

IKHWĀN AL-ŞAFĀ'S RELIGIOUS REFORM AND MAGIC: BEYOND THE ISMA'ILI HYPOTHESIS

LIANA SAIF*
The University of Oxford

INTRODUCTION

Although Ikhwān al-Şafā's epistle on magic is relatively well-known, it has not received substantial critical attention.¹ Yves Marquet, in *La philosophie des Ikhwān al-Şafā*, tackles its astrological content, the Brethren's conceptualization of miracles and magic, and the latter's relationship to prophecy and sacral power.² In his *Les frères de la pureté, pythagoriciens de l'Islam*, he further describes the content while

* Research for this article is one of the outcomes of my fellowship in the Université Catholique de Louvain as part of the research project 'Speculum Arabicum: Objectifying the contribution of the Arab-Muslim world to the history of science and ideas: the sources and resources of medieval encyclopaedism'. I am grateful to Godefroid de Callataÿ, Sébastien Moureau, Daniel de Smet, Wilferd Madelung, Nicholas Harris, and the anonymous reviewers for their valuable support and feedback.

¹ References to the magic of the Ikhwān have been mostly from uncritical printed editions. For ease of access for the reader, I used in this article the epistles published so far by the OUP/IIS critical editions series. Where I refer to an epistle not published yet by the series, I used the widely available yet uncritical Dār Şādir edition, but in every instance I checked it against two manuscripts: Istanbul, Süleymaniye Manuscript Library, Ragıp Pasha 840 and Ragıp Pasha 839. Any major discrepancy between these is noted. As for the long version of the epistle on magic, I refer to manuscripts that are outlined by Godefroid de Callataÿ's and Bruno Halflants's critical edition of the shorter version of the epistle on magic, but rely mainly on Istanbul, Atif Efendi 1681 which is the oldest (12th c.) checked against Ragıp Pasha 840 and 839. *Rasā'il Ikhwān al-Şafā* (Beirut: Dār Şādir, 4 vols., 2008); Godefroid de Callataÿ and Bruno Halflants (eds. and transl.), *Epistles of the Brethren of Purity. On Magic I: An Arabic Critical Edition and English Translation of Epistle 52a Part 1* (Oxford: Oxford University Press in association with the Institute of Ismaili Studies, 2011).

² Yves Marquet, *La philosophie des Iḥwan al-Safa'* (Algiers: Études et Documents, 1975), 138, 485–9.

attempting to establish some structural logic by dividing the epistle into five sections interrupted by digressions and addition, all of which is speculative.³ In his discussion of magic in *La Philosophie des alchimistes et l'alchimie des Philosophes*, Marquet studies its alchemical content.⁴

The first scholarly work fully dedicated to the epistle on magic is an article by Pierre Lory. He too looks into the Brethren's typology of magic and demonstrates the place held by the occult sciences—alongside metaphysics, physics, mathematics, astrology, and religious knowledge—in their quest for wisdom. Like Marquet, Lory focuses on the Brethren's unique conceptualization of magic as sacral power endowed to the special intellect of prophets and imams, a subject that will be revisited in this present article.⁵

The publication of the epistle in its shorter version, translated and introduced by Godefroid de Callatāy, heralded a new stage in the study of magic in the Ikhwān's *Rasā'il* ('Epistles'), based on working through manuscripts and moving towards understanding the place of this epistle in the Ikhwānian corpus as a whole. In this paper, I aim to contextualize magic within the Ikhwān's project of religious reform which itself has been overlooked or often misunderstood, arguing that, along with astrology, it was the tool of the project's realization and of transcending mundane reality, temporal leadership, and corrupt states. I will focus on the longer version of the epistle on magic, currently being edited and translated by Godefroid de Callatāy, Sébastien Moureau, and Bruno Halflants.⁶ To achieve this goal, two lines of investigation are required:

1. Defining the features of the Ikhwān's religiopolitical project which, as I will show, is founded upon the notion of '*tajdīd*', meaning 'renewal' and 'reform'. We thus need to situate their religiopolitical ideas relative to those found in denominations active in tenth-century Iraq and beyond. This article demonstrates that the Ikhwān's religio-political stance shares elements with Ibadism and Zaydism, particularly in their views on the nature and legitimacy of the imamate and caliphate.

³ Yves Marquet, *Les frères de la pureté, pythagoriciens de l'Islam. La marque du pythagorisme dans la rédaction des Épîtres des Iḥwān as-Ṣafā* (Paris: S.É.H.A., 2006), 9–23.

⁴ *La Philosophie des alchimistes et l'alchimie des Philosophes* (Paris: Maisonneuve et Larose, 1988), 32–9.

⁵ Pierre Lory, 'La magie chez les Iḥwān al-Ṣafā', *Bulletin d'Études Orientales*, 44 ('Sciences occultes et l'Islam', eds. Pierre Lory and Annick Regourd, 1992): 147–59, at 147–9, 150–1, 154–9.

⁶ To be published by Oxford University Press in association with the Institute of Ismaili Studies.

2. Inspecting the ways in which magic mobilizes the reformed religion of the Ikhwān. The Ikhwān's definition of magic as powerful and effective action that is able to change internal and external realities incorporates their ideas on the imamate and caliphate. Furthermore, on a more straightforward level, the Ikhwān call for the utilization of transitive magic and divination in state administration.

The first undertaking here is a complex one: the religious affiliation of the Ikhwān, a contentious issue. This debate has been largely concerned with the extent to which the *Epistles* were Isma'ili. Marquet, Corbin, Hamdani, Nasr, Baffioni and recently Janne Mattila, have insisted on the Ikhwān's Isma'ili religious commitment, based on a tendency to view the esoteric/exoteric dichotomy of the *Epistles* as that specific to Isma'ili notions of the *ẓāhir* and the *bāṭin*;⁷ in addition to the Ikhwān's exposition on the cycles and their discussion of the significance of the number seven. The influence of the *Epistles* on Isma'ili *da'wa* particularly in Yemen from the twelfth century is often cited in support of their Isma'ilism.⁸ A group of scholars such as Stern, Bausani, and others argued that these same elements point to a softer Isma'ili affiliation

⁷ Michael Ebstein, 'Spiritual Descendants of the Prophet: al-Ḥakīm al-Tirmidhī, Ibn al-ʿArabī and Ikhwān al-Şafā' on *Ahl al-Bayt*' in Mohammad Ali Amir-Moezzi (ed.), *L'ésotérisme shi'ite: ses racines et ses prolongements* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2016), 539–71, at 541.

⁸ Husain F. al-Hamdānī, 'Rasā'il Ikhwān aṣ-Şafā' in the Literature of the Isma'ili Tayyibī Da'wa', *Der Islam*, 20 (1932): 280–300. The Isma'ili argument: Yves Marquet, *La philosophie des Iḥwān al-Şafā'* (Algiers: Etudes et Documents, 1975), 585; 'Iḥwān al-şafā'', 'Ismā'iliens et Qarmates', *Arabica*, 24 (1977): 233–57; 'Les Iḥwān aṣ-Şafā' et l'Ismā'ilisme' in *Convegno sugli Iḥwān aṣ-Şafā'* (Roma: Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei, 1981), 69–96; Henry Corbin, *Histoire de la philosophie islamique, I. Des origines jusqu'à la mort d'Averroës* (Paris: Gallimard, 1964), 190; Abbas Hamdani, 'A Critique of Paul Casanova's Dating of the *Rasā'il Ikhwān al-Şafā'*' in Farhad Daftary (ed.), *Medieval Isma'ili History and Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 145–52, at 146; Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *An Introduction to Islamic Cosmological Doctrines* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1993), 27–9; Carmela Baffioni, 'Epistles 48 of the Ikhwān al-Şafā' and Their Ismā'ili Commitment' in Ilkka Lindstedt, Jaako Hämeen-Anttila, Raija Mattila and Robert Rollinger (eds.), *Case Studies in Transmission* (Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 2014), 11–31 *et passim*; ead., 'Ibdā', Divine Imperative and Prophecy in the *Rasā'il Ikhwān al-Şafā'* in O. Ali-de-Unzaga (ed.), *Fortresses of the Intellect. Ismaili and Other Islamic Studies in Honour of Farhad Daftary* (London and New York: I.B. Tauris in association with the Institute of Ismaili Studies, 2011), 213–26; Janne Mattila, 'The Philosophical Worship of the Ikhwān al-Şafā'', *Journal of Islamic Studies*, 27/1 (2016): 17–38, at 17 and 37.

rather than belonging to the ‘official’ Isma‘ili *da‘wa*.⁹ Others have argued that these strong tendencies are threads in the ‘syncretic’ or ‘eclectic’ tapestry of the *Epistles*.¹⁰ Ian Netton takes a non-Isma‘ili view based on the Ikhwān’s being ‘more than lukewarm in their devotion to this doctrine [of imam]’ when it is cardinal to the Isma‘ilis, arguing that the doctrine of the imamate is replaced by that of brotherhood.¹¹ Susanne Diwald focuses on the Sufi inclination of the Ikhwān. For her, their brotherhood is indicative of the kind of camaraderie discerned in Sufi circles.¹² Responding to Netton, Michael Ebstein considers them as being ‘one party among many in the colorful “mosaic” of the 9th–10th century Ismā‘īlī world’—Qarāmiṭa, the Fatimids, the missionaries, etc.—and they rather ‘chose to interpret their own Shi‘i–Ismā‘īlī beliefs in a unique way’.¹³ The Ikhwān are part of an ideologically heterogeneous context, but the singularity of their way makes pinpointing their commitment to any specific denomination precarious. Instead, this article proposes a new perspective which distances them further from Isma‘ilism: the Ikhwān’s interpretation is indeed unique, in that they promote their own new denomination which they call The Third Way (*al-sunna al-thālitha*). It has similarities with Zaydism and Ibadism,

⁹ S. M. Stern, ‘The Authorship of the Epistles of the Ikhwān al-Ṣafā’, *Islamic Culture*, 20/1 (Jan. 1946): 367–72; id., ‘Additional Notes to the Article “The Authorship of the Epistles of the Ikhwān al-Ṣafā”’, *Islamic Culture*, 21/1 (Jan. 1947): 403–4; id., ‘New information about the authors of the ‘Epistles of the Sincere Brethren’, *Islamic Studies*, 3 (1964): 405–28, at 421; A. Bausani, *L'enciclopedia dei Fratelli della Purità. Riassunto, con Introduzione e breve commento, dei 52 Trattati o Epistole degli Ikhwān aṣ-ṣafā'* (Napoli: Istituto Universitario Orientale, 1978), 14–16; Nader El-Bizri, ‘Prologue’ in Nader El Bizri (ed.), *The Ikhwān al-Ṣafā' and their Rasā'il: An Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press in association with the Institute of Ismaili Studies, 2008), 1–32, at 8–10.

¹⁰ Godefroid de Callatay, *Ikhwān al-Ṣafā': A Brotherhood of Idealists on the Fringe of Orthodox Islam* (Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 2005), xi, 8–11, 96–7.

¹¹ Ian Richard Netton, *Muslim Neoplatonists: An Introduction to the Thought of the Brethren of Purity (Ikhwān al-Ṣafā')* (London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2002), 97–8, 103.

¹² Susanne Diwald, *Kitāb Iḥwān aṣ-Ṣafā', Arabische Philosophie und Wissenschaft in der Enzyklopädie. Kitāb Ihwan as-safa' (III). Die Lehre von Seele und Intellekt* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1975), 5, 15, 23; On the Ikhwān’s association with Sufism, see also de Callatay, *Ikhwān al-Ṣafā'*, 89–92; Netton, *Muslim Neoplatonists*, 49–50.

¹³ Michael Ebstein, *Mysticism and Philosophy in al-Andalus: Ibn Masarra, Ibn al-Arabī, and the Ismā‘īlī Tradition* (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 180.

namely with regards to the issue of the legitimacy of the imam and the caliph.

The aforementioned arguments for an Isma‘ili religious commitment or affiliation remain in my opinion unconvincing. Nowhere in the *Epistles* do the Ikhwān use the dichotomy of *ẓāhir* and *bāṭin* in an explicitly Isma‘ili way. They use the term *bāṭin* to mean hidden phenomena including astral influences.¹⁴ They also contrast acts of faith that are manifest with those that are hidden but entrenched in *yaqīn* (certitude).¹⁵ Moreover, they use the dichotomy to express outcomes of Qur’ānic exegesis in a very general way.¹⁶ The *ẓāhir* / *bāṭin* dichotomy is shared between classical Sunni mysticism and early Shi‘ism.¹⁷ Furthermore, the Isma‘ili doctrine of *tajrīd*, that is the absolute transcendence of God from the created world, is incompatible with the Ikhwān’s view of God as the First Cause (*‘al-‘illa al-ulā al-ladhī huwa al-Bārī’*);¹⁸ in addition, there is a discrepancy between the Isma‘ili conviction that the Universal Intellect does not proceed from the One by emanation and the many statements made by the Ikhwān that stress the opposite, for example: ‘The Intellect is the first existent emanating from the existence of the Creator, the Glorified and Sublime’.¹⁹

¹⁴ Paul E. Walker, David Simonowitz, Ismail K. Poonawala and Godefroid de Callatāy (eds. and transl.), *Epistles of the Brethren of Purity. Sciences of the Soul and Intellect, Part I: An Arabic Critical Edition and English Translation of Epistles 32–36* (Oxford: Oxford University Press in association with the Institute of Ismaili Studies, 2016), Epistle 36 (*Fī al-akwār wa-l-adwār* / ‘On Cycles and Revolutions’), 144.

