

The *Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ* on angels and spiritual beings¹

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References to angels and, more generally, to spiritual beings are found throughout the *Rasāʾil Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ*. This is hardly surprising considering the resolute determination of the Brethren of Purity to reconcile the message of the Qurʾānic revelation with the philosophical explanation of the world inherited from Neoplatonic philosophy. The emanation theory as elaborated by the Ikhwān implies that angels occupy every part of God's creation.² Indeed, it would be no exaggeration to say that the search for means by which to acquire the status of angels is the most fundamental objective of what the Brethren called the 'spiritual philosophy' (*al-falsafa al-rūḥāniyya*) and, therefore, is the principal *raison d'être* of the corpus itself.³

In spite of being 'God's vice-regent on the earth', in the Brethren's account man occupies an intermediary position in the hierarchy of beings. In Epistle 28, for in-

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² See for instance, among countless other pieces of evidence: *On the Natural Sciences: An Arabic Critical Edition and English Translation of Epistles 15–21*, ed. and transl. Carmela Baffioni, Oxford – New York: Oxford University Press in association with the Institute of Ismaili Studies, 2013, 424–425.

³ On 'spiritual philosophy' within the *Rasāʾil*, see for instance: *On 'Astronomia': An Arabic Critical Edition and English Translation of Epistle 3*, ed. and transl. F. Jamil Ragep – Taro Mimura, Oxford – New York: Oxford University Press in association with the Institute of Ismaili Studies, 2015, 114, and: *On Magic I: An Arabic Critical Edition and English Translation of Epistles 52a*, ed. and transl. G. de Callatāy – Bruno Halflants, Oxford – New York: Oxford University Press in association with the Institute of Ismaili Studies, 2011, 12. The omnipresence of the spiritual in the *Rasāʾil* needs no demonstration. One need only recall that 'the science of spiritual beings' (*ʿilm al-rūḥāniyyāt*) is one of the five sciences that the Ikhwān call 'divine' in the classification of knowledge in Epistle 7 ('On the Scientific Arts'), and also that no formula is used more frequently in the *Rasāʾil* than the shibboleth-like (and partly Qurʾānic) expression 'You must know, my brother – may God assist both you and us with a spirit coming from Him – that ...'. On these two issues, see: G. de Callatāy, 'The Classification of Knowledge in the *Rasāʾil*', in: *Epistles of the Brethren of Purity. The Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ and their Rasāʾil. An Introduction*, N. El-Bizri, ed., Oxford – New York: Oxford University Press in association with the Institute of Ismaili Studies, 2008, 58–82; and Id., 'From Ibn Masarra to Ibn ʿArabi: References, Shibboleths and other Subtle Allusions to the *Rasāʾil Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ* in the Literature of al-Andalus', in: A. Straface – C. De Angelo – A. Manzo, eds., *Labor Limae. Studi in onore di Carmela Baffioni*, a monographic issue of *Studi Magrebini*, 12–13 (2014–2015), vol. 12, 217–267.

stance, devoted to the limits of human knowledge, we are reminded that ‘among the existing beings some are nobler than man, such as angels cherubim (*al-malā’ika al-muqarrabūn*), whereas others are inferior to him, such as wild beasts (*al-bahā’im*).⁴ The Ikhwān insist in the same passage that man ‘is not well-versed in the sciences, like angels, nor ignorant and negligent, like beasts’. Angels also come to the fore in a passage in which the Ikhwān consider man’s inability to know about events that are too far distant in the past:

As for the story of the tribes of Israel, and what was after the flood or before it when going back to the time of Adam, and the stories of angels and tales of demons which spread corruption over the earth before the creation of Adam, there is no science of these things for man and there is no other way for him to know them than by revelation and by the acceptance of [what derives] from the angels, as a concession (*illā min ʿarīq al-wahī wa-l-akhdh ‘an al-malā’ika tasliman*).⁵

To stress the feebleness of human science in comparison to that of the angels, the Ikhwān next provide several examples in the form of analogies that are designed to illustrate the vast gaps, in both qualitative and quantitative terms, between the different levels of God’s creation. What man is able to know of angels, they write, is in the same proportion as what sea-animals are able to know of animals living on dry land, and this is something negligible, just as what the animals living on dry land are able to grasp about humans is negligible. As for the angelic level, the text suggests that this domain is, itself, divided into many ranks and that these ranks vary widely in proportion to each other.⁶ As usual, the Ikhwān bring to bear here a long series of Qur’ānic quotations, which they interpret more or less freely in support of their own theories. For the most part, the references to angels in Epistle 28 remain quite general. The only Qur’ānic spiritual being mentioned by name in this epistle is ‘Iblis the Cursed’ (*Iblis al-la’īn*) at the very beginning of the treatise. There, as at various other places in the *Rasā’il*, the Ikhwān follow Q 2:30-34 in reporting the famous story of the angels summoned by God to prostrate themselves before Adam, and of Iblis’ brazen refusal to obey the divine command.⁷

⁴ Epistle 28, ed. Beirut, vol. 3, 20.

⁵ Epistle 28, ed. Beirut, vol. 3, 22. In the subsequent lines, the Ikhwān provide various examples of things in this world that are beyond the reach of the human intellect and which man will forever be unable to grasp ‘unless he takes the understanding of them by imitation (*taqlīdan*) of the prophets – Peace be upon them – in the same way as they themselves took it from the angels, as a concession (*tasliman*)’.

⁶ Epistle 28, ed. Beirut, vol. 3, 24.

