be more than half the present length of the *Risāla*, without violence to the sense.

IV

In concluding this critique there is no need to make detailed suggestions for fresh studies or re-examinations of old conclusions. The foregoing pages are in fact interspersed with such suggestions which need only to be recapitulated here. The most obvious, of course, is the question of the text of the *Rasā'il*. While there is now a reasonably good edition of *ar-Risāla al-Jāmi'a*, and there appears to be no urgent need for a new critical edition of all the *Rasā'il*, yet it is still desirable to collate as many of the existing manuscript copies as possible in order to establish the accuracy of the text with regard, among other things, to certain technical terms.⁴ The manuscript copies are numerous, both in the East and the West, in public and private libraries, and the greater number of them is catalogued and available for detailed examination.

But the most important aspect of the subject which deserves serious and close study is the nature, date, and purpose of the relationship with Ismā'ilism. The main task should be to prove, not to assume, the existence of the relationship. Closely connected with this is the question of the authorship of the *Rasā'il*, and the two together are not an unworthy theme for a doctorate thesis.

Another aspect of the subject which deserves serious treatment is the determination by detailed analysis and comparison of the various sources

¹ Vol. i, pp. 3 (111)-172; 341-489.

² Ibid., pp. 356, 411; cf. 428, 436.

³ e.g. repetition: vol. i, pp. 8 (cf. 173), 14 (cf. 24);
extravagant language: vol. i, p. 41: أخبار القرون

التي خلت، والأدوار التي مضت، والأكوار التي
انقضت. Cf. 113, 137, 427.

⁴ For examples: vol. i, p. 203, l. 20; vol. iv, p. 69,
l. 7.

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of the *Ikhwān's* material, Muslim and foreign. How far are the *Rasā'il* based on orthodox Islam? To what extent do they canalize the different streams of Muslim thought? In what way can they be considered a successful integration of Islam and Greek philosophy? Who are the Greek thinkers on whom the authors drew, and what in particular are the Greek works which influenced the *Ikhwān*? How deep and accurate was their understanding of Greek philosophy? What are the borrowings from Indian, Iranian, Christian, and Jewish sources? Together with these questions must be considered the *Ikhwān's* legitimate criticisms of what they considered inaccurate translation of philosophical material into Arabic.¹ Except in certain instances where the obscurity seems to be intentional, the language of the *Rasā'il* is remarkably easy and flexible for treating philosophical and metaphysical themes, in comparison with the language of contemporary professional philosophers and theologians. As a by-product of such an investigation, rich glossaries of technical terms in philosophy and science may be compiled which will be an invaluable aid to those at present engaged in translation from modern foreign languages into Arabic.

A third topic still awaiting detailed study is the influence of the *Rasā'il* on Muslim thought, both Sunnī and Shi'ī on the one hand, and on medieval European and Jewish literature on the other. In his monographs cited above² the present writer made a preliminary examination of this question and indicated the positive as well as the negative influence of the *Rasā'il* on Abū Ḥayyān at-Tauḥīdī, Yaḥyā b. 'Adiy, the cosmopolitan Baghdādī circle of Abū Sulaimān as-Sijistānī, Abū al-'Alā' al-Ma'arri, al-Ghazālī, the Ismā'ilī sect, and certain Jewish cabbalists. Of these Hamdānī³ singled out Ismā'ilism and showed the place of the *Rasā'il* in its later literature. 'Awā rendered a valuable service by including in his work⁴ a judicious summary of the results of his own and previous studies. It will, however, be readily perceived that all these attempts are not exhaustive and should really serve as incentives for further research.

Three provocative illustrations will not fail to excite the curiosity of interested students. Firstly, the eccentric but acute thinker, Ibn Sab'in (d. 669/1270), states⁵ very bluntly that al-Ghazālī's material is 'mostly *Rasā'il Ikhwān aṣ-Ṣafā*, weak in philosophy like its source'. Is this statement, in its two parts, not worthy of the closest study? Secondly, Flügel

¹ *Rasā'il*, vol. i, pp. 48, 204; vol. ii, p. 16.