¹⁵ *Rasā’il Ikhwān al-Şafā’* (Dār Şādir), vol. 4, Epistle 64 (*Fī māhiyyat al-īmān wa-kbiṣāl al-mu’minin al-muḥaqqaqīn* / ‘On Faith and the Traits of the Verified Faithful’), 67–8.

¹⁶ *Rasā’il Ikhwān al-Şafā’* (Dār Şādir), vol. 3, Epistle 42 (*Fī al-ārā’ wa-l-diyānāt* / ‘On Beliefs and Religions’), 488.

¹⁷ David Hollenberg, ‘Interpretation after the End of Days: The Fāṭimid-Isma‘īlī *Ta’wīl* (Interpretation) of Ja‘far ibn Manṣūr al-Yaman (d. ca. 960)’ (PhD diss., University of Pennsylvania, 2006), 38.

¹⁸ *Rasā’il Ikhwān al-Şafā’* (Dār Şādir), vol. 1, Epistle 7 (*Fī al-ṣanā’i ‘al-‘ilmiyya wa-l-gharaḍ minhā* / ‘On the Scientific Disciplines and their Purpose’), 272, 317; vol. 1, Epistle 11 (*Fī al-maḡulāt al-‘asbr allatī hiya qaṭiḡhūriyās* / ‘On the Ten Categories’), 404; vol. 3, Epistle 30 (*Fī khāṣiyyat al-ladhdhāt wa-ḥikmat al-ḥayāt wa-l-mawt* / ‘On the Characteristic of Pleasure, the Wisdom of Life and Death, and their Quiddity’), 56, 179; Hollenberg, ‘Interpretation after the End of Days’, 16–17.

¹⁹ Paul E. Walker, *et al.*, Epistle 32 (*Fī al-mabādi’ al-‘aqliyya ‘alā ra’y fithāghūras* / ‘On the Intellectual Principles according to Pythagoras’), 14; Farhad Daftary, *The Isma‘īlis: Their History and Doctrines* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2nd

It is within the Ikhwān's philosophical and cosmological discourse, particularly their Neoplatonism, that we find parallels with some Isma'ili ideas, such as the doctrine of cycles and revolutions and its link with the Isma'ili stratification of the created world, the regulating emanations of the Intellect by the command and word of God, the resulting prophetic cosmology,²⁰ the Intellect as *mubdi'* (the originator), the notion of *amr* (divine command), and more generally the Islamicization of the Neoplatonic hypostases.²¹ Research has demonstrated the Isma'ili influence on the Ikhwān's exposition on the cycles and revolutions in addition to other sources.²² In fact, looking at the works of the Isma'ili *dā'i* Ja'far b. Maṣṣūr al-Yaman (d. ca. 960), especially *Kitāb al-Fatarāt wa-al-qirānāt* ('The Book of Periods and Conjunctions'), one is immediately struck by the similarities with the Ikhwān's exposition on prophetic cycles and conjunctions.²³ Another notion articulated by Ibn Maṣṣūr and found in the *Rasā'il*, namely in the animal fable, is the creation of Man when all the planets are in their dignities.²⁴ Though, the Ikhwān most likely received it from the pseudo-Aristotelian Hermetic text *al-Ustūṭās*, which they mention in the longer version of the epistle on magic and is discussed further below.²⁵ Therefore, it is my contention that it is more cogent to restrict the discussion of Ikhwānian ideas that have parallels with Isma'ili ones within the Ikhwān's philosophical and cosmological enterprise, rather than their religious and ideological discourse; the latter being more the area where we find parallels with Ibadism and Zaydism.

Since the focus of this paper is to demonstrate the ideological aspect of the Ikhwān's 'reform' (*tajdīd*), I will not elaborate on another aspect of the Ikhwānian movement: namely, the reconciliation of philosophy and

edn., 2007), 133–4; Daniel de Smet, 'Isma'ili Theology' in Sabine Schmidtke (ed.) *The Oxford Handbook of Islamic Theology*, 313–24.

²⁰ Michael Ebstein, *Mysticism and Philosophy in al-Andalus*, 45–51.

²¹ Carmela Baffioni, 'Ibdā', *passim*.

²² Godefroid de Callatāy, *Les Révolutions et les Cycles (Épîtres des Frères de la Pureté, XXXVI)* (Beirut: Al-Bouraq; Louvain-la-Neuve: Academia-Bruylant, 1996); de Callatāy, *Ikhwān al-Ṣafā'*, 39–47; Yves Marquet, 'Les cycles de la souveraineté selon les épîtres des Iḥwān al Ṣafā'', *Studia Islamica*, 36 (1972): 49–79.

²³ Hollenberg, 'Interpretation after the End of Days', 17–9, 115, 106–8.

²⁴ Ibid., 101–2. Lenn E. Goodman and Richard McGregor (eds. and transl.), *Epistles of the Brethren of Purity. The Case of the Animals versus Man Before the King of the Jinn: An Arabic Critical Edition and English Translation of Epistle 22* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press in association with the Institute of Ismaili Studies, 2009), 50.

²⁵ Turkey, the National Library of Manisa, MS no. 1461, fols. 5v–6r.

revelation/religion. Many studies have tackled this issue.²⁶ The so-called ‘syncretism’²⁷ of the Ikhwānīan intellectual programme has been discussed as a reconciliation of philosophy and revelation.²⁸ It remains, however, that their ideological aspiration which interpolates beliefs and doctrines from various denominations active in Iraq, including Ibadism and Zaydism, has been ignored, which, as we shall see, a) explains the elements that have been seen as ‘contradictions’ to their Isma‘ili bent, and

²⁶ Mattila, ‘The Philosophical Worship’; Netton, *Muslim Neoplatonists*, pp. 9–32; Ian Richard Netton, ‘The Brethren of Purity (Ikhwān al-Šafā’)' in Seyyed Hossein Nasr and Oliver Leaman (eds.) *History of Islamic Philosophy* (London and New York: Routledge, 1996), 222–30; de Callatāy, *Ikhwān al-Šafā’*, 73–85; Liana Saif, ‘From *Gāyat al-ḥakīm* to *Šams al-ma‘ārif*: Ways of Knowing and Paths of Power in Medieval Islam’ in Matthew Melvin-Koushki and Noah Gardiner (eds.), *Islamic Occultism: New Perspectives*, Special double issue of *Arabica*, 64/3–4 (2017): 297–345; Carmela Baffioni (ed. and transl.), *Epistles of the Brethren of Purity. On the Natural Sciences. An Arabic Critical Edition and English Translation of Epistles 15–21* (Oxford: Oxford University Press in association with the Institute of Ismaili Studies, 2013), ‘Introduction’.

²⁷ ‘Syncretism’ is a term commonly used to describe the Ikhwānīan programme, for example see de Callatāy, *Ikhwan al-Safa’*, 73–85; Netton, ‘The Brethren of Purity’, 222, 224, 228; Nader al-Bizri, ‘The Brethren of Purity’ in Josef W. Meri (ed.), *Medieval Islamic Civilization: An Encyclopedia* (New York: Routledge, 2006), i. 118–19. Al-Bizri prefers it to ‘eclecticism’, which is indeed a problematic term since it implies a liberation from any ideological commitments; a kind of borrowing or appropriation. However, ‘syncretism’ is also contentious as it denotes ‘inauthentication’ and ‘contamination’ by inserting symbols and meanings to what is supposed to be a ‘pure’ tradition. This is a modern and post-modern problematization that reflects the perspective of the groups resisting processes of religious and cultural synthesis. It is also problematic since in essence ‘all religions have composite origins and are continually reconstructed through ongoing processes of synthesis and erasure’, as Rosalind Shaw and Charles Steward write; see Stewart and Shaw (eds.), *Syncretism/Anti-Syncretism: The Politics of Religious Synthesis* (London and New York: Routledge, 1994), 7. The Ikhwān’s synthesis of philosophy, revelation, and the ideological doctrines discussed here is treated as a strategy leading to a reform(ulation)—The Third Way—which resists ‘othering’ since it explicitly rejects antagonizing any religion and any modes of knowledge whether intellectual or revelatory. Ibid, 3–4; see also: Russell McCutcheon, *The Discipline of Religion: Structure, Meaning, Rhetoric* (London and New York: Routledge, 2003), 124, n. 5.

²⁸ Janne Mattila, ‘The Ikhwān al-Šafā’ on Religious Diversity’, *Journal of Islamic Studies*, 28/2 (2017), 178–192, at 179; id., ‘The Philosophical Worship’, *passim*; Ian Netton, *Muslim Neoplatonists: An Introduction to the Thought of the Brethren of Purity* (London and New York: Routledge, 2002), 9–32; de Callatāy, *Ikhwan al-Safa’*, 73–85.

b) sheds light on the development of their religio-political project in an ideologically complex context.²⁹

I: IBADISM AND ZAYDISM AND THE 'THIRD SUNNA'

In Epistle 48 'On the Method of Calling to God' (*Kayfiyyat al-da'wa ilā Allāh*) the Ikhwān stress:

And know, o brother, that we do not oppose any science, nor are we intolerant toward (*nata'assab 'alā*) any religious school (*madhhab*), nor do we abandon any book among the books of the sages and philosophers [containing] all sorts of knowledge that they have set down and authored, and [containing] the subtleties of meanings that they had extracted with their intellects and scrutiny.³⁰

As this article will show, this is not an expression of mere universalism devoid of propaganda, it rather sums up the method and the impetus behind the establishment of the 'Third Way (*sunna*)'. It is a new denomination:

And know, o brother, that the *jamā'a* of the Brethren of Purity are most authentic (*aḥaqq*) in (our) religious worship, observing its times, performing its obligations, knowing what it allows and forbids, for we are those most designated among the people (*akhaṣṣ al-nās*) for it, the most deserving to carry it, the people closest to him in whose hands it came, and the most deserving of him. [We are] also the most authentic in (our) philosophical and divine worship, performing it, abiding to it, and renewing (*tajdīd*) what was dispersed of it. If we complete this, then to us would be the *Third Sunna* [. . .]. As for those things which we trust in, rely on and upon which we establish our case, these are the books of the prophets.³¹

The word *jamā'a* generally means 'a group' but it is also used to denote a group of people united by a consensus (*ijmā'*) often an ideological one.

²⁹ As Amir-Moezzi points out, the political activity of the imams of Twelver Shi'ism can be limited to 'Alī, al-Ḥasan b. 'Alī, al-Ḥusayn b. 'Alī, and 'Alī al-Riḍā; in contrast with the military activism of Zaydism and Isma'ilism: Mohammed Ali Amir-Moezzi, *The Divine Guide in Early Shi'ism: The Sources of Esotericism in Islam* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1994), 61–7.

³⁰ *Rasā'il Ikhwān al-Ṣafā'* (Dār Ṣādir), vol. 4, Epistle 48 (*Fī kayfiyyat al-da'wa ilā Allāh* / 'On the Method of Calling to God'), 167.

³¹ *Rasā'il Ikhwān al-Ṣafā'* (Dār Ṣādir), vol. 4, Epistle 50 (*Fī kayfiyyat anwā' al-siyāsāt wa-kammiyatiha* / 'On the Way the Types of Governance [Came to Be] and their Number'), 268–9.

It is in this specific sense that the Ikhwān refer to themselves. Shortly after the aforementioned statement, the Ikhwān present themselves as the new bearers of the divine law sent down to Muḥammad; like the Rightly Guided caliphs, they will uphold it, but it is a dangerous undertaking:

After the absence (*ghayba*) of the holder of the Law (*sharī'a*), may God pray over him and grant him peace, those among his most worthy of companions, who aided him in establishing the law (*nāmūs*), were killed, such as his confidant [*Siddīqihi*], his *Fārūq*, *Dhū al-Nūrayn*, and all the tragedies that followed his family and relatives. This has become the reason for the hiding (*ikhtifā'*) of the Brethren of Purity and the cessation of the state of the Friends of Loyalty, until God allows the emergence of the first, second, and third [group of brethren] at the times in which they ought to emerge, coming out from their cave, awake after their long slumber.³²

Siddīqihi is obviously a reference to Abū Bakr al-Şiddīq, *al-Fārūq* is 'Umar's epithet, and *Dhū al-Nūrayn* is that of 'Uthmān. Karbala is counted among the tragedies that befell the Prophet's family.³³ In this Epistle (50), the Ikhwān set a system of observances which includes two types of 'worship': 1) practical adherence to civil and religious law, 2) philosophical(-intellectual) worship that aims to confirm the oneness of God. This system also lays out moral responsibilities toward family, friends, and women; and obligations toward physical and spiritual health. In addition, they mention the appropriate sacrifices and enumerate the feasts to be observed by adherents of the Third Way which include astrological festivals, *'id al-fiṭr*, *'id al-aḍḥā*, remembrance of *Ghadīr Khumm*, and others.³⁴

Therefore, it is clear that the Ikhwān resist in their Third Way a sectarian prejudice or intolerance to any religious school. They revere the Rightly Guided Caliphs and honour 'Alī and al-Ḥusayn as will be discussed in more detail below.