⁷ Epistle 28, ed. Beirut, vol. 3, 18-19. A thorough exploration of this narrative in Islamic exegetical literature can be found in L. N. B. Chipman, ‘Adam and the Angels: an examination of mythic elements in Islamic sources’, *Arabica* 49.4 (2002), 429-455. Putting the Brethren’s use of the narrative in perspective with early Ismā’īli interpretations of the Qur’ān, Heinz Halm observes: ‘Die ismailitischen Autoren haben sich diese Verse nicht entgehen lassen. (...) Auch in den *Rasā’il Iḥwān al-Ṣafā*’ wird mehrfach darauf angespielt: Iblis ist „der Pharao Adams“, in seiner Anmaßung (*kibr*) das Urbid aller Widersacher’ (H.

In order to find passages in which the Ikhwān link figures from Islamic angelology with specific parts of the universe, we need to turn to other epistles. The most comprehensive and systematic attempt in this direction is that provided in Epistle 20 ('On Nature'), complemented by certain indications found in Epistle 49 ('On the Spiritual Beings'). Let us begin, then, with Epistle 20, whose importance for the Ikhwānian angelology has already been pointed out by a number of scholars.⁸ The Ikhwān start by recalling that the world is made of eleven spheres in all. These are, in order of their increasing distances from the Earth (which is located at the centre of the universe): 1) the 'sphere of Earth and Water'; 2) the 'sphere of Fire and Air'; 3) the sphere of the Moon; 4) the sphere of Mercury; 5) the sphere of Venus; 6) the sphere of the Sun; 7) the sphere of Mars; 8) the sphere of Jupiter; 9) the sphere of Saturn; 10) the starry sphere; 11) the all-encompassing sphere.⁹ What the Brethren also wish to recall in this epistle is the scheme of emanation that is meant to account for the transmission of the spiritual faculties from the highest to the lowest of these heavenly spheres and from the lowest sphere to the world of coming-to-be and passing-away.

After some discussion of the analogies between this sublunary world and the heavenly world – including an astrologically-orientated comparison between the revolving universe, with the Earth at its centre, and the sacred pilgrimage of the Muslims around the Ka'ba – the Ikhwān al-Šafā' finally set out to describe in detail the influences arising from the spiritual faculties that were particularly attached to each celestial sphere. Their objective in doing so was to harmonise the sayings of the Qur'an with the implications of the Neoplatonic emanation scheme; the Brethren specify the manner in which each 'spiritual faculty' (*quwwa ruḥāniyya*) is commonly referred to by 'the philosophers' (*al-falāsifa*) and by 'the law' (*al-nāmūs*)

Halm, *Kosmologie und Heilslehre der frühen Ismā'īliya. Eine Studie zur islamischen Gnosis*, Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner GMBH 1978, 104).

⁸ The passage, now critically edited and translated into English by Baffioni as part of the Epistles of the Brethren of Purity series (pp. 395-404 of the Arabic edition), had previously been discussed by the same scholar in 'The Angelology System in the Iḥwān al-Šafā', in: *Arabistika i isljamoznanie. Studii po slučaj 60-godišninata na doc. d.f.n. Penka Samsareva*, S. Evstatiev, H. Čobanova and I. Djulgerov, eds., Sofia: Universitetsko izdatelstvo 'S. Kliment Ohridski', 2003, vol. 2, 434-442. The Brethren's angelology is also briefly touched upon in F. Jadaane, 'La place des anges dans la théologie musulmane', *Studia Islamica*, 41 (1975), 23-61. An Italian annotated translation of the passage, based on the Beirut edition of the *Rasā'il*, has recently been provided by Olga Lizzini in 'L'angelologia nelle Epistole dei Fratelli della Purezza: l'esempio della natura', in: *Angeli. Ebraismo Cristianesimo Islam*, G. Agamben and E. Coccia, eds., Vicenza: Neri Pozza, 2009, 1966-2012. The passage was also the subject of a dissertation by Cyril Villarosa Uy II, *Angels and Emanation in the Rasā'il Ikhwān al-Šafā'* (MA Dissertation, Cambridge UK, 2013, unpublished but available on academia.edu). Curiously enough, that study does not discuss at all, or else only very succinctly, the passages of the *Rasā'il* that are central to the present **contribution**.

⁹ Epistle 20, ed. Baffioni, *On the Natural Sciences*, 362-363. In Epistle 16, the first two spheres of the system are called 'the circle of the Earth' (*kurat al-ard*) and 'the sphere of the Air' (*kurat al-hawā*) respectively; see Epistle 16, ed. Baffioni, *On the Natural Sciences*, 86.

respectively. For us, what is interesting about this passage is that the network of correspondences between the philosophical and religious interpretations of the spiritual faculties is given in considerable detail and in a very explicit manner. In addition, the passage also mentions the name of the faculty that corresponds to each planet, as well as the place in the human organism from where the faculty is meant to operate. These latter indications are in full agreement with those found at the end of Epistle 26 ('On the Claim of the Sages that Man is a Microcosm'), in which a more elaborated account of the analogies between the universe and the human organism is provided.¹⁰ For the sake of clarity, these elements have been collected together in the following table:¹¹

"Philosophers"		"Law"
' <i>Ruḥāniyyāt</i> of the fixed stars'		Various unspecified categories of angels, including 'the Bearers of the Throne'
' <i>Ruḥāniyyāt</i> of Saturn' ¹²	Black Bile	'An angel endowed with cohorts and helpers'; amongst them: 'the Angel of Death'; 'Munkar and Nakir'
	Spleen	
' <i>Ruḥāniyyāt</i> of Jupiter'	Blood	'An angel endowed with cohorts and helpers'; amongst them: 'Riḍwān, the Guardian of the Gardens'
	Liver	

¹⁰ See Epistle 26, ed. Beirut, vol. 2, 476-479, where the associations are given in the following order: 1) Heart – Sun; 2) Spleen – Saturn; 3) Liver – Jupiter; 4) Gall Bladder – Mars; 5) Stomach – Venus; 6) Brain – Mercury; 7) Lung – Moon. It should be observed, however, that this final part of Epistle 26 in the Beirut edition could be an interpolation. On this, see: C. Toubeau, *L'homme microcosme. Présentation et traduction annotée de l'épître XXVI de l'Encyclopédie des Ikhwān al-Ṣafā'*, 17 (MA Thesis, University of Louvain 1989, unpublished). On the Microcosm-Macrocosm issue in the thought of the Ikhwān al-Ṣafā', see now: I. Nokso-Koivisto, *Microcosm-Macrocosm Analogy in Rasā'il Ikhwān al-Ṣafā' and Certain Related Texts* (PhD Thesis, University of Helsinki, 2014, unpublished but available on academia.edu).

