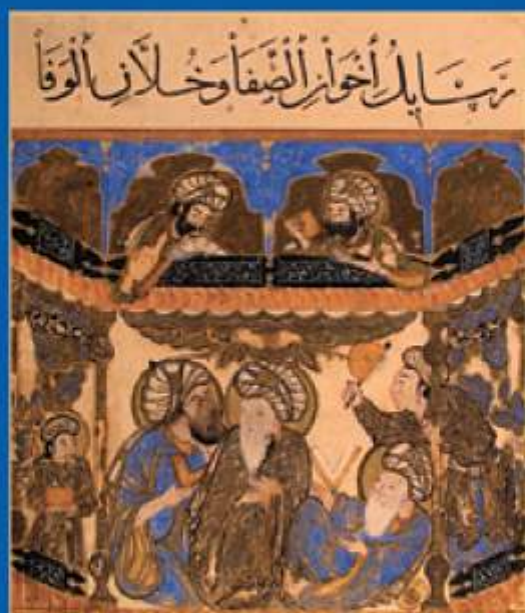


EPISTLES OF THE BRETHREN OF PURITY

On Magic

I

An Arabic Critical Edition and
English Translation of EPISTLE 52a



Edited and Translated by
Godefroid de Callataÿ and Bruno Halflants

Foreword by
Nader El-Bizri

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Foreword

The Brethren of Purity (Ikhwān al-Ṣafā') were the anonymous members of a fourth-/tenth-century¹ esoteric fraternity of lettered urbanites that was principally based in the southern Iraqi city of Basra, while also having a significant active branch in the capital of the 'Abbāsid caliphate, Baghdad. This secretive coterie occupied a prominent station in the history of scientific and philosophical ideas in Islam owing to the wide intellectual reception and dissemination of diverse manuscripts of their famed philosophically oriented compendium, the *Epistles of the Brethren of Purity* (*Rasā'il Ikhwān al-Ṣafā'*). The exact dating of this corpus, the identity of its authors, and their doctrinal affiliation remain unsettled questions that are hitherto shrouded with mystery. Some situate the historic activities of this brotherhood at the eve of the Fāṭimid conquest of Egypt (ca. 358/969), while others identify the organization with an earlier period that is set chronologically around the founding of the Fāṭimid dynasty in North Africa (ca. 297/909).

The most common account regarding the presumed identity of the Ikhwān is usually related on the authority of the famed *littérateur* Abū Ḥayyān al-Tawḥīdī (ca. 320–414/930–1023), who noted in his *Book of Pleasure and Conviviality* (*Kitāb al-Imtā' wa'l-mu'ānasa*) that these adepts were obscure 'men of letters': Abū Sulaymān Muḥammad b. Ma'shar al-Bustī (nicknamed al-Maqdisī); the *qāḍī* Abū al-Ḥasan 'Alī b. Hārūn al-Zanjānī; Abū Aḥmad al-Mihrajānī (also known as Aḥmad al-Nahrajūrī); and Abū al-Ḥasan al-'Awfī. Abū Ḥayyān also claimed that they were the senior companions of a secretarial officer at the

1 All dates are Common Era, unless otherwise indicated; where two dates appear (separated by a slash), the first date is hijri (AH), followed by CE.

Būyid regional chancellery of Basra, known as Zayd b. Rifā'a, who was reportedly an affiliate of the Brethren's fraternity and a servant of its ministry. Even though this story was reaffirmed by several classical historiographers in Islamic civilization, it is not fully accepted by scholars in terms of its authenticity. Furthermore, some Ismaili missionaries (*du'āt*) historically attributed the compiling of the *Epistles* to the early Ismaili Imams Aḥmad b. 'Abd Allāh (al-Taqī [al-Mastūr]) or his father, 'Abd Allāh (Wafī Aḥmad), while also suggesting that the *Rasā'il* compendium was secretly disseminated in mosques during the reign of the 'Abbāsid caliph al-Ma'mūn (r. 198–218/813–833).

Encountering 'veracity in every religion', and grasping knowledge as 'pure nourishment for the soul', the Ikhwān associated soteriological hope and the attainment of happiness with the scrupulous development of rational pursuits and intellectual quests. Besides the filial observance of the teachings of the Qur'an and hadith, the Brethren also reverently appealed to the Torah of Judaism and to the Gospels of Christianity. Moreover, they heeded the legacies of the Stoics and of Pythagoras, Hermes Trismegistus, Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, Plotinus, Nicomachus of Gerasa, Euclid, Ptolemy, Galen, Proclus, Porphyry, and Iamblichus.

The Brethren promoted a convivial and earnest 'companionship of virtue'. Their eschatological outlook was articulated by way of an intricate cyclical view of 'sacred' history that is replete with symbolisms and oriented by an uncanny hermeneutic interpretation of the microcosm and macrocosm analogy: believing that the human being is a microcosmos, and that the universe is a 'macroanthropos'. The multiplicity of the voices that were expressed in their *Epistles* reflects a genuine quest for wisdom driven by an impetus that is not reducible to mere eclecticism; indeed, their syncretism grounded their aspiration to establish a spiritual refuge that would transcend the sectarian divisions troubling their era.

In general, fifty-two epistles are enumerated as belonging to the *Rasā'il Ikhwān al-Ṣafā'*, and these are divided into the following four parts: Mathematics, Natural Philosophy, Sciences of the Soul and Intellect, and Theology. The first part consists of fourteen epistles, and it deals with 'the mathematical sciences', treating a variety of topics in arithmetic, geometry, astronomy, geography, and music.