Most of Epistle 48 is a guide in which the Ikhwān instruct their *dā'i* (caller) on the rhetoric of proselytizing and its refashioning according to the audience addressed such as workers and clerks, kings and sovereigns, 'people of knowledge ignorant of the matter of soul', and Shi'is. The Ikhwān tell the reader that they have assigned to each audience a brother. As *mujaddidūn*, they stress that every state rises and falls; eventually reaching a state of degradation and deficiency (*inḥiṭāṭ wa-muqṣān*).³⁵

³² *Rasā'il Ikhwān al-Şafā'* (Dār Şādir), vol. 4, Epistle 50, 269.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid, 250–72; Janne Mattila analyses these feasts in the recent article, 'The Philosophical Worship of the Ikhwān al-Şafā', 17–38.

³⁵ *Rasā'il Ikhwān al-Şafā'* (Dār Şādir), vol. 4, Epistle 48, 186–7.

In the section concerned with addressing kings and sovereigns, the *dāʿī* is expected to remind them of the inevitable decline and alternation of states. According to the Ikhwān, the books of the prophets serve not only as guides to worship but also as pragmatic tools for the process of reform. Through philosophical insight, divination, astrology, omens, dream interpretation, and physiognomy, one can discover the indications in the Qurʾān (*dalāʾil al-Qurʾān*) that point to the changes of religions and confessions, thus determining the course of *tajdīd* which is linked to the renewal of states.³⁶ This restoration is cyclical: ‘religious communities (*milal*)³⁷ and states (*duwal*) transform in every age, time, cycle, and conjunction, from *umma* to *umma*, from household to household (*ahl bayt* to *ahl bayt*), from one land to another’.³⁸ This recalls a ḥadīth whose earliest appearance is in the *Sunan* of Abū Dāwūd: ‘God will send to this community at the turn of each century someone who will restore (*yujaddid*) the religion’.³⁹ Moreover, these restorations and cycles are written in the sky; astrologers are able to predict ‘the religious communities and states that are indicated by the great conjunctions that occur once in approximately every thousand years; among these the transference of the kingdom from one *amir* to another, from *umma* to *umma*, from country to country, from household to another household’.⁴⁰ The astrological component of this transference is based on the Indo-Persian theory of the Saturn–Jupiter conjunctions, which indicate the replacement of rulers, dynasties, and change of empires and religion.⁴¹ The Ikhwān al-Ṣafā’ are ushering a new political, religious and, perhaps, astrological phase.

The message of their *jamāʿa* is as follows:

³⁶ Ibid, 187, 189–90.

³⁷ In *Rasāʾil Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ* (Dār Ṣādir), vol. 4, Epistle 48, 187 it is *mulk* ملك but in MS Ragıp Pasha 840 (fol. 431r) and 839 it is *milal* ملال.

³⁸ *Rasāʾil Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ* (Dār Ṣādir), vol. 4, Epistle 48, 187. This is also found in Ignacio Sánchez and James Montgomery (eds. and transl.), *Epistles of the Brethren of Purity. On Geography: An Arabic Critical Edition and English Translation of Epistle 4* (Oxford: Oxford University Press in association with The Institute of Ismaili Studies, 2014), 59–60.

³⁹ *Sunan* Abū Dāwūd, Book 39, ḥadīth 1: <https://sunnah.com/abudawud/39>. (Accessed 28 March 2017.)

⁴⁰ Taro Mimura and F. Jamil Ragep (eds. and transl.), *Epistles of the Brethren of Purity. On Astronomy (an Arabic Critical Edition and English Translation of Epistles 3)* (Oxford: Oxford University Press in association with The Institute of Ismaili Studies, 2014); *Rasāʾil Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ* (Dār Ṣādir), vol. 1, Epistle 3, 154.

⁴¹ De Callatay, *Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ*, 45–7, 56, 78–9. For more on the cycles and revolutions, see id., *Les Révolutions et Les Cycles*; Yves Marquet, ‘Les cycles de la souveraineté’, 49–79.

If you enter our spiritual city, walk our royal path, abide by our virtuous way (*summa*), and judiciously study (*tafaqquh*) our intellectual *sharī'a*, you will gaze upon the Highest Assembly (*al-mala' al-a'lā*), live the lives of the felicitous, ecstatic and glad, savouring and forever immortal in your noble eternal soul; illuminated, lightweight, and transparent; not in your lowly body, dark, heavy, changing and transforming, corrupted and doomed. May God assist you and all our brethren to [attain] righteousness, and [may He] lead you and us toward the land of peace with His mercy and generosity. He is able [to realise] what He pleases.⁴²

To understand the Ikhwān's unique path of virtue and transcendence as a reformed *madhhab* we must compare it to other denominations, beginning with Ibadism which had its centre in Baṣra whence it diffused.⁴³ From the crisis among the Khawārij after the death of Yazīd b. Mu'āwiya in 683, four groups emerged: the Azāriqa who went on to set up a state in Ahwāz; the Najdiyya who were active in Arabia; the Ibadis, named after 'Abd Allāh b. Ibāḍ al-Tamīmī (d. 708), who adopted a most moderate stance and survive to this day in Oman and North Africa⁴⁴; and the Ṣufrīs who took an intermediate position and were active in al-Jazīra and North Africa.⁴⁵

According to the Khawārij, Abū Bakr and 'Umar were true imams, 'Uthmān started his caliphate well but violated God's rule, 'Alī's arbitration with the Umayyads was wrong, and the killing of 'Uthmān was categorically right. Thereafter, all caliphs were illegitimate and corrupt.⁴⁶ Though the Ibadis opposed the caliphate of 'Uthmān, they condemned his murder.⁴⁷ The Ibadis perceived the imam as a supreme

⁴² *Rasā'il Ikhwān al-Šafā'* (Dār Šādir), vol. 4, Epistle 48, 194–5; also repeated with little variation in Baffioni (ed.), *Epistles of the Brethren of Purity. On the Natural Sciences*, Epistle 15 (*Fī bayān al-huyūlā wa-l-šūra* / 'On Matter and Form'), 62–5 (Arabic).

⁴³ Elizabeth Savage, 'Survival through Alliance: The Establishment of the Ibādiyya', *Bulletin (British Society for Middle Eastern Studies)*, 17/1 (1990): 5–15.

⁴⁴ Patricia Crone, 'The Khārijites and the Caliphal Title' in Gerald Richard Hawting, Jawid Ahmad Mojaddedi, and Alexander Samely (eds.), *Studies in Islamic and Middle Eastern Texts and Traditions in Memory of Norman Calder* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 85–91, at 86. The Ibadis of North Africa established the Rustumid imamate which lasted to 909 AD; the imamate in Oman lasted to 893 AD.

⁴⁵ Patricia Crone, *God's Rule: Government and Islam* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), 54–6.

⁴⁶ Crone, *God's Rule*, 55–7.

⁴⁷ John C. Wilkinson, *Ibādism: Origins and Early Development in Oman* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 122–3, 132, 152, 211–2; Wilferd

chief and spiritual leader of the Muslim community whose legitimacy is determined by piety and merit and can be lost if he violates the law. They viewed their early imams as leaders of the *shūrā* (council of religious scholars—*‘ulamā’*—who debate the affairs of the community). To the Ibadis of Maghreb and eastern Ibadis—but not the Omanis—the imam was also known as *amīr al-mu’minīn*.⁴⁸ In the *Sīra* of the Ibadi Sālim b. Dhakwān (8th c.) the caliphates of Abū Bakr and ‘Umar are considered exemplary; as for ‘Uthmān, his appointment was legitimate and he initially performed his duties well but deviated as he got older and unjustly favoured his relatives.⁴⁹ The influential Kūfan Ibadi scholar, Abū Muḥammad ‘Abd Allāh al-Fazārī (fl. 767–75), stresses in his *Kitāb fī al-radd ‘alā Ibn ‘Umayr* (‘The Refutation of Ibn ‘Umayr’) the crucial role of the pious and knowledgeable imam as leader of the community and his accountability. He adds that Abū Bakr and ‘Umar were indeed exemplary imams. This is in response to Ibn ‘Umayr’s opinion that the community has no need of an imam altogether.⁵⁰ The Ibadi Shabīb b. ‘Attiya (fl. 8th c.) wrote in his *Sīra*: ‘Truth stems from Kitāb Allāh, the *sunna* of his prophets, and the guidance of the two who followed, Abū Bakr and ‘Umar’.⁵¹ These opinions are confirmed by Ibn Sallām al-Ibādī (d. 887) in his *Bad’ al-islām wa-sharā’i’ al-dīn* (‘The Beginnings of Islam and the Laws of the Religion’),⁵² and the Ibadi imam Ibrāhīm b. Qays al-Ḥadrāmī (d. 1082) in his *Kitāb Uṣūl al-Ibādiyya* (‘The Foundations of

Madelung, ‘Early Ibādī Theology’ in *The Oxford Handbook of Islamic Theology*, 242–51.

⁴⁸ Wilkinson, *Ibādism*, 214, 227; Madelung, ‘Early Ibādī Theology’, 248; Abū al-Faraj Muḥammad ibn Ishāq Ibn al-Nadīm, *The Fihrist: A 10th century AD survey of Islamic culture* (ed. and transl. Bayard Dodge; Chicago: Great Books of the Islamic World, 1998), 452–4; Crone, *God’s Rule*, 62.

⁴⁹ Sālim b. Dhakwān, *The Epistle of Sālim Ibn Dhakwān* (eds., transl. and comm. by Patricia Crone and Fritz Zimmermann; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 76–8.

⁵⁰ ‘Abd Allāh b. Yazīd al-Fazārī, ‘Kitāb fī al-radd ‘alā Ibn ‘Umayr’ in Abdulrahman al-Salimi and Wilferd Madelung (eds.), *Early Ibādī Theology: Six Kalām Texts by ‘Abd Allāh b. Yazīd al-Fazārī* (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 55–8 (Arabic); Crone, *God’s Rule*, 60; Wilkinson, *Ibādism*, 214, 227; Madelung, ‘Early Ibādī Theology’, 248; Ibn al-Nadīm, *Fihrist*, 452–4.

⁵¹ Wilkinson, *Ibādism*, 128.

⁵² Ibn Sallām al-Ibādī, *Kitāb fihī bad’ al-Islām wa-sharā’i’ al-dīn* (eds. Vīrnir Shvarts [Werner Schwartz], Sālim ibn Ya’qūb; Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner, 1986), (Abū Bakr and ‘Umar as exemplary leaders) 70–2; (the condition of merit and piety) 95–8.

Ibadism') which he wrote fearing the disappearance of Ibadism (Ibadiyya) due to its limited dissemination.⁵³

Holding somewhat similar views are the Zaydis. Zaydism is a Shi'i branch which emerged out of the abortive revolt of Zayd b. 'Alī b. al-Ḥusayn in Kūfa in 740.⁵⁴ A part of the Kūfan Shi'a withdrew their support from Zayd in protest against his refusal to condemn unconditionally the early caliphs preceding 'Alī and backed Zayd's nephew Ja'far al-Şādiq as their imam. In terms of the Shi'i break with the Sunni Muslim community, Zaydis were most moderate. During the uprising of Muḥammad al-Nafs al-Zakiyya and his brother, Ibrāhīm b. 'Abd Allāh, in 762, 'Isā b. Zayd was the *de facto* leader of a faction who explicitly identified themselves as Zaydis. After al-Nafs al-Zakiyya was killed, 'Isā led a group of (likely Zaydi) loyalists to Baṣra where they joined the forces of Ibrāhīm b. 'Abd Allāh. When Ibrāhīm was defeated by the 'Abbasids, 'Isā fled from Baṣra to Kūfa.

Zaydi Islam was first preached on a limited scale among the Daylamīs. There was also the missionary activity in western Ṭabaristān, the region of Rūyān, Kalār and Shālūs. In 864 the people of Rūyān revolted and invited al-Ḥasan b. Zayd from al-Rayy to lead them. Al-Ḥasan established the first Zaydi state, with its capital in Āmul. The Zaydi imamate in Yemen was founded in 897 by al-Hādī ilā al-Ḥaqq Yaḥyā b. al-Ḥusayn.⁵⁵

In the early Kūfan phase, Zaydism was divided into Jārūdiyya and Batriyya. To both, the imamate was reserved for the descendants of Fāṭima. Initially, Jārūdiyya upheld that the candidate should be chosen by a *shūrā*, this was later abandoned; however, he had to establish his right to leadership with taking up arms. In contrast to the Imāmiyya, however, they did not confine legal teaching authority to their imams but accepted in principle the teaching of any member of the *ahl al-bayt* qualified by piety and learning. The Batriyya, on the other hand, did not concede any superior knowledge to the Family of the Prophet, but recognized the religious knowledge handed down in the Muslim

⁵³ Ibrāhīm b. Qays al-Ḥaḍramī, *Kitāb Uṣūl al-Ibāḍiyya* (London, British Library, Or. 3744), fols. 15v–18v, fol. 1v.

⁵⁴ Crone, *God's Rule*, 99: 'the Zaydis should be envisaged as a multiplicity of small circles formed around teachers whose doctrines were sufficiently similar on certain points to constitute a trend, not as a party defined by a single set of shared beliefs.'