¹¹ In the passage from Epistle 20, the celestial spheres are listed in the following order: 1) Sun; 2) Saturn; 3) Mars; 4) Jupiter; 5) Venus; 6) Mercury; 7) Moon; 8) Starry sphere. The Sun comes first, no doubt to emphasise the particular importance of its role. The permutation of Jupiter and Mars is perhaps less expected here, although it may be observed that the Ikhwān also revert the order of these two planets when listing the revolutions of the planets in Epistle 36.

¹² Carmela Baffioni (*On the Natural Sciences*, 309 of the English translation) notes that this is the only place in the passage in which the singular form *rūḥāniyya* is generally used in the manuscripts. Given that at least four copies do have the plural form here as well (see the critical apparatus of Baffioni's edition, 397, n. 11), I have retained the plural, which is also much more consistent with the rest of the passage.

"Philosophers"		"Law"
'Ruḥāniyyāt of Mars'	Yellow bile	'An angel endowed with cohorts and helpers'; amongst them: 'Jibrā'il'; 'Malik the Furious' and 'all the Guardians of Hell'
	Gall Bladder	
'Ruḥāniyyāt of the Sun'	Heat	'An angel endowed with cohorts and helpers'; amongst them: 'Isrāfil'
	Heart	
'Ruḥāniyyāt of Venus'	Concupiscent Faculty	'An angel endowed with cohorts and helpers'; amongst them: 'the Houris' and 'the Servant-Maids of the Gardens' ¹³
	Stomach	
'Ruḥāniyyāt of Mercury'	Imaginative Faculty	'An angel endowed with cohorts and helpers'; amongst them: 'the Youths, who are the servants of the inhabitants of the Gardens', 'the Honourable Secretaries' and 'the Honourable Pious'
	Brain	
'Ruḥāniyyāt of the Moon'	Faculty of Respiration	'An angel endowed with cohorts and helpers'; amongst them: 'Those in Succession'
	Lung	

Let us **first** consider the elements of the 'Law' column. If we except the line corresponding to the *ruḥāniyyāt* of the sphere of the fixed stars, we observe that the formula 'An angel endowed with cohorts (*junūd*) and helpers (*a'wān*)' has been used without distinction for all other celestial spheres, namely the seven planetary spheres that stretch from Saturn to the Moon. Nowhere in the Qur'ān does this formula appear as it does here, although the word *junūd* is mentioned on various occasions, on each of which it unambiguously refers to the innumerable armies of angels that populate the heavens of God.¹⁴ The formula suggests that each planetary sphere is linked to one major angel in particular and that this angel is, himself, at the head of a numerous army of subaltern angels.

¹³ Most manuscripts have '*kbuzzān al-jinān*' ('the Guardians of the Gardens'), which is strange here given that the same expression, in the singular form, is already used as an epithet for Ridwān. On the basis of a relatively late manuscript, Baffioni (*On the Natural Sciences*, 401, n. 1) emendates with '*jawāri al-jinān*' ('the Maids of the Gardens'), which I also retain.

¹⁴ For *junūd*, see: Q 33:9; 48:4; 48:7; 74:31. It may be noted, however, that '*a'wān*' (helpers, bodyguards) does not appear in the Qur'ān.

Interestingly, this is also the idea behind the passage from Epistle 49 in which the Ikhwān portray the cavalcades of angels that are meant to represent the spiritual entities escorting each of the seven planets.¹⁵ The passage is remarkable for its extensive supply of symbolic imagery and its heavy recourse to all kinds of astrological correlations. For each planet of the system, from Saturn to the Moon, the procession of a multitude of angels is said to be preceded by the figure of one specific angel, usually described as being of gigantic proportions. In each case, this angel is said to be riding a horse of a particular colour (or combination of colours) and holding a banner, also described as being of a special colour. Most banners are reported to feature inscriptions, which correspond to certain verses (or parts of verses) from the Qur'ān but whose actual link with the present description may seem at times to be quite far-fetched, as is often the case in writings of the Ikhwān. When names of individual angels are mentioned – which is unfortunately only the case for the two most remote planets –, they fully agree with the indications of Epistle 20. An attempt at interpreting the network of astrological implications in this passage has been provided by Yves Marquet in his *La philosophie des Iḥwān al-Ṣafā'*.¹⁶ However, for the purpose of the present contribution we shall limit ourselves to listing the main points indicated by our text in the following table:

Circle of the Fixed Stars	– ‘Those following the Footstool’ – ‘Those surrounding the Throne’ – ‘Those bearing the Throne’
Circle of Saturn	– A multitude of angels seizing the spirits of the dead bodies – Horses of deep black (<i>duhm</i>) colour – An angel in front of the procession – A black banner, with inscription (Q 23:91) – ‘An angel endowed with cohorts and helpers’; angels in charge of the seizing of the spirits; amongst them: the ‘Angel of Death’

¹⁵ Epistle 49, ed. Beirut, vol. 4, 216-224.