It also includes five epistles on elementary logic, which consist of the following: the *Isagoge*, the *Categories*, the *On Interpretation*, the *Prior Analytics*, and the *Posterior Analytics*. The second part of the corpus groups together seventeen epistles on 'the physical or natural sciences'. It thus treats themes on matter and form, generation and corruption, metallurgy, meteorology, a study of the essence of nature, the classes of plants and animals (the latter being also set as a fable), the composition of the human body and its embryological constitution, a cosmic grasp of the human being as microcosm, and also the investigation of the phonetic and structural properties of languages and their differences. The third part of the compendium comprises ten tracts on 'the psychical and intellectual sciences', setting forth the 'opinions of the Pythagoreans and of the Brethren of Purity', and accounting also for the world as a 'macroanthropos'. In this part, the Brethren also examined the distinction between the intellect and the intelligible, and they offered explications of the symbolic significance of temporal dimensions, epochal cycles, and the mystical expression of the essence of love, together with an investigation of resurrection, causes and effects, definitions and descriptions, and the various types of motion. The fourth and last part of the *Rasā'il* deals with 'the *nomos* or legal and theological sciences' in eleven epistles. These address the differences between the varieties of religious opinions and sects, as well as delineating the 'pathway to God', the virtues of the Ikhwān's fellowship, the characteristics of genuine believers, the nature of the divine *nomos*, the call to God, the actions of spiritualists, of jinn, angels, and recalcitrant demons, the species of politics, the cosmic hierarchy, and, finally, the essence of magic and talismanic incantations. Besides the fifty-two tracts that constitute the *Rasā'il Ikhwān al-Ṣafā'*, this compendium was accompanied by a treatise entitled *al-Risāla al-jāmi'a* (The Comprehensive Epistle), which acted as the *summa summarum* for the whole corpus and was itself supplemented by a further abridged appendage known as the *Risālat jāmi'at al-jāmi'a* (The Condensed Comprehensive Epistle).

In spite of their erudition and resourcefulness, it is doubtful whether the Brethren of Purity can be impartially ranked amongst the authorities of their age in the realms of science and philosophy. Their inquiries

into mathematics, logic, and the natural sciences were recorded in the *Epistles* in a synoptic and diluted fashion, sporadically infused with gnostic, symbolic, and occult directives. Nonetheless, their accounts of religiosity, as well as their syncretic approach, together with their praiseworthy efforts to collate the sciences, and to compose a pioneering 'encyclopaedia', all bear signs of commendable originality.

In terms of the epistemic significance of the *Epistles* and the intellectual calibre of their authors, it must be stated that, despite being supplemented by oral teachings in seminars (*majālis al-'ilm*), the heuristics embodied in the *Rasā'il* were not representative of the most decisive achievements in their epoch in the domains of mathematics, natural sciences, or philosophical reasoning. Moreover, the sciences were not treated with the same level of expertise across the *Rasā'il*. Consequently, this opus ought to be judged by differential criteria as regards the relative merits of each of its epistles. In fairness, there are signs of conceptual inventiveness, primarily regarding doctrinal positions in theology and reflections on their ethical-political import, along with signs of an intellectual sophistication in the meditations on spirituality and revelation.

The *Rasā'il* corpus is brimming with a wealth of ideas and constitutes a masterpiece of mediaeval literature that presents a populist yet comprehensive adaptation of scientific knowledge. It is perhaps most informative in terms of investigating the transmission of knowledge in Islam, the 'adaptive assimilation' of antique sciences, and the historical evolution of the elements of the *sociology* of learning through the mediaeval forms of the popularization of the sciences and the systemic attempts to canonize them. By influencing a variety of Islamic schools and doctrines, the Brethren's heritage acted as a significant intellectual prompt and catalyst in the development of the history of ideas in Islam. As such, their work rightfully holds the station assigned to it amongst the distinguished Arabic classics and the high literature of Islamic civilization.

The composition of this text displays impressive lexical versatility, which encompasses the technical idioms of mathematics and logic, the heuristics of natural philosophy, and the diction of religious pronouncements and occult invocations, in addition to poetic verses,

didactic parables, and satirical and inspirational fables. Despite the sometimes disproportionate treatment of topics, the occasional hiatus in proofs, irrelevant digressions, or instances of verbosity, the apparent stylistic weaknesses disappear, becoming inconsequential, when a complete impression is formed of the architectonic unity of the text as a whole and of the convergence of its constituent elements as a remarkable *oeuvre des belles lettres*.

Modern academic literature on the *Rasā'il Ikhwān al-Ṣafā'* is reasonably extensive within the field of Islamic studies, and it continues to grow, covering works dating from the nineteenth century up to the present, with numerous scholars attempting to solve the riddles surrounding this compendium. The academic rediscovery of the *Rasā'il* in modern times emerged through the monumental editorial and translation efforts of the German scholar Friedrich Dieterici between the years 1861 and 1872. Several printed editions aiming to reconstruct the original Arabic have also been established, starting with the *editio princeps* in Calcutta in 1812, which was reprinted in 1846, then a complete edition in Bombay between 1887 and 1889, followed by the Cairo edition of 1928, and the Beirut editions of 1957, 1983, 1995, and their reprints.² Although the scholarly contribution of these Arabic editions of the *Rasā'il* is laudable, as they valuably sustained research on the topic, they are uncritical in character, and they do not reveal their manuscript sources. Consequently, the current printed editions do not provide definitive primary-source documentation for this classical text. Given this state of affairs, the Institute of Ismaili Studies (IIS) in London has undertaken the publication (in association with Oxford University Press) of a multi-authored, multi-volume Arabic critical edition and annotated English translation of the fifty-two epistles. In preparation