⁵⁵ Wilferd Madelung, 'Zaydiyya', *EI*² art.; Najam Haidar, 'The Contested Life of 'Isā b. Zayd: Notes on the Construction of Zaydi Historical Narratives', *Journal of Near Eastern Studies*, 72/2 (Oct., 2013): 169–78, at 169–71; Ibn al-Nadīm, *Fihrist*, 443–5.

community as valid and allowed the use of individual reasoning (*ijtihād*, *qiyās*) in establishing the law. Abū Zayd al-ʿAlawī (d. 937-8) in contrast to some scholars among the Zaydis of his time, maintained that ‘the Prophet had appointed ʿAlī to the imamate by rule of investiture (*naṣṣ*) according to the tradition of *Ghadīr khumm*’. Batrīs viewed the companions who sided against ʿAlī as mistaken but had not committed an act of disbelief. According to them, Abū Bakr and ʿUmar were legitimate. Yahyā b. al-Ḥusayn, in his tract ‘On Proving the Imamate [of ʿAlī]’ emphasizes that the validity of any imam stems from consensus (*ijtimāʿ*), that obedience to God is reflected in obedience to the Prophet and ‘whoever the *umma* agreed upon after the Messenger of God.’ He accepts that the Prophet made as deputy (*istakhlafa*) Abū Bakr who should be recognized as *khalīfa*, *walī* and imam. This has led to the emergence of two groups (*fariqayn*): those who believe ʿAlī to be the successor, and those who accepted the Prophet’s choice. Yahyā presents himself as the mouthpiece of a third group which interrogates the previous two in order to obtain their agreement on the view that ʿAlī is the most legitimate imam and successor of Muḥammad. As a result of the questioning, the two groups agree that ʿAlī is the best (*akḥyar*) of all mankind and that his service to the *umma* is unparalleled. Yahyā asserts the superiority of ʿAlī mainly by highlighting his merit, dedication, and piety; nevertheless, even the two groups agree that the imam should be from Quraysh. Notwithstanding that, the community must abide by Muḥammad’s choice and opinion; though, it must be accepted that opinions—implying even the Prophet’s in this case—may err. Yahyā, thus, does not believe that ʿAlī’s imamate is legitimate by explicit designation (*naṣṣ*).⁵⁶ The Jārūdiyya branch of Zaydism completely rejected the imamate of the three caliphs preceding ʿAlī, holding that he had been appointed by the Prophet as his legatee (*waṣī*) and implicitly as his successor, condemning the majority of the Companions and the Muslim community for their desertion of the rightful imam.

In contrast with Twelver Shiʿism and Ismaʿilism, the Zaydi doctrine of imamate rejects the occultation of the awaited imam and the belief in the

⁵⁶ Yahyā b. al-Ḥusayn, *Kitāb al-Funūn* (London, British Library, MS Or. 3971), fols 26v–27v. This work contains a number of his treatises, one of which is ‘On Proving the Imamate’. This opinion is expressed also in ‘A Collection of Works by al-Imām al-Ḥādī ilā al-Ḥaqq Yahyā b. al-Ḥusayn’ (created in 1173 AH), (British Library, Or. 3798), fols. 48r–v. This manuscript’s date of creation is stated as Ramadan 1215 AH. On the life and writing of Yahyā b. al-Ḥusayn see, A. B. D. R Eagle, ‘Ghāyat al-amānī and the Life and Times of al-Ḥādī Yahyā b. al-Ḥusayn: An Introduction, Newly Edited Text, and Translation with detailed Annotation’ (PhD diss., Durham University, 1990), 34–40.

intercession (*shafā'a*) of the Prophet or the imams.⁵⁷ The imam—or *waṣī*—himself is not infallible nor is he divinely guided; rather his judgements are validated by consensus and deliberation (*shūrā*), and supported by evidence of legitimacy, as expressed by Yahyā b. al-Ḥusayn.⁵⁸

Wilāya (as guardianship) is given to the legitimate Zaydi imam, but not *walāya* (sacral power). In Ibadi thought, *wilāya* as association is a central concept; particularly as it pertains to who is entitled to inclusion and protection by Ibadi guardianship/imamate, and who deserves dissociation (*barā'a*). Generally speaking, all Muslims or 'people of the *qibla*' are entitled to it if they truly profess their belief in one God and his Messenger. For believers whose intentions and faith are not clearly manifest and have not caused corruption, the community and its guardian should adopt the position of *wuqūf* and *imsāk*, that is withholding condemnation.⁵⁹ Al-Fazārī explains that among the 'people of the *qibla*' are those who are 'people of novelties' (*ahl al-ḥadath*), including the *mu'tazila*, extreme *khawārij*, the *murji'a*, and the Zaydis; the latter because of their lax adherence to the conditions of execution. Nevertheless, if these groups confess the oneness of God and believe in his Messenger, they remain monotheists,⁶⁰ but if they cause corruption and refuse to pray and fast then they are not Muslims and thus are not entitled to guardianship and deserve dissociation; otherwise, *wuqūf* must be adopted.⁶¹ So for the Ibadis, *wilāyalimāma* is a system of religio-political regulation which guards and monitors not only members of Ibadism but those of other denominations.⁶² As such, it is more akin to *khilāfa* than the *walāya* (sacral power) of the imams of Twelver Shi'ism, yet similar to the Isma'ili aspiration to power realized by the Fatimid Caliphate minus the divine entitlement.⁶³ The Fatimid Isma'ili *dā'ī* Ja'far b. Maṣṣūr mentions the prophets, legateses, imams, and caliphs

⁵⁷ 'A Collection of Works by al-Imām al-Hādī ilā al-Ḥaqq', fol. 37r.

⁵⁸ Yahyā b. al-Ḥusayn, *Kitāb al-funūn*, fol. 27v; 'A Collection of Works by al-Imām al-Hādī ilā al-Ḥaqq', fols. 34v–35r, fol. 36r.

⁵⁹ al-Fazārī (see n. 50 above), 'Kitāb fī man raja'a 'an 'ilmihi wa-fāraqa al-nabī wa-huwa 'alā dīnihi', 23–7 (Arabic).

⁶⁰ According to Ibadism, sinning Muslims and non-Ibadi Muslims can be *kuffār al-nifāq* (hypocrites) or *kuffār ni'ma* (ungrateful to God's blessings). They remain monotheists and cannot be denounced as unbelievers. Valerie J. Hoffman, *The Essentials of Ibādī Islam* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2012), 36, 43, 56, 183; Madelung, 'Early Ibādī Theology', 243.

⁶¹ al-Fazārī, 'Kitāb al-Tawḥīd fī ma'rifat Allāh', 29–38; id., 'Kitāb al-Futya', 2–4.

⁶² al-Fazārī, 'Kitāb fī man raja'a 'an 'ilmihi', 27–8.

⁶³ Hollenberg, 'Interpretation after the End of Days', 25.

as ‘embodiments’ or ‘shrines’ (*maqāmāt*) of God’s power and divine wisdom, adding that in every age God installs caliphs through whom His power is manifest.⁶⁴

For their imams, Ibadis and Zaydis accepted the title of *khalīfat Allāh*.⁶⁵ As Crone confirms, with the exception of the Ibadis of Arabia, all the Khawārij who established local dynasties applied the title *khalīfa* and/or *amīr al-mu’minīn* (commander of the faithful) to their imams.⁶⁶ To an extent, the qualifications of the imam according to the Ibadis and Zaydis mirror those of the caliph as set by Sunnīs.⁶⁷

The features, ideology and imamate of the Zaydis and the Ibadis began to crystallize during the eighth and ninth centuries, but by the time of the Ikhwān, the caliphate of *ahl ‘Abbās* was suffering fragmentation. The relevance of the caliphs had become symbolic; their imperial ideology and that of local governments was inconsistent. The region was destabilized by events like the Zanj rebellion near Baṣra, the devastating

⁶⁴ Ibid, 103–5, 114.

⁶⁵ Najam Haider, ‘Zaydism: A Theological and Political Survey’, *Religion Compass*, 4/7 (2010): 436–42; Madelung, *El*² art., ‘Zaydiyya’; Hassan Ansari, Sabine Schmidtke and Jan Thiele, ‘Zaydī Theology in Yemen’ in *The Oxford Handbook of Islamic Theology*, 473–93; Etan Kohlberg, ‘Some Zaydī Views on the Companions of the Prophet’, *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, 39/1 (1976): 91–8; Crone, *God’s Rule*, 58, 100–2, 104.

⁶⁶ Crone, ‘The Khārijites and the Caliphal Title’, 85–6. Crone gives examples from the eighth to the fifteenth century of Ibadis attesting the title of caliph (deputy of God) to their righteous leaders.

⁶⁷ Ibid, 85–91. For the attestation of the title *khalīfat Allāh*, Crone focuses on the Azāriqa, Ibadīyya and Ṣufrīs. The Ibadi imam Ibrāhīm b. Qays al-Ḥaḍramī (d. 1082) sets down in his *Uṣūl al-Ibāḍīyya* eleven criteria for the *imāma*: 1) He must be an adult and of sound mind; 2) He must be neither blind nor deaf; 3) He must not be mute; 4) He must be eloquent in the Arabic language; 5) He must be of a sound body without missing limbs; 6) He must be knowledgeable in religious sciences and pious; 7) He has to be elected by at least six adult freemen; 8) He must be a Muslim; 9) He must not be elected *just after* another imam unless their domains are separated by a sea, otherwise he must follow the earlier imam; 10) He must not be elected *at the same time* as another imam without both being separated by a sea; otherwise neither can be an imam. The matter in this case is to be settled by *shūrā* (counsel); 11) He must not have been subjected to amputation and whipping *ḥadd*s. See, Ibrāhīm b. Qays al-Ḥaḍramī, *Kitāb Uṣūl al-Ibāḍīyya*, London, British Library MS. Or. 3744, fols. 106v–107r. Criteria 9 and 10 respond to the problematic coexistence of two imamates in Oman and North Africa. Crone informs us about the opinion of the Omani judge Muḥammad b. Maḥbūb (d. 873) according to whom the coexistence of two imams is not against the rules as long as their domains are not contiguous: ‘The Khārijites and the Caliphal Title’, 86–7.

raids of the Qarāmiṭa in Baṣra and Makka, local revolts in Tabaristan against the fiscal exactions of the 'Abbasids, the Zaydi revolts in the Caspian regions which paved the way to the Buyid dynasty's control of Fars in 934 and their capture of Baghdad in 945, and the conflicts between Zaydis and Isma'ilis in Yemen.⁶⁸ The Ikhwānian message of concord and reconciliation, on philosophical and religio-political levels, should be understood against the backdrop of a century of destabilization and doctrinal plurality.⁶⁹

The Ikhwān dedicate a chapter to the issue of the imamate. Below is a translation of a crucial part:

We say: know that the issue of the imamate is also one of the major issues of contention (*khilāf*) among the scholars [of religion]. Those who are preoccupied with it have gone astray with too many claims, and exaggerate [their reliance] in it on hearsay. Hostility and hate became evident among those who are preoccupied with it; wars and battles took place among those who seek it; money and blood were spilled because of it; and it remains to our day unsettled. Rather, each day dispute seems to increase among those who are preoccupied with it and differ [on it]. Many opinions and stances diverge within it [the issue of the imamate] and from it, to such a degree that no one but God can keep count of them. And so we need first to mention the foundation upon which all its people agree, then we shall mention the reasons of dispute in its different strands.

We say: know, that the entire community (*umma*) says that there must be an imam who would be the caliph of its Prophet in his community after his death. This is for many reasons, and [dependent on] several traits: one of which is that the imam must safeguard the law (*al-sharī'a*) for the community, and keep alive the tradition (*al-sunna*) in the religion (*milla*), and to command the good and prohibit evil. This way the community is regulated by his opinion.

Another group must be his caliphs in the rest of the Muslim lands, as his representatives for collecting land tax, taking the tithes and *jizya*, distributing them among the army and [royal] retinue, to safeguard with them the seaports of Muslims, to protect those without kinship (*bayḍa*), to conquer enemies, protect the roads from thieves and bandits. Therefore, he stops the unjust, holds back the strong from the wronged and weak, and is fair and just in the affairs of his people; and similar characteristics necessary for Muslims to have in someone who manages the external affairs of their lives.

⁶⁸ On this latter conflict see, Hollenberg, 'Interpretation after the End of Days', 52; and David Thomas Gochenour, 'The Penetration of Zaydi Islam into Early Medieval Yemen' (PhD diss., Harvard University, 1984).

⁶⁹ Exactly why an entire epistle (42) is dedicated to the problem of religious and doctrinal divergence; see, Mattila, 'The Ikhwān al-Šafā' on Religious Diversity', 178–92.

Another characteristic is that the jurists and scholars of Muslims must refer their dilemmas in religious matters and matters of dispute to him. For he settles that which they dispute, making judgments concerning jurisprudence, verdicts, punishments and penalties, prayers, Friday prayers, feasts, ḥajj, raids, appointment of judges and officers, and the fatwas of the jurists. Everything is regulated according to his opinion and management, his command and forbidding; this is the foundation that is agreed upon in their need for an imam.