¹⁶ Y. Marquet, *La philosophie des Iḥwān al-Ṣafā'*, Algiers: Études et documents 1975, 114-129. There would certainly be much to gain from an extensive comparison of this passage with other networks of symbolic relationships as found in Islamic literature and visual arts, but such an investigation obviously lies beyond the limits of the present inquiry. For various Islamic astrological representations that incorporate angels, see for instance: A. Caiozzo, ‘Rituels théophaniques images et pratiques magiques: les anges planétaires dans le manuscrit persan 174 de Paris’, *Studia Iranica* 29 (2000), 109-140; Eadem, *Images du ciel d'Orient au Moyen Âge : une histoire du zodiaque et de ses représentations in les manuscrits du Proche-Orient musulman* (Collection Islam), Paris: Presses de l'Université de Paris-Sorbonne, 2003; Eadem, ‘Anges gardiens et démons familiers dans les manuscrits enluminés de l'Orient médiéval’, in: *De Socrate à Tintin. Anges gardiens et démons de l'Antiquité à nos jours*, J.-P. Boudet – Ph. Faure – C. Renoux, eds., Rennes: Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2011, 105-118.

Circle of Jupiter	– A multitude of angels – Horses of white (<i>bayḍ</i>), gray (<i>shubḥ</i>), and piebald (<i>balq</i>) colours, with white and green clothes – A noble angel, of gigantic size, in front of the procession – A banner (no colour mentioned), with inscription (Q 31:1; 35:24) – Amongst them: 'Riḍwān, the Guardian of the Gardens'
Circle of Mars	– A multitude of angels, rude and violent – An angel in front of the procession, riding a reddish (<i>aḥmar</i>) horse – A red banner, with inscription (Q 55:33; 57:25)
Circle of the Sun	– Angels visiting kings and sultans with clothes made of golden silk – Horses of chestnut (<i>shaqar</i>) and golden (<i>ṣufī</i>) colours – A noble angel, of gigantic size, in front of the procession – A golden banner, with inscription written with light (Q 2:255; 3:26)
Circle of Venus	– A multitude of angels – Beasts of various colours (<i>mulawwana</i>) and beautifully ornamented (<i>muwashshaha</i>) – An angel in front of the procession – A banner (no colour mentioned), with inscription (Q 7:32)
Circle of Mercury	– Angels as noble secretaries, with beautiful forms, light spirits, and subtle personalities – An angel in front of the procession – A banner (no colour mentioned), with inscription (Q 80:11-16)
Circle of the Moon	– A multitude of angels in charge of this world of coming-to-be and passing-away – An angel in front of the procession – A white banner, with inscription in black colour (Q 36:39-40)

Angels referred to by name in this passage and in that from Epistle 20 all correspond to major figures in Islamic angelology, most of them already mentioned in the Qur'ān.¹⁷ The 'Bearers of the Throne' (*ḥamalat al-'arsh*) evidently recall 'Those who bear the Throne' (*alladhīn yaḥmilūn al-'arsh*) and 'Those [as a collective] who bear the Throne of your Lord' (*yaḥmilu 'arsh rabbi-ka*) in Q 40:7 and 69:17 respectively. In Q 39:75 and 40:7, reference is also made to 'Those around the Throne' (*man ḥawḍ al-'arsh*). The 'Angel of Death' (*malik al-marwt*) is mentioned by name in one place, Q 32:11. In contrast, neither the name Munkar nor that of Nakir is

¹⁷ For a very recent and updated overview of Islamic angelology, see G. S. Reynolds, 'Angels', in *Encyclopaedia of Islam, THREE*, K. Fleet – G. Krämer – D. Matringe – J. Nawas – E. Rowson, eds., Brill Online, 2015 (consulted on 21 November 2018).

found in the Qur'ān.¹⁸ As a proper name, Ridwān does not appear either, anymore than does 'the Guardian of the Gardens' (*khāzin al-jinān*), but it seems that it later came to be regarded as a personification of the common word '*riḍwān*' ('approval'), which does appear in various places, such as Q 3:15.¹⁹ Contrary to what one might perhaps have expected, the name Jibrā'il is mentioned only three times in the entire text of the revelation, at Q 2:97, 2:98 and 66:4. Mālik is mentioned in Q 43:77, although not as 'the Furious' (*al-ghaḍbān*), and 'the Guardians of Hell' (*khazanatu jahannam*) appear as such in Q 40:49. Remarkably, the name Isrāfil does not appear at all in the Qur'ān. As for the Houris (*al-hūr al-'ayn*), we find them under this appellation in Q 44:54, 52:20 and 56:22 (*hūr 'ayn*), while '*hūr*' is used in Q 55:72. The formula 'Servant-Maids of the Gardens' (*jawāri al-jinān*), by contrast, is not found as such in the Qur'ān. The expressions 'the Youths' (*al-wildān*), 'the Honourable Secretaries' (*al-kirām al-kātibūn*), and 'the Honourable Pious' (*al-kirām al-barara*) are all Qur'ānic: the former is found in Q 56:17 and 76:19, and the latter two are mentioned in Q 82:11 and 80:16 respectively. Finally, we note that 'Those in Succession' (*al-mu'aqqibāt*) in all likelihood echoes Q 13:11, where the same expression indeed refers to the 'successive angels' protecting each human 'before and behind him', as has been mentioned above.