² *Jamā'atu Ikhwān aṣ-Ṣafā* (Beirut, 1930-1), pp. 60-79.

³ *Der Islam*, xx (1932), pp. 281-300, especially the appendix with Arabic texts, pp. 297-300.

⁴ *L'Esprit critique des Frères de la Pureté* (Beirut, 1948), pp. 309 f.

⁵ Massignon, *Recueil de Textes inédits concernant*

l'histoire de la mystique en pays d'Islam (Paris, 1929), p. 130: *وكتابه على أكثر ما يظهر في أكثر كلامه هو رسائل اخوان الصفا فانه في الفلسفة ضعيف مثل أصله*. Cf. p. 186, where Massignon gives in a rich paragraph instances of the influence of the *Rasā'il* on Ghazālī's *Ihyā*, Ibn 'Arabī's *Futūḥāt*, and others.

mentioned in the introductory paragraphs of his paper¹ that the *Rasā'il*, particularly the *Risāla* on the dispute between Man and Animals, were very popular with the Hebrew scholars in Spain such as Joseph Ben Zaddick (fifteenth century). Modern Jewish scholarship has established that Arabic-speaking Jews who were at the same time cabbalists such as Bahya Ben Paquda (eleventh century) were strongly influenced by the *Rasā'il* in so far as the doctrine of emanation and the significance of numbers were concerned.² Does this subject not deserve the attention of an Arabic-Hebrew scholar? Thirdly, although we know that at least one of the *Rasā'il* was translated into Latin, their influence on medieval Christendom has not yet been investigated in the masterly manner in which Asín y Palacios proved Dante's indebtedness to Muslim thought.³ The same scholar has himself, however, composed a most interesting contribution,⁴ concerned mainly with exposing the plagiarism of a Franciscan monk of the fourteenth century, who after turning Muslim in Tunis and assuming the name of 'Abdullah at-Turjumān published a book in Arabic entitled *Tuhfatu'l-Arib fi'r-Raddi 'alā Ahli's-Ṣalīb* which Palacios proved was a reproduction of the famous *Risālatu'l-Insān wal-Ḥayawān* (the dispute between Man and Animals).

Finally, a fourth topic that deserves close study is the place of the *Rasā'il* in Muslim educational thought and practice. The present writer has pointed out elsewhere⁵ that Muslim education was, up to the fifth/eleventh century, largely a voluntary, personal pursuit, over which the State exercised little or no control and on which practically no public money was spent. It seems, however, that as a result of the Shi'i bid for the leadership of Islam, a rivalry with the Sunna in the field of education became inevitable. This rivalry is symbolized in the emergence of institutions such as Dār al-'Ilm in the Shi'i camp and the Madrasah in the Sunni camp as educational establishments created by the State, and hence subject in staffing and curriculum to State control. Both the Dār and the Madrasah were intended for intermediate or higher education, and the promoters of both assumed the existence of private means of acquiring the preliminary facility in reading, writing, and reckoning.⁶ It is thus no accident that *Rasā'il Ikhwān aṣ-Ṣafā*, composed as they were during the Shi'i-Sunnī rivalry, are distinctly addressed to the youth with the same assumption. Their content and method of approach, together

¹ *Z.D.M.G.* 1859, p. 2.

² See, for example, Loewe's article 'Kabbala' in Hasting's *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics* (1914), vol. vii, p. 624.

³ 'La escatalogía musulmana en "la divina comedia"': see English abridged translation by Sunderland: *Islam and the Divine Comedy* (London, 1926).

⁴ 'El Original Arabe de "La Disputa del Asno contra Fr. Anselmo Turmeda"', which was published in Madrid in 1914 in the Spanish Philological Review.

⁵ *Islamic Culture*, xxviii, No. 3 (1954), pp. 435 et seq.

⁶ Al-Cabisi (d. 403) wrote of elementary education thus: انه شيء مما يختص أمره كل انسان في نفسه.

with the pure theory of education revealed incidentally here and there, provide rich material for a more detailed study of an important aspect of Muslim education in the fourth/tenth century. Such a study is shortly to be published by the present writer.

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