As for who the imam should be and what he is like, this they dispute according to two opinions or stances: some of them see and believe that he has to be the most superior among them after the Prophet and the closest to him in lineage, and that he is appointed by investiture (*muṣṣa 'alayhi*), and some see otherwise. Due to these two opinions and stances, among them there are antagonism and arguments, too long to explain, mentioned in their books. Nevertheless we need to mention the cause of their differences, how they started and at which point the matter became problematic.⁷⁰

It is puzzling that that the Ikhwān do not explain who the second group is, presumably those who do not believe in the condition of 'Alī's investiture. As for their own stance, the Ikhwān here appear to be noncommittal; however, from other parts of their corpus a clearer picture starts to emerge. In fact, in their Third Way, Ikhwān al-Ṣafā' promote a view of the imamate that is similar to both Ibadism and Zaydism. In addition to the aforementioned quotation which presents the Ikhwān as some kind of successors to the Rightly Guided Caliphs, they also refer to 'Uthmān's resignation to his fate with reverence, even comparing him to Muḥammad and al-Ḥusayn:

Like the contentment of 'Uthmān b. 'Affān when they entered [his house] to kill him. His slaves rose up, drew their swords and said: 'without you, [then] we die!' He retreated and dissuaded [them], and recalled the report by Anas that the Messenger of God, may God pray over him and grant him peace, said: 'Open the gate for him ('Uthmān) and deliver the good tidings: he is the guardian (*walī*) of this community after 'Umar', and warn him of a calamity that will strike him causing the spilling of his blood. And so he ['Uthmān] said to his slaves 'whoever draws his sword into its scabbard, he is freed, a charity to God (*li-wajh Allāh*)'. He settled on his seat and placed the [Holy] Book on his lap and read: 'Allah will compensate you'. He was content with God's decree and knew he would be killed [...] and like the contentment of al-Ḥusayn, may God be pleased with him, on Karbala, when his thirst became unbearable and he asked for water, he was asked: 'Will you surrender to the son of Ibn Ziyād, in order to let you go?'

⁷⁰ *Rasā'il Ikhwān al-Ṣafā'* (Dār Ṣādir), vol. 3 Epistle 42, 493–4.

He said: ‘No, but [I surrender] to God’. He knew he would be killed. So he fought, content with God’s decree.⁷¹

The Ikhwān cite ḥadīths featuring ‘Umar several times, and his name is followed by the complimentary phrase ‘may God be pleased with him’.⁷² They mention Abū Bakr again in the 44th epistle (concerned with the doctrines of Ikhwān al-Şafā’) as the friend and confidant of Muḥammad (ṣadiqihī/ṣiddiqihī) and one of the earliest individuals to accept the message of Islam.⁷³ So their stance seems to share the tolerance of Ibadis and Zaydis (especially Batrīs).

Marquet notes the tolerance of the Ikhwān demonstrated by the aforementioned excerpt on ‘Uthmān. However, to highlight their supposed stance against the Rightly Guided Caliphs, he also turns his attention to the fable of the old hawk who faked piety to become the caliph of the crows. After attaining it, the hawk abuses his powers and employs a member of his own species. The latter is even crueller. Marquet surmises that the evil old hawk and his confidant represent Abū Bakr and ‘Umar respectively. If this story indeed reflects a specific historical incident, then it appears to be rather about ‘Uthmān who became the caliph in his sixties and was criticized for favouring his Umayyad family, eventually leading to a revolt. Considering the more favourable tone used in their description of his resignation and contentment with God’s decree, they appear to be in agreement on this point with the Ibadis who were not necessarily in favour of the caliphate of ‘Uthmān but condemned his murder. The Ikhwān’s use of allegory itself testifies to their sensitivity, and even neutrality.⁷⁴

The Ikhwān were conscious of the contentions between Shi‘i groups, for in Epistle 42 ‘On Beliefs and Religions’ they mention the ‘differences [of opinion] on the imams who are the successors (*khulafā*) of the prophets as [seen] among the Shi‘a’.⁷⁵ In an excerpt worth translating in full, the Ikhwān seem to share with the Zaydis their absolute rejection of the intercession of the imams and occultation—distancing themselves from both Twelver Shi‘ism and Isma‘ilism. In addition they criticize the

⁷¹ Ibid, vol. 4, Epistle 46, 74–5.

⁷² Ibid, vol. 1, Epistle 9 (*Fī bayān al-akhlāq wa-asbāb ikhtilāfihā, wa-amwā‘ ilalihā wa-nukat min ādāb al-anbiyā’ wa-zubad min akhlāq al-ḥukamā’* / ‘On Morals, the Reasons for their Variation, the Categories of their Causes, Stories on the Ethics of Prophets, and Anecdotes on the Morals of Sages’), 346, 380.

⁷³ Ibid, vol. 4, Epistle 44 (*Fī bayān i’tiqād ikhwān al-ṣafā’ wa-madhhab al-rabbāniyyīn* / ‘On the Doctrine of the Brethren of Purity and the Way of the Divine Ones’), 16.

⁷⁴ Marquet, *La philosophie des Iḥwan al-Şafā’*, 572.

⁷⁵ *Rasā’il Ikhwān al-Şafā’* (Dār Ṣādir), vol. 3, Epistle 42, 488.

practices of cursing, wailing, and prolonged stays at sanctuaries (*mashāhid*). Addressing the Shi'is in Epistle 48, the Ikhwān describe three groups (*ṭawā'if*) of their party (*shī'atunā*): the elite people of intellect (*khawāṣṣ wa-ʿuqalāʾ*); the stupid, evil and immoral; and those who take a middle position (*mutawassiṭūn*). The first group includes those who are the scholars of divine knowledge, who keep the secrets of revelation and who undergo philosophical training. The moderate group comprises three types of people: those who are uncertain about the existence of Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ; those who are certain about their existence but do not know who they are, and yet anticipate their manifestation; and those who are best described as hypocrites since they are certain of the existence of the Ikhwān but are ignorant of their knowledge and precisely because of this they publicly deny and ridicule them. As for the evil ones:

Some evil people use *tashayyuʿ* (being *shīʿa*) as a cover up for the [bad] deeds against which they are warned by those who command the good and prohibit evil. In fact, they commit every sin and neglect every command. When they are prohibited from doing evil, they hurry to flash [their] *tashayyuʿ* and seek the protection of the ʿAlids against those who prohibit and forbid a wrong deed. Surely what evil they commit! Among [those] people is a group of those who affiliate themselves to us with their bodies but their souls are dissociated from us. They call themselves ʿAlids; they are not the lofty ones (*ʿulwiyyūn*)⁷⁶, but they are among the lowest of the fallen ones! [...] They are the furthest people from our confession (*milla*), the most hostile to our party (*shīʿatinā*), the most ignorant among all created beings of our sciences, and the people most heedless of the truth of our affairs and the secrets of our wisdom, except those from whom God has removed wickedness and whom He has deeply purified. To them the Messenger of God, may God pray over him and grant him peace, was referring when he said: ‘O Banī Hāshim, while people approach judgment day with their deeds, you come with your lineage? I cannot intercede for you with God at all’. And among the people a group that made profit from *tashayyuʿ*, such as the wailers and story tellers, who do not know anything of *tashayyuʿ* other than disavowal, insulting, defaming, cursing, crying with the wailers, admiring the zealots in [their] *tashayyuʿ*, and abandoning seeking knowledge, learning the Qurʾān and the judicious study of religion, making as their trait the staying in sanctuaries and visiting graves like bereaved women, who cry over the loss of our bodies when it is more urgent to cry over their own souls. Among the *shīʿa* are those who say that the imams hear calls and answer prayers, without knowing the truth of what they are stating and the

⁷⁶ The Brethren here employ a homograph: the word *ʿulwiyyūn* (the lofty ones) is written identically to *ʿalawīyyūn* (ʿAlids). It is intended to amalgamate both meanings and to contrast with *sāfilīn* (degraded, fallen) in the next phrase.

correctness of what they believe. Some of them say that the awaited imam is hidden out of fear of adversaries. Oh no, he is manifest as they are manifest.⁷⁷ He knows them but they deny him. As it was said:

He is known by the seeker [who is] of the same kind

But the rest of the people, they deny him.

They all acknowledge that the prophets, peace be upon them, are the treasurers of the knowledge of God, and that the caliphs with the guided imams are the heirs to the science of prophecies (*nubuwwāt*), but they do not know the truth of what they are admitting nor the verification of what they believe. May God protect you, o loyal compassionate brother, may God support you and us with a spirit from Him, not to be one of them, but be a guided guidance, a rightly guided (*rashid*) physician (*ṭabīb*), and a companion to your brethren, friends and neighbours, showing the lost the way, healing the blind and the leper, and reviving the dead by God’s permission.⁷⁸

In her commentary on this passage, Baffioni views it as a critique of other missions in contrast to the Ikhwān’s (Isma‘īli in her opinion). However, the translation she provides is problematic:

Wa-min al-shī‘a man yaqūl inna al-a‘imma yasma‘ūn al-nidā’ wa-yujībūn al-du‘ā’ wa-lā yadrūn ḥaqīqat mā yuqirrūn bihi [...]. Wa-minhum man yaqūl inna al-imām al-muntaẓar mukhtafin min khawf al-mukhālifin. Kallā bal huwa zāhir.

Baffioni translates the first sentence as: ‘And to the Shī‘a he belongs who says that he listens to the appeal of the *a‘imma* and answers [their] call’.⁷⁹ The translation should be: ‘Among the *shī‘a* are those who say that the imams hear calls and answer prayers’. The imams (*a‘imma*) is the subject of the verb to hear/to answer. This mistranslation prevents understanding this statement as a criticism of the belief in intercession. *Wa-minhum*, also becomes misunderstood, resulting in confirming the Ikhwān’s belief in the awaited imam, rather than their rejection of this very same notion as also expressed clearly in Epistle 42 ‘On Beliefs and Religions’, and described as a ‘false belief’ (*ra’y fāsīd*).⁸⁰

Yves Marquet and Abbas Hamdani proposed that when the Ikhwān mention their rejection of the hidden imam, they are expressing a pro-Fatimid and anti-Qarāmiṭa stance, the latter believing in the occultation

⁷⁷ This stance recurs elsewhere too: *ibid*, vol. 3, Epistle 42, 523. Anticipating the emergence of the hidden imam is considered one of the ‘wrong opinions’ (*ārā’ fāsida*).

⁷⁸ *Ibid*, vol. 4, Epistle 48, 147–8.

⁷⁹ Baffioni, ‘Epistle 48 of the Ikhwān al-Şafā’’, 17–18.

⁸⁰ *Rasā’il Ikhwān al-Şafā’* (Dār Şādir), vol. 3, Epistle 42, 523.

of Muḥammad b. Ismāʿīl. To support this argument, Marquet points to the Ikhwān's description of a group who profess Shi'ism but have acted heinously, which he understands to be a reference to the violence and desecration enacted by the Qarāmiṭa.⁸¹ Hamdani sees in the Ikhwān 'an adherence to the Seventh Imam', even though they are critical of 'the Seveners', since '[t]hey speak of *al-Ghā'ib Amīr al-Mu'minīn*'.⁸² However, the first statement is based on a speculation, namely that when the Ikhwān criticize those who believe in the Hidden Imam they mean Muḥammad b. Ismāʿīl. The second statement is taken out of context. The '*ghā'ib Amīr al-Mu'minīn*' is mentioned in Epistle 52b, in a section concerned with employing the astrological doctrine of the Ninth-Parts (*nūbahrāt*) for astrological interrogation. A particular astral configuration in this part indicates that the missing person (*ghā'ib*), about whom, the inquiry is made, is *amīr al-mu'minīn* (commander of the faithful); therefore, not related at all to the Hidden Imam.⁸³

The above excerpt, rather, outlines the Ikhwān's response to what they perceive as the shortcomings of the Shi'ism of their time: eschatological priority of lineage,⁸⁴ belief in occultation of the awaited imam, some public practices such as wailing and cursing—probably referring to the cursing of the first two caliphs, Abū Bakr and 'Umar.⁸⁵ After their capture of Baghdad in 945, the Buyids, who are thought to have been Zaydis first then Twelvers, instated the public commemoration of *Ghadīr khumm* and sanctioned public cursing.⁸⁶ The Ikhwān state that they observe *Ghadīr khumm* referring to it as '*īd al-Ghadīr* (Remembrance of *Ghadīr*) but from what they write, we surmise that their observation does not include cursing and wailing.⁸⁷ It is worth noting that the Ibadi

⁸¹ Yves Marquet, 'Les épîtres des Ikhwān as-Safā', oeuvre ismailienne', *Studia Islamica*, 61 (1985): 57–79, at 67.

⁸² Abbas Hamdani, 'An Early Fāṭimid Source on the Time and Authorship of the 'Rasā'il Iḥwān al-Ṣafā'', *Arabica*, T. 26, Fasc. 1 (Feb. 1979): 62–75, at 68.

⁸³ Atif Efendi 1681, fol. 552a; *Rasā'il Ikhwān al-Ṣafā'* (Dār Ṣādir), vol. 4, Epistle 50, 269.

⁸⁴ Ebstein, 'Spiritual Descendants of the Prophet', 563.

⁸⁵ Netton, *Muslim Neoplatonists*, 101–2.

⁸⁶ Hugh Kennedy, *The Prophets and the Age of the Caliphate* (New York and Oxford: Routledge, 3rd edn., 2016), 196.