2 The principal complete editions of this compendium that are available in print consist of the following: *Kitāb Ikhwān al-Ṣafā' wa-Khullān al-Wafā'*, ed. Wilāyat Ḥusayn, 4 vols. (Bombay: Maṭba'at Nukhbat al-Akhbār, 1305–1306/ca. 1888); *Rasā'il Ikhwān al-Ṣafā'*, ed. Khayr al-Dīn al-Ziriklī, with two separate introductions by Ṭaha Ḥusayn and Aḥmad Zakī Pasha, 4 vols. (Cairo: al-Maṭba'a al-'Arabiyya bi-Miṣr, 1928); *Rasā'il Ikhwān al-Ṣafā'*, ed. with introduction by Buṭrus Bustānī, 4 vols. (Beirut: Dār Ṣādir, 1957); and an additional version, *Rasā'il Ikhwān al-Ṣafā'*, ed. 'Ārif Tāmīr, 5 vols. (Beirut: Manshūrāt 'Uwaydāt, 1995).

for the critical edition, reproductions of nineteen manuscripts were acquired by the IIS, and their particulars can be summarized as follows, with the corresponding Arabic sigla:

Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris:

MS 2303 (1611 CE): [ر]

MS 2304 (1654 CE): [ز]

MS 6.647–6.648 (AH 695; Yazd): [د]

Bodleian Library, Oxford:

MS Hunt 296 (n.d.): [ح]

MS Laud Or. 255 (n.d.): [ح]

MS Laud Or. 260 (1560 CE): [خ]

MS Marsh 189 (n.d.): [ع]

El Escorial, Madrid:

MS Casiri 895/Derenbourg 900 (1535–1536 CE): [س]

MS Casiri 923/Derenbourg 928 (1458 CE): [ش]

Istanbul collections (mainly the Süleymaniye and associated libraries):

MS Atif Efendi 1681 (1182 CE): [ع]

MS Esad Efendi 3637 (ca. thirteenth century CE): [ن]

MS Esad Efendi 3638 (ca. 1287 CE): [ا]

MS Feyzullah 2130 (AH 704): [ف]

MS Feyzullah 2131 (AH 704): [ق]

MS Köprülü 870 (ca. fifteenth century CE): [ك]

MS Köprülü 871 (1417 CE): [ل]

MS Köprülü 981 (n.d.): [و]

Königliche Bibliothek zu Berlin:

MS 5038 (AH 600/1203 CE): [ب]

The Mahdavi Collection, Tehran:³

MS 7437 (AH 640): [ط]

Reconstruction of the *Rasā'il* by way of a critical edition will be undertaken using manuscript reproductions that are significantly distanced in time from the original, and these have proved to be traceable to a variety of transmission traditions that cannot be articulated with confidence in terms of a definitive *stemma codicum*.⁴ The dexterity of the copyists, their deliberate tampering, or commendable exercise of restraint and relative impartiality, along with their scribal idioms, would have conditioned the drafting of the manuscripts. Such endeavours would also have been influenced by the intellectual impress of the prevalent geopolitical circumstances in which this text was transcribed, in addition to its channels of transmission. By widening

3 It is worth noting that these acquisitions by the IIS, which consist of the oldest complete manuscripts, along with significant supplementary fragments of an early dating, were each carefully selected from over one hundred extant manuscripts, which are preserved in thirty-nine libraries and collections, noted in alphabetical order by country, as follows: *Egypt*: Dār al-Kutub, Arab League Library (possibly also in the Arab League offices in Tunis); *France*: Bibliothèque nationale de France; *Germany*: Königliche Bibliothek zu Berlin, Herzogliche Bibliothek zu Gotha, Eberhard-Karls-Universität (Tübingen), Leipzig (Bibliotheca Orientalis), München Staatsbibliothek; *Iran*: Muṭahhari Library, Tehran University Central Library, Mahdavi Collection (private); *Ireland*: Chester Beatty Library; *Italy*: Biblioteca Ambrosiana, Biblioteca Vaticana; *Netherlands*: Bibliotheca Universitatis Leidensis; *Russia*: Institut des Langues Orientales (St Petersburg); *Spain*: Biblioteca del Monasterio San Lorenzo de El Escorial; *Turkey*: Süleymaniye, Aya Sofia, Amia Huseyn, Atif Efendi, Esad Efendi, Millet Library, Garullah, Köprülü, Kütüphane-i 'Umūmī Defterī, Manisa (Maghnisa), Rashid Efendi (Qaysari), Topkapı Saray, Yeni Çami, Revan Kishk; *United Kingdom*: Bodleian Library, British Library, British Museum, Cambridge University (Oriental Studies Faculty Library), Institute of Ismaili Studies (including copies from the Hamdani, Zāhid 'Alī, and Fyzee collections), Mingana Collection (Selly Oak Colleges Library, Birmingham), School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS); *United States*: New York Public Library, Princeton University Library.

4 Within both the English and the Arabic text, the beginning of each folio of the MS Köprülü 871 [J] manuscript is indicated, starting at verso folio 520, (fol. 520b)/[ط ٥٢٠ ل], and recto folio 521, (fol. 521a)/[ط ٥٢١ ل]; the fifth, tenth, fifteenth, and twentieth lines of each of the folios of this manuscript figure in the Arabic and English text respectively in the form, for example, ٥ or [5]. The pagination of the fourth volume of the Beirut (Dār Šādir) printed edition is also indicated, using square brackets, for example, [p. 283]/[٢٨٣].

the selection of the oldest manuscripts and fragments, based on the period of the copying, the levels of completeness and clarity, and the recommendations of past and present scholars who have consulted these collections, a suitably grounded critical edition will be produced, and this more-reliable textual reconstruction will offer us improved access to the contents of the *Rasā'il* beyond what is presently available through the printed editions (i.e., those from Bombay, Cairo, and Beirut). It is ultimately hoped that the collective authorial effort, in establishing the Arabic critical edition of the *Rasā'il* and the first complete annotated English translation, will eventually render service to the academic community and lay a scholarly foundation for further studies dedicated to the Brethren's corpus and its impact on the history of ideas in Islam and beyond.