When attempting to understand the rationale lying behind the relations the Ikhwān set between angels and heavenly spheres, the references or allusions to the Qur'ān remain vague, even meaningless, if we do not consider them in the context of the astrological implications they have for the authors of the *Rasā'il*. Several of the correspondences between angels and planets can be justified only by reference to the network of relations that astrologers had established between given planets and the categories of people and professions on which they were meant to exercise their particular influence. In Epistle 26, the Ikhwān report that the Sun is the leader of the planets in the sphere, in the same way as there are kings and leaders among humans. They complete this analogy by defining which specific relation each of the other six planets has with the Sun:

The relation of Mars to the Sun is like that of the chief of army (*ṣāhib al-jaysh*) to the king. The relation of Mercury to the Sun is like that of the secretaries and ministers (*al-kuttāb wa l-wuzarā'*) to the kings. The relation of Jupiter to the Sun is like that of the judges and the scholars (*al-quḍāt wa l-'ulamā'*) to the kings. The relation of Saturn to the Sun is like that of the guardians and deputies (*al-khuzzān wa l-wukalā'*) to the kings. The relation of Venus to the Sun is like that of the servant-maids and female singers (*al-jawāri wa l-mughanniyyāt*) to the kings. The relation of the Moon to the Sun is like that of the rebels (*al-khawārij*) to the kings.²⁰

For two sections of our table above, we need offer no further explanation. The present passage makes it perfectly intelligible that the Brethren associate Mercury with

¹⁸ See A.J. Wensinck, 'Munkar wa-Nakir', in: *EP*², vol. 7, 577.

¹⁹ See W. Raven, 'Ridwān', in: *EP*², vol. 8, 519.

²⁰ Epistle 26, ed. Beirut, vol. 2, 467.

the 'Pious Secretaries' and Venus with the 'Servant-Maids'. In the case of Mars, Jupiter, and Saturn, we must turn to other types of astrological affinities, largely inherited from the Greeks, who were, themselves, walking in the footsteps of their Chaldean predecessors. Thus, in addition to the figure of the chief of army, the baneful Mars represents the flamboyant, impetuous, and brutal temperament, and the deep red colour of the planet reinforces its link to both blood and fire. In contrast to Mars, the brilliant Jupiter is meant to be a benevolent planet, whose strength is considerable and whose temperament incarnates equilibrium and justice. As for Saturn, considered to be another malevolent planet from the astrological perspective, the slowness of its revolution makes it a symbol of old age.²¹ Embroidering the ancient dichotomy between the two clearly benevolent planets (Jupiter and Venus) and the two clearly nefarious ones (Saturn and Mars), the Ikhwān offer in Epistle 3 some additional comments, which are worth considering here. The passage reads:

Among these [existing things] is the situation of the two benefics (*sa'adayni*), Jupiter and Venus. One of them, Venus, is an indicator of good fortune for people in this world. That is, if it dominates the nativities, it guides them to the delight of eating, drinking, sex, and pleasures in this world; a person whose condition is thus in this world is one of the fortunate people in this world. As for Jupiter, it is an indicator of good fortune for people in the Hereafter. That is, if it dominates the nativities, it guides them to goodness of character, rightness of creed, sincerity of piety, and purity of piety; a person whose condition is this in this world is one of the fortunate people in the Hereafter. Also among these are the two malefics (*naḥṣāni*), Saturn and Mars. One of them, Saturn, is an indicator of bad fortune for people in this world. That is, if it dominates the nativities, it guides them to misfortune, distress, poverty, illness, and adversity in [one's] affairs; a person whose condition is thus in this world is one of the unfortunate people in it and whoever experiences this state in this world is amongst the miserable ones in it. As for Mars, it is an indicator of bad fortune for people in the Hereafter. That is, if it dominates the nativities, it guides them to evils of illegality, debauchery, murder, theft, and corruption on Earth; a person whose condition is thus in this world is one of the unfortunate people in the Hereafter.²²

All of this fits remarkably well with the associations between angels and planets noted above. That Saturn is considered a planet 'ill-fated in this world' tallies well with the presence of the Angel of Death, as well as that of Munkar and Nakir, in its sphere. Likewise, the fact that Mars is regarded as 'ill-fated in the other world' enables us to understand why 'Mālik the Furious' and the other guardians of Hell are closely linked with it. In the opposite direction, the auspicious influence that Jupiter is meant to exert upon the other world certainly justifies the presence of Rīdḥān, the guardian of Paradise, in that sphere. It must be acknowledged, how-

²¹ For a comprehensive overview of the planetary characteristics in Antiquity, see the still valuable *L'astrologie grecque* (Paris: Ernest Leroux, 1898) by Auguste Bouché-Leclercq, 89-104.

²² Epistle 3, ed. Ragep – Mimura, *On Astronomia*, 101-103 (68-69 of English translation).

ever, that the passage above does not provide any grounds by which we can substantiate our final association – that of Venus with the Houris and the Servant-Maids of the Gardens – with the same clarity, since the Houris and the Maids hardly ever appear to have an effect on the happiness of this world. In this last case, it is tempting to assume that the above-mentioned network of relations between the Sun and the other planets, on the one hand, and the king and the other social categories, on the other, proved to be the decisive element.

Leaving the seven planetary spheres to one side for the time being, let us now consider the starry sphere above them. It is important to bear in mind that, according to the Ikhwān, this eighth sphere, ‘the sphere of the fixed stars’ (*ḥalāk al-kawākib al-thābita*), is not the outermost sphere of the system. As did several other scientists of their time, and following in the footsteps of Greek astronomers from Late Antiquity, the Brethren postulated the existence of a supplementary sphere, without stars, which they usually call ‘the all-encompassing sphere’ (*al-ḥalāk al-muḥīṭ bi-l-kull*). This ninth and ultimate sphere was meant to account for the movement of equinoctial precession allegedly discovered by Hipparchus in the 2nd century BC. At times, the Brethren also refer to this all-encompassing sphere as ‘the sphere of the zodiac’ (*ḥalāk al-burūj*). This title comes from the fact that, in their eyes, an abstract zodiac was, as it were, attached to the inner side of the all-encompassing sphere and thus also moved with respect to the visible constellations at the speed of one degree every 100 years, a rate which corresponds to the canonical estimation of the precessional cycle given by Ptolemy in the 2nd century AD.²³