⁸⁷ *Rasā'il Ikhwān al-Ṣafā'* (Dār Ṣādir), Epistle 50, iv. 269. Maribel Fierro (at p. 109 in the article cited below) writes: 'it is safe to conclude that they were written before 325/936'. We may say that if the mention of '*īd Ghadīr* is referring to, the public commemoration of *Ghadīr Khumm* started by the Buyids then the *terminus post quem* should be 945, the year the Buyids took over Baghdad. This confirms Abū Ḥayyān al-Tawḥīdī's account of them being active under the Buyids, see Abbas Hamdani, 'Abū Ḥayyān al-Tawḥīdī and the Brethren of

scholar al-Fazārī only sanctions the cursing and the insulting of the overt unbeliever (*kāfir*) but enjoins adherence to the doctrine of *wuqūf* and *imsāk*.⁸⁸

Elsewhere, the Ikhwān again address ‘*al-mutashayyi‘ūn*’, the Shi‘is.⁸⁹ They stress the points that they have in common with them, among which: ‘the love for our Prophet, peace be upon him, the pure people of his House, and the *wilāya* of ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib best of all legatees (*khayr al-waṣiyyīn*), prayers of God be upon them all’.⁹⁰ This and their reverence for *ahl al-bayt* point to the Ikhwān’s religious identity, or Third Way, being Shi‘i-oriented, with their stance on *ahl al-bayt*, the imam and the Rightly Guided caliphs resembling Zaydi and Ibadi attitudes. As mentioned above, both these groups accepted the title *khalīfat Allāh* for their imams, something that the Ikhwān echo too: ‘prophets, imams, and those who follow them who command the good and prohibit evil are the caliphs of God.’⁹¹ This is precisely the opinion expressed by al-Fazārī and Yāhyā b. al-Ḥusayn.⁹² It also shows that the Ikhwān’s stance or connection with the denominations around them to be more nuanced than vacillation ‘between typically orthodox Shī‘ī–Ismā‘īlī worldview and a more universal-humanistic perspective, between a sectarian vision of society and history, on the one hand, and an ecumenical one, on the other’.⁹³ The Ikhwān’s project of concord cannot be denied of course; however, ‘universalism’ is often used as an umbrella term under which seeming contradictions and vacillations are swept. Furthermore, in the early Islamic period, it is reductionist to speak of ‘orthodoxy’ in such a heterogeneous and polemical context, and to assume that a polarity

Purity’, *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 9/3 (Oct. 1978): 345–53. Maribel Fierro, ‘Bātinism in al-Andalus. Maslama b. Qāsim al-Qurṭubī (d. 353/964), Author of the *Rutbat al-Ḥakīm* and the *Ghāyat al-Ḥakīm* (*Picatrix*)’, *Studia Islamica*, 84 (1996): 87–112. See also: Godefroid de Callataÿ, ‘Magia en al-Andalus: *Rasā’il Ijwān al-Şafā’*, *Rutbat al-Ḥakīm y Ghāyat al-Ḥakīm* (*Picatrix*)’, *Al-Qantara*, 34/2 (2013): 297–344.

⁸⁸ al-Fazārī, ‘Kitāb al-Tawḥīd’, 29–38; ‘Kitāb al-Futayā’, 2.

⁸⁹ This passage appears in the Dār Ṣādir edition as the penultimate chapter of epistle 48; it is absent in Ragıp Pasha 840, but present in Ragıp Pasha 839, fol. 520r.

⁹⁰ *Rasā’il Ikhwān al-Şafā’* (Dār Ṣādir), vol. 4, Epistle 42, 195.

⁹¹ Atif Efendi 1681, fol. 558a; *Rasā’il Ikhwān al-Şafā’* (Dār Ṣādir), Epistle 52, vol. 4, 379.

⁹² Crone, *God’s Rule*, 104–5; al-Fazārī, ‘Kitāb al-Radd ‘alā Ibn ‘Umayr’, 58; al-Imām al-Hādī ilā al-Ḥaqq, ‘A Collection of Works’, fol. 39r–v.

⁹³ Ebstein, ‘Spiritual Descendants of the Prophet’, 560.

exists between an ‘orthodox’/official strand and universalism.⁹⁴ Janne Mattila successfully highlights the Ikhwān’s problematization of religious divergence and stresses that their pluralistic attitude remains confined within their commitment to Islam as a final revelation. He sees their ‘Neoplatonizing philosophical system’ and its eschatological objective as facilitating this pluralistic tendency, in addition to their adoption of the Isma‘īlī *ẓāhir* / *bāṭin* scheme, which as shown above, is problematic.⁹⁵ Furthermore, in Epistle 4 ‘On Geography’, the Ikhwān stress that ‘the inception of the state of the virtuous appears with a group of good, wise, virtuous and learned scholars. They are unanimous in thought and acknowledge one religion only’.⁹⁶

The Ikhwān’s strong similarities with Zaydism is expressed elsewhere. In Epistle 33 they discuss the significance of number five: for example, it is the number of the wandering planets, the elements (fire, water, earth, air, and ether), the senses, the five archangels (Jibrīl, Mikā’īl, Isrāfīl, The Angel of the Preserved Tablet (*al-Lawḥ*), Angel of the Pen (*Qalam*), and the prophets (Noah, Abraham, Moses, Jesus, and Muḥammad); it is also the number of the imams.⁹⁷ This may be a reference to the Zaydi belief that the fifth imam is Zayd b. ‘Alī, the grandson of al-Ḥusayn rather than Muḥammad al-Bāqir. The imams that follow have to be from the House of ‘Alī but this is conditioned by merit and piety. This can be contrasted with the discussion of numbers found in the Jābirian corpus. In *Kitāb al-Ḥajar* (‘The Book of the Stone’), discussing the ‘sibā’iyya’ (things-that-come-in-seven), the seven imams are correlated with the seven planets, in addition to the seven climes.⁹⁸ Of course the Ikhwān correlate the seven

⁹⁴ M. Brett Wilson, ‘The Failure of Nomenclature: The Concept of ‘Orthodoxy’ in the Study of Islam’, *Comparative Islamic Studies*, 3/2, (Dec. 2007): 169–94.

⁹⁵ Mattila, ‘The Ikhwān al-Ṣafā’ on Religious Diversity’, 182–5.

⁹⁶ Ignacio Sánchez and James Montgomery (eds. and transl.), *Epistles of the Brethren of Purity. On Geography*, 60 (Arabic), 77 (English). In the quote above, I replace ‘cycle’, translation of ‘*dawla*’ chosen in this volume with ‘state’, as in my opinion it is more fitting.

⁹⁷ Ragıp Pasha 840, fol. 283r : والفضلاء من أهل البيت خمس وأئمة الدين خمسة

Esad Efendi 3638_284 (c. 1287), fol. 283v: الفضلاء من أهل البيت خمسة أئمة الهدى خمسة

Ragıp Pasha 839 (833?): أئمة الدين خمسة والفضلاء من أهل البيت خمسة

Paul E. Walker *et al.*, *Epistles of the Brethren of Purity*: no reference to five imams 28 والفضلاء من أهل البيت خمسة, (the rest of the correspondences, 26–8).

Rasā’il Ikhwān al-Ṣafā’ (Dār Ṣādir), vol. 3, Epistle 33, 208: no reference to imams, والفضلاء من أهل بيت النبوة خمسة

⁹⁸ Jābir ibn Ḥayyān, *Rasā’il Jābir ibn Ḥayyān* (ed. Aḥmad Farīd al-Mazīdī; Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyya, 2006), 92; The Jabirian Corpus contains knowledge attributed to the sixth imam Ja‘far al-Ṣādiq, Jābir ibn Ḥayyān’s

planets with many other things throughout the *Rasā'il* (for example, seven layers of hell, seven sublunary bodies, etc.) but there seems to be a deliberate aversion to the Isma'ili doctrine of the seven imams.⁹⁹ In the same section concerned with the significance of numbers, in which the reference to the five imams is found, the Ikhwān avoid discussing the number 7 saying: 'As for things-that-come-in-seven (*musabba'āt*) among existents, we leave out their discussion, since a group of people of knowledge were obsessed with them and discussed them at length.'¹⁰⁰ In Epistle 5, on music, 'seveners' (*al-musabbi'a*) are described as people 'who were obsessed with mentioning heptads as superior to anything else'.¹⁰¹ As Annemarie Schimmel explains: 'Seven reigns [over] the whole philosophy of the Isma'ilīs, the Sevens Shī'īs, who have developed a complicated system of heptads: seven prophets are the seven pillars of the House of Wisdom, the seventh imām in the succession of a prophet will bring the resurrection [...] The seven prophets correspond to the seven spheres, the seven imāms in each prophetic cycle, to the seven earths'.¹⁰² Al-Ghazālī uses the term 'sab'iyya' as a pejorative reference to the Isma'ilīs. We find a similar use in Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī (d. 1210) and Ibn Taymiyya (d. 1328) among others.¹⁰³

Though it is Shi'i-oriented, the Ikhwānian denomination has little in common with Isma'ilism and more in common with Zaydism and even Ibadism, particularly when it comes to the issues of imamate and caliphate. Leaders of the Muslim community should be assessed according to merit and it seems that the Ikhwān themselves aim to function as the reformed council which will spread the Third Way's message of concordance to kings, craftsmen and others. They hope that ultimately a grand transformation will take place which will create a utopian state ruled by leaders, imams, and caliphs who have attained enlightenment by polishing their intellects with knowledge and wisdom (*ḥikma*).

purported mentor. Paul Kraus, *Jābir ibn Hayyān: Contribution à l'histoire des idées scientifiques dans l'islam* (Hildesheim and New York: Georg Olms, 2 vols., repr., 1989), ii. 262–5; Douglas S. Crow, 'Jabir Ibn Hayyan and Earliest Isma'ili Gnosis' (PhD diss., McGill University, 1980).

⁹⁹ *Rasā'il Ikhwān al-Şafā'* (Dār Şādir), vol. 3, Epistle 30, 64.

¹⁰⁰ Paul E. Walker *et al.*, *Epistles of the Brethren of Purity. Part I*, 25 (Arabic).

¹⁰¹ Owen Wright (ed. and transl.), *Epistles of the Brethren of Purity. On Music: An Arabic Critical Edition and English Translation of Epistle 5* (Oxford: Oxford University Press in association with The Institute of Ismaili Studies, 2011), p. 111.

¹⁰² A. Schimmel, art. 'Sab', Sab'a' in *EI*², iv. 662–3.

¹⁰³ J. von Ess, *Der Eine und das Andere. Beobachtungen an islamischen häresiographischen Texten*, vol. 1 (Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2011), 1057–8, 1084, 1153.

II: MAGIC

According to Ibn 'Umayr, the Ibadi authority and al-Fazārī's rival, prophethood must be affirmed by miracles. Al-Fazārī contends that God may or may not choose to support prophets with miracles, signs or proofs; the messages of the prophets are the most powerful testimony.¹⁰⁴ Furthermore, to the ignorant, the miracle of Moses, as an example, is identical to the feats of the magicians whom he confronted. Therefore, miracles cannot be solid affirmation of prophethood.¹⁰⁵ Nevertheless, with the miracles and signs of prophecy 'God intensifies the affirmation' (*ghallaḏa Allāh 'alayhim al-iḥtijāj*), thus amplifying accountability.¹⁰⁶

The Ikhwān cite the story of Moses as evidence for the existence of magic.¹⁰⁷ On the one hand, they, like Ibn 'Umayr, remark that prophets need miracles and signs to prove they are the messengers of God; but on the other hand, miracles are a kind of magic. A miracle, like that of Moses, is a kind of effective action that prophets achieve through direct divine inspiration and affirmation. This constitutes 'grand and licit magic' (*al-siḥr al-ʿaẓīm, al-siḥr al-ḥalāl*) which includes the magical feats of sages and philosophers. The effective action of the pharaoh's magicians is illicit magic (*siḥr bāṭil/siḥr ḥarām*) since it is used to challenge the prophets, and is employed by the enemies of sages and philosophers who seek to mislead and corrupt.¹⁰⁸ However, when the pharaoh's magicians (*saḥara*), who are also described as 'astrologers and diviners' (*aṣḥāb al-nijāma wa-l-kihāna*), aligned themselves with Moses, their abilities and practice became admirable.¹⁰⁹

The polemics of Ibn 'Umayr and al-Fazārī, in addition to the Ikhwān's position, reflect the traditional 'binary logic of the revelation' according to which *siḥr* of the unbelievers is contrasted with the authentic signs of

¹⁰⁴ al-Fazārī, 'Kitāb fī al-Radd 'alā Ibn 'Umayr', 3–4.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid, 7, 10.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid, 9–10. Though merely of an anecdotal value, it is worth mentioning that in the title page of British Library MS. Or. 3971 containing *Kitāb al-Funūn* by the Zaydī imam Yaḥyā b. al-Ḥusayn, we find a 'spell' for identifying a thief written by the hand of the scribe after stating that it is 'transferred from the hand of *amīr al-mu'minīn*', implying that Yaḥyā wrote about magic, fol. 1r. It is possible that this was written by a vigilant scribe to discourage anyone who may wish to steal the manuscript itself.

¹⁰⁷ Godefroid de Callatay and Bruno Halflants (eds. and transl.), *Epistles of the Brethren of Purity. On Magic I*, 29–30; Atif Efendi 1681, fol. 537b; *Rasā'il Ikhwān al-Ṣafā'* (Dār Ṣādir), vol. 4, Epistle 52, 327–8.

¹⁰⁸ Atif Efendi 1681, fols. 537b–538a; *Rasā'il Ikhwān al-Ṣafā'* (Dār Ṣādir), vol. 4, Epistle 52, 327–8.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid, 375; Atif Efendi 1681, fol. 556b.

divine revelation.¹¹⁰ Ibn ‘Umayr is most consistent with this tradition while al-Fazārī demotes the teleological value of miracles and nearly equates it to that of *sihr*; in fact, he emphasizes that only those very few whom God endowed with grace can see the difference.¹¹¹ The Ikhwān on the other hand promote *sihr* by subsuming miracles under it and positioning philosophy/wisdom on a level with prophecy as we shall see here.