This present volume, prepared by Professor Godefroid de Callatay and Mr Bruno Halflants, consists of the Arabic critical edition and annotated English translation of the first division of the lengthy Epistle 52: 'On Magic', from the fourth part of the *Rasā'il*, on 'the nomic or legal and theological sciences'.⁵

The text that is included within the covers of this present volume will be referred to herein as the 'short version', or 'Epistle 52a: On Magic', since its critical edition was based on the Köprülü 871 (ج) and Esad Efendi 3637 (ج) manuscripts, which correspond only with the first thirty pages of the rendition of this tract in the Beirut (Dār Šādir) edition of 1957 (vol. 4, pp. 283–312). The Arabic critical edition and annotated English translation of what is consequently classifiable as the 'long version', or 'Epistle 52b: On Magic', will be edited and translated by Professor de Callatay and Mr Halflants, in collaboration with Dr Sébastien Moureau, to be published at a later date in a separate volume of our series. This 'long version' will cover the textual material that corresponds with the remaining part from the Beirut edition of this tract (vol. 4, pp. 312–463), and its critical edition will be based on nine manuscripts, including Atif Efendi 1681 (ع). The 'short' and 'long' versions belonged to two manuscript traditions, even though the Beirut edition placed them side-by-side in emphasis of their potential

5 Previously published books in the OUP-IIS *Epistles of the Brethren of Purity* series are mentioned in the preliminary pages of this present volume.

continuity. However, the irreducibility of their respective origins to a single unified source, and their noticeable dissimilarities, resulted in the editorial decision to publish them separately.

In acknowledgement of all those who contributed to the publication of this present volume, it is my delightful duty to thank firstly Professor de Callatāy and Mr Halflants for their scholarly composition of this 'short version', or 'Epistle 52a: On Magic', and also for their continuation of the work with Dr Moureau on 'the long version', or 'Epistle 52b: On Magic'. Thanks are due as ever to Mr Saleh al-Achmar for his meticulous copy-editing of the Arabic text. I am also most thankful to the eminent members of the Editorial and Advisory Boards of our series for their continual academic support. Profound thanks must go as well to the Co-Directors and Governors of the Institute of Ismaili Studies in London for their generous sponsorship of this publication, and I am especially indebted to Dr Farhad Daftary for his constant endorsement of this institutional initiative. My special expressions of gratitude are owed to Ms Tara Woolnough for her thoughtful copy-editing of the English text and work on the indexes, and for her dedicated professional care in the everyday co-ordination of this project. It is with pleasure that I also announce Professor de Callatāy's acceptance of our invitation to join the Advisory Board of the *Epistles of the Brethren of Purity* series.

Sincere recognition, in memoriam, ought to be expressed in homage to the late eminent scholar of Islamic studies and celebrated humanist intellectual, Professor Mohammed Arkoun, for his support of this series, and for his wise counsel during his longstanding service as a Governor and Senior Research Fellow at the Institute of Ismaili Studies, London.

Nader El-Bizri
(General Editor, *Epistles of the Brethren of Purity*)
London, July 2011

Introduction

Godefroid de Callataÿ

The Manuscript Tradition of the Epistle 'On Magic'

For the last fifty years, research on the *Rasā'il Ikhwān al-Ṣafā'* has been conducted almost exclusively on the basis of, and with reference to, the Beirut edition, published in 1957 by Buṭrus al-Bustānī.¹ Although uncritical and, in this respect, not significantly better than its two predecessors, the Bombay edition of 1887–1889 and the Cairo edition of 1928,² the Beirut edition provides a very legible text, with certain words vocalized and some explanatory footnotes in places. Its success up to the present time has also largely been due to its greater availability.

In the Beirut edition, the epistle 'On the Quiddity of Magic [*siḥr*], Incantations [*azā'im*], and the Evil Eye [*ayn*]' is listed as the fifty-second and ultimate *risāla* of those making up the encyclopaedic corpus of the *Ikhwān*. It takes up 180 pages (pp. 283–463) of the fourth volume, which makes it the second longest treatise of the entire corpus

1 *Rasā'il Ikhwān al-Ṣafā'*, ed. Buṭrus al-Bustānī, 4 vols. (Beirut: Dār Ṣādir and Dār Bayrūt, 1377/1957; repr., 2004). Unless otherwise specified, this is the edition of the *Rasā'il* referred to throughout.

2 *Kitāb Ikhwān al-Ṣafā' wa-Khullān al-Wafā' li'l-imam al-humām qutb al-aqtāb mawlānā Aḥmad ibn 'Abd Allāh*, ed. Wilāyat Husayn, 4 vols. (Bombay: Maṭba'at Nukhbat al-Akḥbār, 1305–1306/ca. 1887–1889); *Rasā'il Ikhwān al-Ṣafā' wa-Khillān al-Wafā'*, ed. Khayr al-Dīn al-Ziriklī, 4 vols. (Cairo: al-Maṭba'a al-'Arabiyya bi-Miṣr, al-Maktaba al-Tijāriyya al-Kubrā, 1346/1928). On these editions, see also Ismail K. Poonawala, 'Why We Need an Arabic Critical Edition with an Annotated English Translation of the *Rasā'il Ikhwān al-Ṣafā'*', in *The Ikhwān al-Ṣafā' and their 'Rasā'il'*, ed. N. El-Bizri (New York–London: OUP–IIS, 2008), pp. 33–57, esp. pp. 44–50. See also Abdul Latif Tibawi, 'Ikhwān al-Ṣafā' and their *Rasā'il*: A Critical Review of a Century and a Half of Research', *Islamic Quarterly* 2 (1955), pp. 28–46.

after Epistle 22 and the famous 'Case of the Animals versus Man' story.³ Consequently, all modern scholars have thus far taken for granted that the epistle on magic formed a single, 180-page-long unit.