The Brethren associate this eighth sphere, the sphere of the fixed stars, with ‘the Bearers of the Throne’ (*ḥamalāt al-‘arsh*). As noted above, the Qur’ān makes mention of ‘Those bearing the Throne’ in two places, and also twice alludes to ‘Those around the Throne’. One Qur’ānic line turns out to have been especially important in inspiring Islamic angelology, namely 69:17, concerning the Day of Resurrection: ‘And the angels are at its edges [= of the Heaven]. And they will bear the Throne of your Lord above them, that Day, eight [of them]’ (*wa-l-malak ‘alā arjā’ihā wa-yahmilu ‘arsha rabbi-ka faṣṣa-hum yawma’idhin thamāniyya*). Thinkers as imbued as were the Ikhwān with arithmetical symbolism in the style of the Pythagoreans could hardly have resisted the temptation to connect the eight angels of this verse with the first eight spheres of their cosmology. This is, indeed, what we infer from what they write in Epistle 16 (‘On the Heavens and the World’) about the last two spheres of their system, having first described the seven planetary spheres:

²³ On all this, see my footnotes to Epistle 36 in: *Sciences of the Soul and Intellect. Part I: An Arabic Critical Edition and English Translation of Epistles 32-36*, ed. and transl. Paul E. Walker – Ismail K. Poonawala – David Simonowitz – Godefroid de Callataÿ, Oxford – New York: Oxford University Press in association with the Institute of Ismaili Studies, 2015, 199 of English translation.

As to the eighth sphere, i.e. the sphere of the fixed stars that extends over and embraces these seven spheres, it is the *Footstool that extends over the heavens and the earth* (*al-kursī al-ladhi wasi'a al-samawāt wa-l-arḍ*). As to the ninth sphere, embracing these eight spheres, it is the lofty *Throne that eight [angels] shall carry above them upon that [day]* (*fa-burwa al-'arsh al-'azīm alladhi yahmalu-hu faṣṣa-hum yawma'idhin thamāniyya*), as God, be He exalted, mentioned.²⁴

In addition to the explicit reference to the Qur'ānic Throne of 69:17, the Ikhwān also quote here from the famous '*āyat al-kursī*' at Q 2:255, which ends with the words, 'His Footstool extends over the heavens and the earth'. It is unfortunate that the *āyat al-kursī* (literally, the 'verse of the Footstool') is frequently rendered in English and in other European languages as 'the verse of the Throne', leading to a multitude of grave confusions in the modern scholarship.²⁵ As the passage above makes plain, the Brethren clearly distinguished between the two notions, to the extent that they made them correspond in reality with two distinct spheres, as Yves Marquet pointed out nearly fifty years ago.²⁶

Another factor that has likely also contributed to the misunderstanding of the Brethren's views, including in the medieval transmission of the *Rasā'il*, is that a superficial look at the Brethren's words in this and similar passages can easily lead to erroneous conclusions. One such incorrect interpretation is that the 'Bearers of the Throne' should be linked to the ninth sphere, since this is the sphere that corresponds to the Throne. Another serious error consists in identifying the Throne with the eighth sphere itself, as did the copyist of Atif Effendi 1681, the oldest extant manuscript of the *Rasā'il*.²⁷ A closer examination of the passages relating to the two most distant spheres and the Qur'ānic references therein can only lead to the conclusion that the Brethren identify the 'the Bearers of the Throne' with the eighth sphere, and the Throne itself with the ninth.²⁸ In conformity with their habit of reading the Qur'ān through Neoplatonic lenses, the Ikhwān turn the im-

²⁴ Epistle 16, ed. Baffioni, *On the Natural Sciences*, 138-139 (Baffioni's translation, according to the alternative reading she proposes on p. 138, n. 15). See also the critical apparatus on p. 75 of the Arabic.

²⁵ See Baffioni, *On the Natural Sciences*, 138, n. 15: 'The other versions [of the Qur'ān] consulted (Arberry, Bausani, Bonelli, Chebel, Kasimirski, Kračkovskij, Masson) translate both *kursī* and '*arsh*' with "Throne", but the context suggests "footstool" to be a more suitable translation for *kursī*.'

²⁶ Y. Marquet, *La philosophie des Ikhwān al-Ṣafā'*, 110-112.

²⁷ The translation of the passage in Atif Effendi 1681 reads: 'As to the eighth sphere, i.e. the sphere of the fixed stars, the intermediate [sphere between Saturn and the sphere] that embraces these eight spheres, it is the lofty Throne that eight [angels]...'

²⁸ See, for instance, Epistle 20, ed. Baffioni, *On the Natural Sciences*, 303: 'And know, O my brother, that the angels that surround the Throne are those who carry the Throne, and they are the fixed stars that surround the ninth sphere from inside (*wa-hiya al-kawākib al-thābita al-ḥaffa bi-l-falak al-tāsi' min dākhili-hi*), as pilgrims surround the Ka'ba from outside in their *ṭawāf*. The expression 'from inside' is used to stress that the 'Bearers of the Throne' and the Throne are not at the same level.

age of the eight angels bearing God's Throne into their view that the eighth sphere of the cosmos supports the final sphere.²⁹

Interpreting the Qur'ān in line with the astronomical and astrological views of the Ikhwān has enabled us to grasp the great majority of the associations between angels and celestial spheres established in Epistles 20 and 49. However, some components of our table still remain unexplained. In order to address these points, we need to turn our attention to what Islamic traditions, which are considerably richer on the topic of angelology than is the Qur'ān, have to tell us about this issue. Ḥadīth literature on angels is vast, but we may benefit greatly in this regard from Stephen Burge's recent study of the *Ḥabā'ik fi akhbār al-malā'ik* by Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī (d. 911/1505).³⁰ Al-Suyūṭī's treatise compiles some 750 prophetic traditions dealing with angels from a great variety of earlier classical Ḥadīth scholars, with a notable predilection for authors who, like Abū al-Shaykh (d. 369/979) or al-Bayhaqī (d. 458/1066), lived far closer in time to the Ikhwān than to the Mamlūk compiler.