In the longer version of the epistle on magic (52b) one finds several passages concerned with imamate, caliphate, and state administration. At first, these seem to be awkwardly placed. To understand them, three contextualizing tactics are necessary: 1) unpacking the different meanings of magic according to the Ikhwān, 2) looking for similarities and distinctions between ‘divinely-guided’ leadership and magic; 3) highlighting if and how magic is recommended for practical use in state administration and establishment of leadership.

How do the Ikhwān define magic in 52b? They start with a very general and vague definition: magic is ‘demonstrating and revealing the reality of a thing and displaying it, swiftly and competently’.¹¹² Using ‘*minhu*’ we are given the following categories:

1. ‘Telling what will be before it becomes’. We are told elsewhere that astrology is ‘a type (*ḍarb*) of magic’ upon which talismanry depends.¹¹³
2. ‘Alteration of essences/substances and breaching the norm (*kharq al-‘āda*)’.
3. Wit and rhetorical skills.
4. ‘What the prophets were accused of and sages known for’.
5. ‘Knowledge special to women’.¹¹⁴

Another very general definition is given: magic is ‘everything whereby minds are enchanted (*suḥirat*) and towards which spirits are led through speech and actions by way of fascination, submission, attention, listening, inclination, obedience, and acceptance’.¹¹⁵ In effect, the

¹¹⁰ Travis Zadeh, ‘Magic, Marvel, and Miracle in Early Islamic Thought’ in David J. Collins (ed.) *The Cambridge History of Magic and Witchcraft in the West from Antiquity to the Present* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 235–67, at 239.

¹¹¹ al-Fazārī, ‘Kitāb al-Radd ‘alā Ibn ‘Umayr’, 10.

¹¹² Atif Efendi 1681, fol. 537b; *Rasā’il Ikhwān al-Şafā’* (Dār Şādir), vol. 4, Epistle 52, 312.

¹¹³ Atif Efendi 1681, fol. 543b; *Rasā’il Ikhwān al-Şafā’* (Dār Şādir), vol. 4, Epistle 52, 333.

¹¹⁴ Atif Efendi 1681, fol. 537b; *Rasā’il Ikhwān al-Şafā’* (Dār Şādir), vol. 4, Epistle 52, 313.

¹¹⁵ Atif Efendi 1681, fol. 538a; *Rasā’il Ikhwān al-Şafā’* (Dār Şādir), vol. 4, Epistle 52, 314; This definition is found in *Ghāyat al-ḥakīm* (*Picatrix*) by

Ikhwān consider magic to be ‘powerful and effective action’ that causes internal/subjective and external/transitive changes. The fourth definition is the most relevant to our investigation.

The Ikhwān’s discussion of magic is based on two dichotomies: pneumatic/intellectual powers, and earthly/divine powers. Pneumatic magic is achieved ‘by mediation of the soul. It is foreknowing what will be, astrological elections, and knowing the conditions and actions of the celestial world, announcing them and judging [things] according to them.’ Astrologers belong to the second category. As for divine magic, they write: ‘among [the categories of] magic is that which is known by the mediation of the intellect. It is explicating and revealing the truths of things, and the knowledge uttered by the prophets and delivered by philosophers from revealed books and detailed verses.’¹¹⁶ The ability of the astrologer/magician comes from the celestial world, whereas the feats of the prophets, such as Muḥammad, God bestows from beyond the celestial spheres; from the Divine Throne (*‘Arsh*) and Pedestal (*al-Kursī*).¹¹⁷

The great intellectual magic, that the Ikhwān speak about, is the manifestation of power received directly by divine inspiration and aid, stressing that ‘this is the trait of the great *walāyah/wilāyah* and the grand *khilāfa* that is the deputyship of God special to the People of the Message (*ahl al-risāla*, i.e., the prophets), who do not need a director nor a scholar but themselves [...] that is why they deserved leadership (*riyāsa*) and were marked by deputyship (*khilāfa*)’.¹¹⁸ The Ikhwān also see the Macrocosmic Man as a *khalīfa*, God’s deputy in the created world.¹¹⁹ This is recalling the notion of *khilāfa* in the Qur’ān: ‘Your lord said to the angels, “I will make upon the earth a *khalīfa*” ’ (Q. 2: 30) Grand deputyship is divine and bestowed upon Adam, prophets, and the imams who achieve enlightenment.¹²⁰ The *riyāsa* of this divine deputyship is contrasted with the *siyāsa* of terrestrial and temporal deputyship which

Maslama b. Qāsim al-Qurṭubī (d. 964): see Hellmut Ritter (ed.) *Picatrix: Das Ziel des Weisen* (Leipzig: B. G. Teubner, 1933), 6–7.

¹¹⁶ Atif Efendi 1681, fol. 565b; *Rasā’il Ikhwān al-Ṣafā’* (Dār Ṣādir), vol. 4, Epistle 52, 407.

¹¹⁷ Atif Efendi 1681, fol. 556b; *Rasā’il Ikhwān al-Ṣafā’* (Dār Ṣādir), vol. 4, Epistle 52, 375.

¹¹⁸ Atif Efendi 1681, fol. 556b; *Rasā’il Ikhwān al-Ṣafā’* (Dār Ṣādir), vol. 4, Epistle 52, 375–6.

¹¹⁹ *Rasā’il Ikhwān al-Ṣafā’* (Dār Ṣādir), vol. 1, 29; vol. 1, Epistle 9, 306; Ikhwān al-Ṣafā’, *al-Risāla al-jāmi’a* (ed. Jamīl Ṣalībā; Damascus, 2 vols., 1949–1951), i. 496–7; Ebstein, *Mysticism and philosophy*, 176–7.

¹²⁰ Atif Efendi 1681, fol. 558a; *Rasā’il Ikhwān al-Ṣafā’* (Dār Ṣādir), vol. 4, Epistle 52, 377.

requires astrological expertise.¹²¹ For the Ikhwān, the imams are the caliphs/deputies of the prophets;¹²² thus true caliphate, prophecy, and imamate constitute the 'Grand Magic'.¹²³

The Ikhwān then stress that those people who become the temporal caliphs, preoccupied with mundane affairs, are really the caliphs of Satan; they are unjust and hostile. Such a caliph is a slave (*mamlūk*) and not a master (*mālik*), coming upon his position with trickery and disobedience. They become restricted by a planetary spiritual force (*rūḥāniyya*) which is why they need astrology to manage their affairs.¹²⁴ Here the Ikhwān appear to articulate anti-'Abbasid sentiments—the 'Abbasids, as is widely known, were avid patrons of astrology¹²⁵—a sentiment they also express in the animal fable as Marquet has pointed out.¹²⁶ If indeed the Ikhwān observe the public commemoration of *Ghadīr khumm* instated by the Buyids then this passage could be understood as pro-Buyid administration. An anti-'Abbasid position was also expressed by Ibn Sallām al-Ibādī who dedicates a chapter on the decadence and failures of the Umayyads and the 'Abbasids. Regarding the latter, he singles out their reprehensible association with diviners (*kūhhān*) and 'companions of Jinn'; and rebukes both dynasties for nepotism, contrasting them both with the Rightly Guided Caliphs who formally transferred power based on merit not lineage or blood relations.¹²⁷

The Ikhwān do count the Rightly Guided Caliphs as among divine deputies of the prophets and thus grand magicians:

¹²¹ Atif Efendi 1681, fol. 556—b. *Rasā'il Ikhwān al-Şafā'* (Dār Şādir), vol. 4, Epistle 52, 374, 376.

¹²² *Rasā'il Ikhwān al-Şafā'* (Dār Şādir), vol. 3, Epistle 42, 489.

¹²³ Atif Efendi 1681, fol. 557b; *Rasā'il Ikhwān al-Şafā'* (Dār Şādir), vol. 4, Epistle 52, 378.

¹²⁴ Atif Efendi 1681, fols. 556a–557a; *Rasā'il Ikhwān al-Şafā'* (Dār Şādir), vol. 4, Epistle 52, 374–6.

¹²⁵ Stephen P. Blake, *Astronomy and Astrology in the Islamic World* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2016). Damien Janos, 'Al-Ma'mūn's Patronage of Astrology: Some Biographical and Institutional Considerations' in Jens Scheiner and Damien Janos (eds.) *The Place to Go: Contexts of Learning in Baghdad, 750-1000 C.E.* (Princeton, NJ: Darwin Press, 2014), 389–454; Edward S. Kennedy, *Astronomy and Astrology in the Medieval Islamic World* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1998); David Pingree, 'Astrology' in M. J. L. Young, J. D. Latham and R. B. Serjeant (eds.), *Religion, Learning and Science in the 'Abbasid Period* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 290–300.

¹²⁶ Marquet, *Les frères de la pureté*, 568.

¹²⁷ Ibn Sallām, *Kitāb fīhi bad' al-Islām*, 101.

And know, o compassionate and loyal brother, that every science perfected and action that issued from the prophets, messengers, and the Rightly Guided Caliphs who succeeded them, the pure people of their houses, and their companions among the faithful, these [belong to] intellectual magic and divine command [...] every action, art, craft, labour that emerges from sages and philosophers, [including] the propaedeutic sciences, announcing astral matters and judging according to them, these [belong to] pneumatic magic that manifests by mediation of nature.¹²⁸

In addition to the clear reverence for Abū Bakr, ‘Umar and ‘Uthmān in the *Rasā’il* and referring to them by their well-known epithets (see above), the Ikhwān here assert that they were divinely inspired and, more unconventionally, they were great magicians.

Concerning pneumatic magic, how can it be used pragmatically in state administration? The Ikhwān write: ‘Know, o brother, that the best thing people attained from this art [magic] and absorbing its sciences, is knowing the state of kings, sovereigns, caliphs, successors, princes, generals, leaders of war, viziers, secretaries, royal custodians, and the rise of states and their fates, longevity of natives [...]’.¹²⁹ This is followed by astrological elections for ensuring the legitimacy of the caliph/king who receives official allegiance (*bay‘a*).¹³⁰

The use of magic and divination in state administration and military matters is found in the pseudo-Aristotelian *Hermetica*. They comprise a group of texts that take the form of epistles and conversations between Alexander the Great and Aristotle in which the philosopher teaches his royal pupil about the workings of the universe, the forces within it, the hidden powers of nature, and magic. Aristotle bases his instructions on knowledge he received from Hermes. The Ikhwān cite *al-Ustūṭās*—pseudo-Aristotelian hermetic text—as the source of their lunar mansions magic.¹³¹ They also transfer almost the entire content of another pseudo-Aristotelian hermetic text concerned with magically attracting

¹²⁸ Atif Efendi 1681, fol. 565b; *Rasā’il Ikhwān al-Ṣafā’* (Dār Ṣādir), vol. 4, Epistle 52, 408.

¹²⁹ Atif Efendi 1681, fol. 554b; *Rasā’il Ikhwān al-Ṣafā’* (Dār Ṣādir), vol. 4, Epistle 52, 369.

¹³⁰ Atif Efendi 1681, fols. 554b–556a; *Rasā’il Ikhwān al-Ṣafā’* (Dār Ṣādir), vol. 4, Epistle 52, 369.

¹³¹ Atif Efendi 1681, fols. 572a–576a; *Rasā’il Ikhwān al-Ṣafā’* (Dār Ṣādir), vol. 4, Epistle 52, 443–5; Turkey, the National Library of Manisa, MS no. 1461, fols. 18b–25b. Diwald posits that the Ikhwān see gnosis through the lens of ‘Hermeticism’ and Sufism: Diwald, *Kitāb Iḥwān aṣ-Ṣafā’* (III), 25; this is corroborated in Netton, *Muslim Neoplatonists*, 50–2.

animals.¹³² In another text belonging to this corpus and which might have been known by the Ikhwān, called *al-Iṣṭimākhīs*, Aristotle gives instructions for creating four talismans and four amulets that would aid Alexander in securing victory.¹³³ In the same text, Aristotle tells Alexander that every king has a spiritual power (*rūḥāniyya*) attached to him and connects him to his star, adding that kings made covenants with these powers to guide them away from harm, ensure their victory and defeat their enemies.¹³⁴ As we saw above, this exact idea is deemed by the Ikhwān as the characteristic of temporal sovereigns.

Appending the occult sciences to state administration is also found in the pseudo-Aristotelian (but not expressly Hermetic), *Kitāb al-Siyāsa fī tadbīr al-rī'āsa*, ('The Book of Governance on Managing Leadership'), which purports to be an epistle from Aristotle to Alexander the Great offering political, moral, and dietary advice. The final chapter of the text, titled *Sirr al-asrār*, is concerned with astral magic. The work itself claims in the proem to be a translation from Greek into Syriac then into Arabic by the translator Yahyā b. al-Bīṭrīq who flourished in Baghdad in the ninth century. But not enough evidence remains to indicate the existence of a Greek original.¹³⁵ Aristotle tells Alexander: 'If you are able, do not stand nor sit, eat nor drink, nor undertake any action without consulting astrology'.¹³⁶ In the last chapter, Aristotle prescribes an elaborate

¹³² This section does not appear in Atif Efendi 1681 but in Dār Ṣādir, vol. 4, Epistle 52, 450–57; also in MS Köprülü 870 (15th c.) and Bibliothèque Nationale de France (BnF), MS 2304 (dated 1654). Compare to British Library, Delhi Arabic MS 1946, 21v–32r.

¹³³ Ibid, fols. 1v–21r.

¹³⁴ Ibid, fols. 5v–5r.