Study of the manuscripts provides us with a different picture, however. Out of the eleven manuscripts used here that were furnished by the Institute of Ismaili Studies for the establishment of the edition, it appears that: (1) nine manuscripts, including MS Atif Efendi 1681 (ع or 'ayn, dated 1182 CE), offer text corresponding to the last 152 pages of the epistle according to the Beirut edition (vol. 4, pp. 312–463, hereafter referred to as the 'long version', or 'Epistle 52b', and to be published separately as *On Magic II*) and to that part alone;⁴ (2) two manuscripts — namely, Köprülü 871 (ل or lām, dated 1417 CE) and Esad Efendi 3637 (ن or nūn, undated, but conjecturally ca. thirteenth century CE)⁵ — provide the text that corresponds to the first thirty pages of the epistle in Beirut (vol. 4, pp. 283–312, hereafter referred to as the 'short version', or 'Epistle 52a') and to those pages only.

From the variant readings appearing in the short version of Beirut, one must postulate the existence of at least a third manuscript in the second group. Unfortunately, given that al-Bustānī is completely silent about his source(s), this manuscript — or these manuscripts, in the case that Beirut is based on more than just one manuscript — has remained impossible to identify with any precision.⁶

Now, since each manuscript, no matter which group it belongs to, allows itself to be regarded as the 'authorized version' of the epistle 'On Magic', we should speak in reality of two traditions that are not

3 For that epistle, see now Goodman and McGregor (ed. and tr.), *The Case of the Animals versus Man Before the King of the Jinn; An Arabic Critical Edition and English Translation of Epistle 22* (New York–London: OUP–IIS, 2009). See also Goodman, 'Reading *The Case of the Animals versus Man*: Fable and Philosophy in the Essays of the Ikhwān al-Ṣafā', in *The Ikhwān al-Ṣafā'*, ed. N. El-Bizri, pp. 248–274.

4 See the technical introduction of the present volume, below, for a detailed description of these manuscripts.

5 See N. El-Bizri, 'Prologue', in *The Ikhwān al-Ṣafā'*, ed. N. El-Bizri, pp. 1–32, here p. 21.

6 According to A. Hamdani ('The Arrangement of the *Rasā'il Ikhwān al-Ṣafā'* and the Problem of Interpolations', in *The Ikhwān al-Ṣafā'*, ed. N. El-Bizri, pp. 82–100, here p. 84), all three editions are based on a single, late Indian manuscript.

only independent from one another, but even mutually exclusive. And we are also to infer that the three editions of Bombay, Cairo, and Beirut were solely responsible for having merely juxtaposed these versions with one another under the same generic title. Actually, the dividing line corresponds to a sub-heading which appears in all three editions as: 'Explanation of the reality of magic, etc.' (*Bayān haqīqat al-sihr wa-ghayri-hi*).⁷ It is interesting to note that this demarcation was completely overlooked by Yves Marquet in his ultimate work on the Brethren of Purity,⁸ although the same scholar had mentioned it, albeit with some approximation in the reference, in the break-down of the epistle as provided in his earlier *La Philosophie des alchimistes et l'alchimie des philosophes*.⁹

That Beirut would have followed a manuscript where the short and the long versions were already side-by-side seems to me unlikely. Aside from the disproportion in size, to which I shall later return, the two parts show in fact considerable dissimilarities with one another in form. Whereas the short version appears as a relatively well-structured composition, with clearly defined purposes and supported by a carefully chosen set of ancient authorities, the long version would seem to betray a lesser degree of organization, with definitely no noticeable plan or purport to help the reader find his bearings in this *selva oscura*. It is no doubt this impression of disorder and incoherence, joined perhaps to a style that looks slovenly in places, which has prompted a scholar like Alessandro Bausani to deem the epistle on magic — understood, of course, as comprising both versions — as 'di non gran valore' and even to consider it as spurious.¹⁰

7 See Bombay, vol. 4, p. 309 = Cairo, vol. 4, p. 347 = Beirut, vol. 4, p. 312. For a concordance between the three editions, see D. R. Blumenthal, 'A Comparative Table of Bombay, Cairo and Beirut Editions of the *Rasā'il Iḥwān al-Ṣafā'*', *Arabica* 21 (1974), pp. 186–203, here p. 196.

8 Y. Marquet, *Les «Frères de la pureté» pythagoriciens de l'Islam. La marque du pythagorisme dans la rédaction des Épîtres des Iḥwān al-Ṣafā'* (Paris: S.E.H.A., 2006). On pp. 9–32, Marquet suggests a way to divide Epistle 52 into five main sections which, according to him, form coherent entities. No one of the divisions he proposes corresponds to our demarcation line.

9 Marquet, *La philosophie des alchimistes et l'alchimie des philosophes: Jābir ibn Ḥayyān et les Iḥwān al-Ṣafā'* (Paris: Maisonneuve et Larose, 1988), pp. 18–21.

10 A. Bausani, *L'enciclopedia dei Fratelli della Purità. Riassunto, con Introduzione e*

How are we to understand this twofold transmission of the epistle 'On Magic, Incantations, and the Evil Eye'? Of the two versions that have come down to us, does one have more authority than the other? Should we consider one of them, or even both, as apocryphal, or would it be more appropriate to consider them as two different stages, or two different facets, of the same project, which would imply that in this case they could both be attributable to the Brethren themselves? On what grounds are we entitled to answer these questions in the first place? Should the number of manuscripts in each group be considered the decisive factor? Or would the antiquity of some manuscripts be regarded as a more important criterion still?