Leaving aside the figures of Mikhā'il, retained by the tradition as one of the four archangels but curiously not mentioned by the Ikhwān al-Ṣafā', and, conversely, of the Houris, who do appear in Epistle 20 but are nowhere to be found in al-Suyūṭī's collection, the comparison of the *Rasā'il* with the *Ḥabā'ik* provides a number of interesting clues that can help us better appreciate the Brethren's motivations for linking certain angels with specific spheres of the celestial vault. For instance, Ḥadīth 27, the first of those concerned with the four archangels, reports that, of the four, 'Jibrā'il is the one responsible for the winds and the army' (*fa-amma jibrā'il fa-murwakkil bi-l-riyāḥ wa-l-junūd*). This attribution, which finds parallels in the Talmud, enables us to explain why Jibrā'il is ranged with the *ruḥāniyyāt* of Mars, together with Mālik the Furious and the Guardians of Hell. Ḥadīth 28 goes in much the same direction, stating that, in addition to being responsible for the Book, 'Jibrā'il is also responsible for the acts of destruction when God has willed [Gabriel] to annihilate peoples, and he is responsible for victory in battle'.

With regard to Isrāfil, whom the Ikhwān connect with the sphere of the Sun, al-Suyūṭī's *Ḥabā'iq* also includes several Ḥadīth that concur in making this arch-

²⁹ Now, it is also true that the Ikhwān in fact make use of various different Qur'ānic formulas to evoke angels beyond the sphere of Saturn, and it is not easy to determine in each case whether these expressions are meant to designate the angels of one of the last two spheres specifically or if they may refer to both indistinctly. An example of these intricacies is found in a passage from Epistle 49 dealing with 'the Sublime Angels' (*al-malā'ika al-'ālūn*), which reads as follows: 'Among them there are the souls of those who follow the Footstool (*al-lāḥiqūn bi-l-kursi*) that embraces the heavens and the world, and of those who surround the Throne (*al-ḥāffūn min ḥawla al-'arsh*), and of those who bear the Throne (*ḥamalat al-'arsh*), and each of them is in a noble station and an eminent place, singing the praise of their lord' (Epistle 49, ed. Beirut, vol. 4, 216-217).

³⁰ S. Burge, *Angels in Islam. Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī's Al-Ḥabā'ik fi akhbār al-malā'ik*, London – New York: Routledge 2012.

angel the creature who is closest to God. This may usefully be compared with passages in which the Brethren stress the prominent role of the Sun in the diffusion of the *ruḥāniyyāt* through the cosmos, in spite of its sphere being separated from the all-encompassing sphere by several levels. Thus, in dealing with the particular status of the angels attached to the sphere of the Sun, they write:

This status is the most majestic status for the supreme spiritual beings (*fa-bādhbihi al-manzila ajall manāzil al-ruḥāniyyin*), and they are the angels cherubim (*fa-hum al-malā'ika al-muqarrabūn*).³¹

The lines that immediately follow in Epistle 49 give the impression that 'cherubim' (*al-muqarrabūn*)³² is, for the Ikhwān, a kind of loose appellation under which they include at the same time those angels attached to the sphere of the Sun and those attached to the last two spheres of the system, for whom they appear to reserve the more specific denomination of 'supreme cherubim' (*al-muqarrabūn min al-'ālīn*). This seems to confirm the idea that a very special affinity exists for the Ikhwān between the sphere of the Sun, that is the king according to the above-mentioned analogy, and the most elevated part of the cosmos. The following passage, also taken from Epistle 49, illustrates the same viewpoint:

From the body of each one of the fixed stars is projected a spiritual power which spreads to the whole body of the world, from the highest point of the eighth sphere, which is the vast Footstool, to the point most extreme from the centre of the Earth. Thanks to this power and with these angels exists the light which illuminates the heavens, makes the spheres brilliant, and comes into contact with the Sun, converting the latter into the luminous candle, the brilliant star, the manifest light, and the brightest lighted lamp.³³

The same conception also tallies fairly well with Ḥadīth literature about Isrāfil. A great number of traditions insist that Isrāfil is the creature closest to God, and most of these traditions connect him in particular with 'the Preserved Tablet' (*al-lawḥ al-mahfūz*), the Qur'ān, and the Throne of God.³⁴ All these issues are, needless to say, central to the Ikhwānian system. Reading Suyūṭī's collection of Ḥadīth, we also observe with Burge that, 'Isrāfil has a privileged position as the angel *nearest* [Burge's emphasis]. As such, Isrāfil acts as a mediator between God and the angels, mainly Michael and Gabriel, just as Gabriel acts as the mediator between the human and divine worlds'.³⁵ It seems that this was also the idea that the Brethren had

³¹ Epistle 49, ed. Beirut, vol. 4, 216.

³² On the identification of *al-muqarrabūn* (literally, 'Those close to [God]') with the Biblical Cherubim (*al-karūbiyyūn* or *al-karrūbīm*), see for instance: W. Madelung, 'Malā'ika', in: *EP*, vol. 6, 217 and, more recently: Lizzini, 'L'angelologia', 1469-1471. On Cherubim, see also: G. Davidson, *A Dictionary of Angels including Fallen Angels*, New York – London: The Free Press / Collier-MacMillan Limited 1967, 86-87. For a discussion of the words *karūbiyya* and *ruḥāniyya* inside and outside Ismā'īlī literature, see: S. Stern, *Studies in Early Ismā'īlism*, Leiden: Brill 1983, 26-29.

³³ Epistle 49, ed. Beirut, vol. 4, 224.

³⁴ Burge, *Angels in Islam*, 66.

³⁵ Burge, *Angels in Islam*, 92.

in mind when they made Isrāfil one of the angels specifically associated with the Sun.