¹³⁵ Pseudo-Aristotle, *al-Uṣūl al-yūnāniyya li-l-naẓariyyāt al-siyāsiyya fī l-islām*, ed. 'Abd al-Raḥmān Badawī (Cairo, Maktabat al-nahḍa al-miṣriyya, 1954), 69. On the influence, circulation, and structure of this text see, Mario Grignaschi, 'L'Origine et les métamorphoses du *Sirr al-asrār*', *Archives d'histoire doctrinale et littéraire du Moyen Âge*, 43 (1976): 7–112; Mario Grignaschi, 'La diffusion du *Secretum Secretorum* (*Sirr al-asrār*) dans l'Europe occidentale', *Archive d'Histoire Doctrinale et Litterature du Moyen Âge*, 48 (1980): 7–70; Mario Grignaschi, 'Remarques sur la formation et l'interprétation du *Sirr al-asrār*' in W. F. Ryan y Ch. B. Schmitt (eds.), *Pseudo-Aristotle The Secret of Secrets. Sources and Influences* (London: The Warburg Institute, 1982), 3–33; Steven J. Williams, 'The Early Circulation of the Pseudo-Aristotelian "Secret of Secrets" in the West. The Papal and Imperial Courts', *Micrologus*, 2 (1994): 127–44; Mahmoud Manzalaoui, 'The Pseudo-Aristotelian *Kitāb Sirr al-Asrār*. Facts and Problems', *Oriens*, 23/24 (1974): 147–257.

¹³⁶ Pseudo-Aristotle, *al-Uṣūl al-yūnāniyya*, 85.

talisman known as ‘the talisman of the king’ which ensures obedience, awe, and victory.¹³⁷

The pseudo-Aristotelian *Hermetica* and *Sirr al-asrār* were sources that familiarized the Ikhwān with the application of occult sciences to state administration; however, they do utilize astrology and divination (‘telling what will be before it becomes’) in a unique way as means to assess the merit of temporal leadership. Moreover, if we accept the Zaydi impact on the Ikhwān’s view on imamate, as I argue above, then astrological assessment is applicable to the imams since they are not infallible but subject to council. Despite their temporality, the imams’ high status is maintained: to them is legitimate *wilāya* (guardianship, leadership) if they achieve enlightenment and transcend mundane affairs, but they do not necessarily achieve *walāya* (sacral power). They too become rightly guided. Temporal caliphs are worthy of neither *wilāya* nor *walāya*.

So what is the role that the Ikhwān envisage for themselves in this religio-political and magical movement (the Third Way)? In the 44th epistle titled ‘On the Doctrine of the Brethren of Purity’, they narrate a fable about the physician who enters a city with most of its inhabitants suffering from a ‘hidden’ (*khafī*) disease. He treats one man who then aids the physician to heal the afflicted inhabitants one by one. The Ikhwān then compare this process to the prophets’ mission explaining that they are the physicians of the souls.¹³⁸ They state afterwards: ‘this is the religious school (*madhhab*) of our noble brethren’.¹³⁹ This fable and the epistle in which it is found, are mentioned again in the long version of the epistle on magic where they assert that medicine is licit magic (*siḥr ḥalāl*), because it transforms a deficient and corrupt state into a sound and perfect one. In this way, the Ikhwān stress, physicians are comparable to prophets.¹⁴⁰ The Ikhwān with their mission perform such transformative feats, for in the 44th epistle, they state:

It is we, *jamā’at* Ikhwān al-Ṣafā’, noble and pure friends, who were asleep in the cave of our father Adam for a period of time while the vicissitudes of ages and the calamities of misfortune rolled on, till the day of reckoning after the dispersal in the lands of the kingdom of the Greatest Law [...] Will you, my brother, may

¹³⁷ Ibid, 159–64.

¹³⁸ Pseudo-Aristotle, *al-Uṣūl al-yūnāniyya*, 115–16; Owen Wright (ed. and transl.), *Epistles of the Brethren of Purity. On Music*, 7–12, 43–53, 73–4; *Rasā’il Ikhwān al-Ṣafā’* (Dār Ṣādir), vol. 3, Epistle 31 (*Fi ’ilal ikhtilāf al-lughāt war-rusūm al-khuṭūṭ wa-l-ibārāt* / ‘On the Causes for the Variations in Languages, Scripts, and Expressions’), 138.

¹³⁹ *Rasā’il Ikhwān al-Ṣafā’* (Dār Ṣādir), vol. 4, Epistle 44, 14–16.

¹⁴⁰ Atif Efendi 1681, fol. 542a–b; *Rasā’il Ikhwān al-Ṣafā’* (Dār Ṣādir), vol. 4, Epistle 52, 327.

God support you and us with a spirit from Him, go ahead and embark with us on the ship of salvation that was built by our father Noah, peace be upon him, to be saved from the flood of Nature before the sky brings about ominous smog, to be safe from the waves of the sea of matter, and not to be among those who drown?¹⁴¹

The prophets, their followers and successors (*khulafā'*), in addition to the philosophers, trivialize the body/material world and dedicate themselves to the soul, just as the People of the Prophet's House during Karbala, who surrendered their bodies, fighting through thirst, stabbing, and beating until their souls departed their bodies and rose to the heavenly kingdom (*malakūt al-samā'*) where they were reunited with Muḥammad and 'Alī.¹⁴² The Ikhwān's objective is to transform reality from a mundane state to a divine one, and this is the greatest magic ('alteration of essences/substances and breaching the norm (*kharq al-'āda*)'). They ask their reader: 'Will you, o brother, may God support you and us with a spirit from Him, follow them and their way (*sunna*)?' This is the way of the Ikhwān, the Third Way. The first way, is that of prophets; the second is of the philosophers; and third is the Ikhwān's ultimate synthesis. They say in the 44th epistle: 'We invoke in this view the sayings and counsel of the philosophers, and the actions of the prophets and the ways (*sunan*) of their laws.' For they have seen that people often contradict philosophy with law (*sharī'a*) and vice versa, causing themselves confusion and leading themselves astray.¹⁴³

Hence, the Third Way is a reconciliatory reform and the missionary tone is very clear. Magic serves as a rhetorical, allegorical and practical tool that aims to assess and ensure the merit and accountability of the leaders under whom the Ikhwānian movement is active. It is also one that heals the state from its terrestrial corruption. The magicians of the pharaohs aligned themselves with the prophets, and, like the prophets and *ahl al-bayt*, they were content with their brutal execution when they realized that in their death there is 'a [new] life, victory, salvation, loyalty to the religion, and devotion to the brethren (*ikhwān*)'.¹⁴⁴

Another fable is given in the epistle on magic, to illustrate the unworthiness of temporal sovereignty. At the pinnacle of his wealth and power, a Persian king sees an apparition of a well-dressed handsome young man who stares at the king with derision and scorn. He orders his men to capture the young one but to no avail. The king demands to

¹⁴¹ *Rasā'il Ikhwān al-Şafā'* (Dār Şādir), vol. 4, Epistle 44, 18.

¹⁴² Ibid, 33.

¹⁴³ Ibid, 36.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid, 27.

know who he is. The apparition responds: 'O you pitiful man! O you who are enticed by temporal sovereignty and partial kingship! What kind of king are you? You are a slave (*mamlūk*) and not master (*mālik*) [...] I am heavenly kingship and divine sovereignty!' From this encounter, the king becomes overwhelmed by the mundanity of his powers. So he falls ill, mind and body. His vizier consults a shaykh who recommends that they seek the help of a wise man from the Indian region, specifically the mountains of Sarandīb (modern day Sri Lanka). Hope reinvigorates the king and he begins to recover. They send for the wise man who in his place dispatches two of his pupils. He orders them to begin instructing the king on the propaedeutic science and progress to the divine sciences. They teach the king and his vizier accordingly until both of them reach enlightenment and spiritual salvation. The king rewards the two wise men and grants them his own kingdom. The temptations of mundane kingship overwhelms them and they trade 'heavenly kingship' for it. We are told 'they desert the licit magic (*sihr ḥalāl*) that descended onto them, to which they were ordered to adhere, and through which salvation was reached by those who were saved. They returned to illicit magic (*sihr ḥarām*), misguided and misguiding.' This reflects what happened to Hārūt and Mārūt who abandoned the company of God and His angels and taught mankind harmful magic.¹⁴⁵

The grand magic of divine caliphate/imamate is super-terrestrial. Abdicating temporal positions of power to attain salvation is a *sihr ḥalāl*. Thus it seems that the Ikhwān are promoting their own *Epistles* and the pedagogical structure therein, which begins indeed with the propaedeutic sciences and ends with the divine ones. The entire *Epistles* is the means to salvation and grand magic.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

This article argued that the Ikhwān al-Ṣafā' aimed with their *Rasā'il* to establish an anti-sectarian religio-political reform that they refer to as the Third Way. Its strategy comprises: reconciling revelation and philosophy; valuing the message of religions other than Islam (Christianity, Judaism, Brahmins, and Sabians); and addressing some Shi'a specific practices and doctrines which it scrutinizes. The Ikhwān mitigate the doctrinal boundaries between Shi'ism and other denominations by adopting a more equitable position which is consonant with Zaydi and Ibadi attitudes

¹⁴⁵ Atif Efendi, fols. 538a–542a; *Rasā'il Ikhwān al-Ṣafā'* (Dār Ṣādir), vol. 4, Epistle 52, 327.

toward the contentious issues of imamate, caliphate, and *wilāya/walāya*. Furthermore, magic is a characteristic feature of the Third Way. The Ikhwān see magic as the conceptual and practical pivot of the Third Way, since it is the culmination of philosophy and revelation, making it the appropriate tool for regulating state guardianship and sublimating the temporal state itself into a sacred city instead of investing sacral power into a single person. The Ikhwān themselves are the ushers of this utopia.

Rather than replacing the doctrine of the imamate with that of brotherhood as Netton argues, the Ikhwān promote themselves as the imamate's superintendents, so to speak, by assessing the legitimacy of the *wilāya* of the imams whose unquestioned sanctity is dispelled, predicting the character and behaviour of sovereigns through astrology, and utilizing magic for the benefit of the community. They also present themselves as counsellors who would ultimately eradicate temporal sovereignty through the salvation of the corrupt sovereigns. They are like the prophets, 'inviters (*du'ā*) to the higher world'. Unlike prophets, who are aided and supported by direct inspiration through the angels, the Ikhwān can resort to astrology and magic as a kind of *qalb al-'ayān wa-kharq al-'āda*, the alterations of essences and breaching the norm,¹⁴⁶ to establish their Third Way and facilitate as sound a leadership as possible. Thus, the religio-political activism of Ikhwān al-Şafā' is essentially occultist; equally, their occultist activism is essentially religio-political, paving the way and directly inspiring the occult-centric imperial ideology of the fifteenth and sixteenth-century as heralded by the members of the neo-Ikhwān al-Şafā' such as Şā'in al-Dīn Turka (1369–1432) and 'Abd al-Raḥmān Bisṭāmī (d. 858/1454).¹⁴⁷

¹⁴⁶ This is not found in Istanbul, Atif Efendi 1681 but in BnF, Ms 2304.

¹⁴⁷ Matthew Melvin-Koushki, 'Astrology, Lettrism, Geomancy: The Occult-Scientific Methods of Post-Mongol Islamicate Imperialism', *The Medieval History Journal*, 19/1 (2016): 142–50; Melvin-Koushki, 'The Quest for a Universal Science: The Occult Philosophy of Şā'in al-Dīn Turka Işfahānī (1369–1432) and Intellectual Millenarianism in Early Timurid Iran' (PhD diss., Yale University, 2012), 16–18. Melvin-Koushki, 'Early Modern Islamicate Empire: New Forms of Religiopolitical Legitimacy' in Armando Salvatore, Roberto Tottoli and Babak Rahimi (eds.) *The Wiley-Blackwell History of Islam* (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2017, forthcoming); Noah Gardiner, 'Esotericism in a Manuscript Culture: Aḥmad al-Būnī and His Readers through the Mamlūk Period' (PhD diss., University of Michigan, 2014), 155–7.

Abstract

This article investigates the role of magic in the confessional identity of the Ikhwān al-Ṣafā as it is articulated in the 52nd epistle on magic, and informed by the rest of their *Rasā'il* (*Epistles*). To achieve this, the author revisits the long scholarly tradition of speculation about their denominational commitment that has seen them affiliated one way or the other to Ismailism, seeing its esoteric foundations as the platform onto which their magic and astrology were cultivated. Rather this article argues that the Ikhwān al-Ṣafā aimed with their *Rasā'il* to establish an anti-sectarian religio-political reform that they refer to as the Third Way. Its strategy comprises: reconciling revelation and philosophy; valuing the message of religions other than Islam (Christianity, Judaism, Brahmans, and Sabians); and addressing some Shi'a specific practices and doctrines which it scrutinizes. The Ikhwān mitigate the doctrinal boundaries between Shi'ism and other denominations by adopting a more equable position which is consonant with Zaydi and Ibadi attitudes toward the contentious issues of imamate, caliphate, and *wilāya/walāya*. So, the Ikhwān see magic as the conceptual and practical pivot of the Third Way, since it is the culmination of philosophy and revelation, becoming a suitable concept to signify the self-enlightenment of the accountable imam achieved through knowledge of the Divine and Nature and the abandonment of physical attachment, and constituting the only conditions of legitimacy. It is also an appropriate tool for regulating state guardianship and sublimating the temporal state itself into a sacred city instead of investing sacral power into a single person.