The fact is that we are here facing two major difficulties. One is inherent to the manuscript transmission itself. As has already been noted by several contributors to the present series of volumes of the *Epistles of the Brethren of Purity*, there exists a wide gap between the supposed time of redaction of the *Rasā'il* — generally believed to have taken place shortly after the middle of the tenth century CE, although scholars like Marquet and Hamdani have opted for a significantly earlier date — and the oldest known manuscript, namely, MS Atif Efendi 1681, dated 1182 CE. Obviously, a great variety of alterations may have affected the original text over such a long period, as was rightly pointed out by Ismail Poonawala:

This unaccounted-for interval of two or three centuries leaves us with many unresolved issues concerning additions, subtractions, and modifications introduced into the text. Besides those interpolations, it is obvious that numerous errors might also have been introduced, intentionally or unintentionally, in the process of transcription by the scribes, especially as the book is in several volumes and was widely read and copied.¹¹

The second difficulty arises from the present state of research which, in spite of various efforts (to begin with, the current project of editing for the first time the entire corpus of *Rasā'il* on a scholarly basis),

breve commento, dei 52 Trattati o Epistole degli Ikhwān al-Ṣafā' (Naples: Istituto Universitario Orientale, 1978), p. 12 and p. 279. In fact, Bausani's *riassunto* of Epistle 52 does not exceed two pages and only presents a very small quantity of the elements actually found in Epistle 52.

11 Poonawala, 'Arabic Critical Edition', p. 45.

remains largely incomplete. Here again it seems fitting to quote from Poonawala: 'Unfortunately, no one has undertaken the task of compiling a comprehensive list of manuscript copies of the *Rasā'il*, either of the complete or incomplete set of four parts or simply of copies of certain epistles, scattered in private and public libraries around the world'.¹² Out of the more than one hundred complete manuscript copies of the *Epistles* located by Nader El-Bizri in libraries and collections throughout the world,¹³ only a few have been described, and many are impossible to date with any accuracy. For a number of reasons that will be discussed in greater detail by Bruno Halflants in the technical introduction of this volume, the filiations of even the best-known copies remain unclear, making the establishing of the *stemma codicum* a challenging, and in the end rather frustrating, task.

The combination of these difficulties results in the scholar's unpleasant impression that his exploration is limited to the emergent part of a giant iceberg, and that there remains considerable room for speculation about what lies beneath the surface of the water. Needless to say, this impression holds even truer in the case of the epistle on magic, as will be seen from the technical introduction here below.

The Short and Long Versions of Epistle 52

In consideration of these difficulties, and given that the short and the long versions of the epistle do not seem to be reducible to one common origin, it has been decided to publish them separately. The present volume is thus exclusively concerned with the short version (Epistle 52a). The publication of the long version (Epistle 52b) is expected to take place later on, in another volume of the series.

That being said, and pending the completion of the other volume, which should include a thorough discussion about the authorship of the work, I should like to expose here some of the reasons why I believe that the short version is genuine and why it is the one best qualified for being considered part and parcel of the encyclopaedic endeavour of the Brethren of Purity.

12 Poonawala, 'Arabic Critical Edition', p. 56.

13 El-Bizri, 'Prologue', pp. 21–22.

Let us start with an argument which, although inconclusive, deserves to be taken into account. The size of the short version fits better with the average length of the rest of the epistles than that of the long version. The vast majority of the epistles are between ten and fifty pages long in the Beirut edition.¹⁴ Only a few epistles exceed this length: Epistle 9: 'On the Explanation of Characters' in Section I; Epistle 19: 'On the Coming-to-be of Minerals', Epistle 22: 'On the Coming-to-be of Animals', and Epistle 31: 'On the Difference in Languages' in Section II; Epistle 46: 'On the Quiddity of Faith' and Epistle 48: 'On the Modalities of the Call to God' in Section IV. With just thirty pages in all, the short version would *a priori* seem to be more in line with the Brethren's custom than the longer one, which is five times its size and which is surpassed only by Epistle 22.

Qur'anic quotations are another issue for which the two versions show some significant disparity with one another. Whereas the short version provides us with the ratio of about one Qur'anic quotation per two pages in the Beirut edition — a proportion in fairly good agreement with the average ratio of the *Rasā'il* —, the longer one shows a frequency of only twenty-eight citations for 152 pages (i.e., less than one per five pages), which makes it by far the feeblest ratio of the entire corpus.¹⁵ But I am not sure the case should be pressed too hard here, since most of the quotations in the short version appear to be part of a mere string of verses, not even commented on, as we shall see.

More significantly perhaps, the inner structure of the short version fits better with what appears as the usual practice in most epistles, and which can be grossly summarized as follows: an introduction in the form of a recapitulation of what has been said in the preceding epistle(s); an exposition of the subject, its purport and the reasons why it is deemed of importance; a mention, wherever possible with the indication of source, of ancient authorities that must be regarded as supporting the Brethren's view; and a final admonition to the reader

14 For the complete list of epistles, along with the indication of page numbering in the Beirut edition, see my *Ikhwan al-Safa'; A Brotherhood of Idealists on the Fringe of Orthodox Islam* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2005), pp. 12–15.

15 I wish to thank Omar Ali de-Unzaga for allowing me to mention here some of the results of his yet unpublished work on the Qur'anic citations in the *Rasā'il*.

as to the way to understand the authors' sayings. The short version of the epistle includes all of the previous elements, and in that order. The least that can be said of the longer version is that it does not enable the reader to spot this sequence with the same facility, as has been mentioned above.