In addition to Epistles 20 and 49, there is one more epistle that has much to offer with regard to angelology. I refer here to Epistle 52a, the short version of the epistle on magic. As well as being possibly the last genuine part of the corpus of *Rasā'il*, this is also the only *risāla* to bear mention of 'the demons of the earth, the jinn, the devils and the angels' in its very title.³⁶ The reason for this uniqueness is clear. This last epistle includes the famous passage in which the Brethren report the views on spiritual beings that were held by the mysterious Ṣābi'ans. If we are to believe the Brethren's account, which finds some interesting parallels in other medieval authors, such as Mas'ūdī (d. 345/956), Ibn al-Nadīm (d. c. 388/998), and al-Shahrastānī (d. 548/1153), those Ṣābi'ans built 87 temples, each presumably devoted to one particular angel or star, and performed in them ceremonies of astral magic. We are also told of pagan initiation rituals in which young men and maidens were symbolically sacrificed to spiritual entities in the heavens. One such ritual, we learn, included the recitation of 'the names of the angels, male and female – and there are eighty-seven of them (*asmā' al-malā'ika al-mudbakkara wa-l-mu'annatha wa-hiya sab'a wa-thamānūn*)'. A multitude of proper names are mentioned throughout the narrative, without it always being possible to discriminate between what is considered 'a star', 'an angel', 'a spirit', or 'a god'. Thus, in addition to the temples for the planets, we are told that the Ṣābi'ans also devoted temples to the constellations of the starry sphere:

They also made temples to all the fixed stars, and they managed them in the same way as with the planets. And they allege that experience has led them to this and to the knowledge of the powers of their influences. Amongst them is the Dog of the Giant, that is Sirius Crossing; amongst them, al-Ūrūn, that is Capricorn; amongst them, Harūs, and that is Sagittarius; amongst them, Suḥā, which is the little star which is part of the Great Bear.³⁷

³⁶ See Epistle 52a, ed. de Callataÿ – Halfants, *On Magic I*, 5. The full title of this epistle is: 'On the quiddity of magic, incantations, the evil eye, incitements [given to animals], intuition, and spells; on the modalities of the actions of talismans; on what the daemons of the earth, the jinn, the devils, and the angels are; and on the means of their deeds and mutual influences. The objective is to expound clearly the fact that in the world there are autonomous and imperceptible agents that are called spiritual beings'. For the issue of the authenticity of Epistle 52a, see pp. 5-10 of the introduction to the edition of this text. For discussions about angels, jinns, and devils in Islamic literature and/or practice, see for instance: F. Toufic, 'Ange, démons et djinns en Islam', in: *Génies, anges et démons* (Sources orientales, 8), Paris: Le Seuil 1971, 153-214; P. Lory, 'Ange, djinns et démons dans les pratiques magiques musulmanes', in: *Religion et pratiques de puissance*, A. de Surgy, ed., Paris: L'Harmattan 1997, 81-94. D. De Smet, 'Ange, diables et démons en gnose islamique: vers l'islamisation d'une démonologie néoplatonicienne', in: *Démons et merveilles d'Orient* (Res Orientales, 13), R. Gyselen – P. Gallieri, eds., Bures-sur-Yvettes: GEMCO 2001, 61-70.

³⁷ Epistle 52a, ed. de Callataÿ – Halfants, *On Magic I*, 64-65 (English translation, 130-132).

And if this is not enough, the Ikhwān next report that the Şābi'ans also made temples to souls not attached to any celestial bodies:

And [deriving] from the fixed stars, as if these were the souls denuded (*al-nufūs al-mujarrada*), they also made other temples, and they managed them in the same way as with the stars, along the years and the needs. Amongst them is Pluto, who is the king in charge of hell and the abyss; amongst others, Poseidon, who is the king in charge of the sea; amongst others, Fūḥās, who is the king in charge of the winds; amongst others, Kīmas, who is the king in charge of the marvels arising from the jinn; amongst others, Aphrodite, who is the king [sic] in charge of the waves; and so forth for what they could conceive of. And in this way, they completed for them eighty-seven temples.³⁸

Now the question naturally arises as to whether, and to what extent, the Ikhwān themselves believed in these doctrines. As I have tried to demonstrate in my comments on this epistle, it is not always possible to fix in the text the limits between the parts that report the tenets of the Şābi'ans and those in which the authors express their own views. There are certainly elements in this hotchpotch of rituals and symbols that the Ikhwān could not endorse or subscribe to other than in a purely allegorical way. What is beyond doubt, however, is that this extreme form of astral determinism also lies behind innumerable passages of the *Rasā'il* in which the theories conveyed are meant to be part and parcel of the Brethren's own teaching. We may conclude the present contribution by giving one last example, concerning the two nodes of the Moon which astrologers traditionally refer to as 'the Head of the Dragon' (*ra's al-jawzahr*) and 'the Tail of the Dragon' (*albanab al-jawzahr*). At the beginning of Epistle 52a, but not in the Şābi'an section itself, we find the assertion that these two nodes are 'neither stars nor apparent bodies, but hidden things' and that, as such, 'the concealment of their essence and the apparentness of their actions, is an indication that in the world there are souls that are concealed to sensation. Their actions are apparent, whereas their essences are concealed: they are called the spiritual beings (...). They are the genera of angels, and the tribes of jinn, and the groups of devils'.³⁹ The world of the Ikhwān is, without question, a world of spirits.

³⁸ Epistle 52a, ed. de Callatāy – Halflants, *On Magic I*, 65-66 (English translation, 132-133).

³⁹ Epistle 52a, ed. de Callatāy – Halflants, *On Magic I*, 11 (English translation, 91-92). For a passage that is almost identical, see also Epistle 3, ed. Ragep – Mimura, *On Astronomia*, 101-103 (69-70 of English translation).

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