Now we come to arguments which I would be inclined to consider as determinant. The short version opens up with some quite explicit indications as to the place it occupies in the corpus. Thus, the authors refer there to the 'fifty epistles which precede for us this epistle' (*fi khamsīn risāla taqaddamat la-nā qabla hādhihi al-risāla*), as well as to the classification of these that they have established 'in the Epistle of the Table of Contents' (*fi risālat al-fihrist*). Having then recalled the names of the four great sections of their encyclopaedia, they write: 'This epistle is the last one of those from the fourth section and it is the fifty-first one' (*wa-hādhihi al-risāla hiyya ākhira al-risāla min al-qism al-rābi' wa-hiyya al-hādhiyya wa'l-khamsūn*) — an assertion also to be found at the end of the same text. Whether the Ikhwān's corpus originally consisted of fifty-one or fifty-two treatises is another vexed problem that has retained the attention of many scholars, both ancient and modern, as is well known.¹⁶ In the present state of knowledge about the manuscript transmission, it would seem prudent not to look for a final decision about this issue since, in addition to the contradictory elements found in the corpus itself, there appear to be too many potential variables to consider in order to arrive at an unequivocal conclusion. Should the *Fihrist* (here explicitly referred to as an epistle on its own) and/or the *Jāmi'a* (also frequently referred to in other epistles) be part of the

16 On this, see Hamdani, 'Arrangement', pp. 85–86 and 89–90. The symbolic value ascribed to the number 51 is often advocated in the discussion; see for instance A. Russo, 'Insegnamenti ermetici e dottrine 'alawite', in *Hermetism from Late Antiquity to Humanism. La tradizione ermetica dal mondo tardo-antico all'umanesimo. Atti del Convegno internazionale di studi, Napoli, 20–24 novembre 2001*, ed. P. Lucentini, I. Parra, and V. Perroni Compagni (Turnhout: Brepols, 2003), pp. 355–367, p. 365: 'Allo stesso modo, le Epistole dei Fratelli della Purità ammontano a cinquantuno, analogamente al numero dei dignitari 'alawiti che si trattengono davanti alle porte della città di Harrān, come rammenta il *Kitāb al-Majmū'* (Libro della raccolta)'. The *Majmū'* recalls that out of these fifty-one dignitaries, seventeen are Iraqis, seventeen Syrians, and seventeen of unknown provenance.

computation or not? Or else should 'Epistle 51' ('On the Arrangement of the World') be excluded from the count as it largely proves to be a doublet of a part of Epistle 21, as Marquet has shown?¹⁷ Depending on the way to answer these questions and others in the same vein, it would be equally easy to justify either of the two figures. If anything, the twofold transmission of the epistle on magic would allow for an even higher degree of flexibility in this computation. But this is not the point I should like to make here. Whether considered the fifty-first or the fifty-second of the corpus, what matters here is to observe that the text of the short version plainly confirms its own position as the last one — provided we exclude the *Jāmi'a* from the count — of a carefully designed programme.

Aside from mentioning the *Fihrist* and the four main sections of the corpus, the short version also provides us with some valuable cross-references to other epistles. While concerned in the beginning of the treatise with the science of the stars, the authors make reference to 'the third epistle of the first section of our book' (*fi'l-risāla al-thālitha min al-qism al-awwal min kitābi-nā*), which indeed corresponds to Epistle 3: 'On Astronomy'. Later on, in a passage dealing with the cause of misfortune in this world, the authors refer with great precision to 'the chapter on the reasons and causes of vices' (*fi bāb 'ilal al-shurūr wa-asbābi-hā*) being a part of 'the epistle on views and doctrines' (*risālat al-ārā' wa'l-madhāhib*). This undoubtedly echoes a sub-heading in Epistle 42: 'On Views and Religions' which reads: 'On the explanation of the sayings of those who say that the causes of vices in the world are by accident and not in view of [some] design' (*faṣl fi bayān al-qā'ilīn inna asbāb al-shurūr fi'l-'ālam bi'l-gharaḍ lā bi'l-qasad*).¹⁸ That a certain discrepancy exists between those texts with respect to the sub-headings and titles may be interpreted as a proof of some re-arrangement of the corpus at some stage. It remains that the accuracy of these

17 Marquet, *La philosophie des Ikhwān al-Ṣafā'* (Algiers: Études et documents, 1973), p. 11.

18 See *Rasā'il*, vol. 3, p. 471. This corresponds to Chapter 30 in Baffioni's translation of the epistle; see C. Baffioni, *L'Epistola degli Ikhwān al-Ṣafā' 'Sulle opinioni e le religioni'* (Naples: Istituto Universitario Orientale. Dipartimento di Studi e Ricerche su Africa e Paesi Arabi, 1989), p. 147.

cross-references is evidence for the inclusion of our short version of Epistle 52 in the general framework.

But there is evidence more decisive still. On several occasions, the authors of the short version also refer to 'that epistle that is for us before this epistle' (*tilka al-risāla allatī la-nā qabla hādhihi al-risāla*). The context, about the souls which are called 'the spiritual beings', makes it clear that the authors do not have in mind here Epistle 51 ('On the Arrangement of the World'), which is possibly spurious, nor even the unquestionably genuine and crucial Epistle 50 ('On the Species of Governance'), but Epistle 49 ('On the Spiritual Beings'). This is, let us note in passing, another example of the numerous inner contradictions that give weight to the theory that re-arrangements of the corpus have taken place, although it is not possible to decide whether this process occurred during the period of activity of the authors or long after. For us, however, the significance of the reference to Epistle 49 does not lie so much in those chronological considerations, as in the fact that Epistle 49 provides us with what I should call the perfectly symmetric cross-reference to the one just considered.

As has been noted by Carmela Baffioni, Epistle 49 includes a passage on the varieties of souls which is almost identical with that appearing towards the middle of the short version of Epistle 52, on the occasion of a presentation of the views allegedly held by the Ḥarrānians.¹⁹ The passage from Epistle 49 is introduced with an explicit mention of 'the epistle on magic and talismans' (*risālat al-sihr wa'l-ṭillasmāt*)²⁰ and it is concluded with another reference to 'the epistle on the science of the stars and magic and the talismans' (*risālat 'ilm al-nujūm wa'l-sihr wa'l-ṭillasmāt*).²¹ Although this last appellation does not exactly correspond to the actual title of our epistle, it fits rather well with its contents, as various passages of the epistle on magic are indeed mostly

19 C. Baffioni, "Traces of 'Secret Sects' in the *Rasā'il* of the Ikhwān al-Ṣafā", in *Shī'a Islam, Sects and Sufism. Historical dimensions, religious practice and methodological considerations*, ed. F. de Jong (Utrecht: Publications of the M. Th. Houtsma Stichting, 1992), pp. 10–25. The textual comparison of both passages — namely, vol. 4, p. 296.4–18 (for Epistle 52) and vol. 4, p. 244.11–22 (for Epistle 49) — is found on pp. 17–19.

20 See *Rasā'il*, vol. 4, p. 244.10–11.

21 See *Rasā'il*, vol. 4, p. 244.21–22.

concerned with astral magic. Whatever the case, I would assume that the symmetry of these cross-references is an unmistakeable indication that both Epistle 49 and the short version of Epistle 52 were an integral part of the original plan.²²

If, as the majority of experts would agree, the final redaction of the *Epistles* took place in the second half of the tenth century, and probably between 960 and 980, then I would assume that the short version of the Epistle 52 is the one best qualified for having been involved in this process.

Magic and the Other Occult Sciences in the Short Version

Magic is a subject whose Protean nature makes it almost impossible to define with clarity or precision what we are talking about: 'There are nearly as many definitions of magic and divination as there are people writing on the subject. Attempts at an all-inclusive definition tend to reflect the concerns of the person writing, whether philological, theological, historical, or anthropological' — to take up Emilie Savage-Smith's introductory words to the collective volume *Magic and Divination in Early Islam* in the 'Formation of the Classical Islamic World' series.²³ The same scholar provides in that essay an overview

22 Actually, several amongst the last epistles of the corpus contain material of a similarly esoteric nature, suggesting that they could have been designed to form a group of their own. In addition to Epistle 49, specifically concerned with the spiritual beings, one may point out Epistle 50 ('On the Species of Governance'), with the famous passage on the three 'Greek feasts' which Marquet ('Sabéens et Ikhwān al-Ṣafā', *Studia Islamica* 25 [1966], pp. 77–109, pp. 96–103), following Corbin ('Rituel sabéen et exégèse ismaélienne', *Eranos Jahrbuch* 19 [1950], pp. 181–246, especially pp. 208–214), does not hesitate to bring in line with the Ṣābi'an ceremonies as described by the Brethren in Chapter 6 of the present epistle. In this respect, one might also consider a passage from Epistle 44 ('On the Belief of the Brethren of Purity and the Doctrine of Divine Men') featuring various prophet 'Sleepers of the Cave': Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, Jesus, Muhammad, but also the Mazdean al-Yazdān and the Hermetic (and Ṣābi'an) Agathodaimon; see *Rasā'il*, vol. 4, pp. 18–19.

23 E. Savage-Smith, 'Introduction: Magic and Divination in Early Islam', in *Magic and Divination in Early Islam*, ed. E. Savage-Smith (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004), pp. xiii–li, here p. xiii. In the more specific context of Islamic magic and divination, it also seems worthwhile here quoting from the few lines coming next: 'Moreover, modern attempts to define magic and divination in Islam have been made in

of the disciplines, practices, and materials that are related to magic and divination in Islam; they range from amulets, talismans, letter magic, magic squares, and talismanic equipment to magic as trickery and conjuring, magic as wonder-working and marvels, sortilege, letter-number interpretation (*‘ilm al-ḥurūf*), and even to astrology and physiognomy.²⁴

Needless to say, this is also a subject that has provoked a great diversity of responses, and consequently led to a great number of debates. Although the spectrum of positions actually held is very much more complex than this, we may grossly summarize by saying that there were three main categories of people with regard to magic and its practice in mediaeval Islam. There were those who, like the Mu‘tazilites, would go as far as to deny that such a thing as magic or any of the related issues could even exist. There were those, like the imam al-Ghazālī (d. 1111) or the scholar and historian Ibn Khaldūn (d. 1404), who, although admitting for the possibility that magic exists and that it could even have some efficacy, condemned its practice as something incompatible with the moral precepts of Islam and therefore a danger to it. And then there were those who seem to have considered magic and, in a more general way, every hidden art or practice not only as licit and useful, but even as potentially fundamental. Mediaeval Islam has generated an enormous amount of that kind of literature, and the fame enjoyed over the centuries by some of its representatives — let us just mention here the names of Abū Ma‘shar (d. 886) for astrology, Jābir ibn Ḥayyān (eighth century) for alchemy, and al-Būnī (d. 1225) for magic — is something that remains quite impressive to a modern reader.

It will not surprise anyone to find that the Ikhwān al-Ṣafā’ belong to the third category referred to here. It is a truism to say that the Brethren were much concerned with the occult in general. Esotericism is one

terms of European practice, which nearly always invokes forces other than God. Many European concepts, such as ghosts, necromancy, and witchcraft, have little or no counterpart in Islam, while the employment of dichotomies often used to characterize European practices (high v. low, white v. black, learned v. popular, prayers v. spells) is to a large extent inappropriate in the Islamic context.’

24 See Savage-Smith, ‘Introduction’, pp. xlv–li for a very useful bibliography on all those topics.

of the most salient features of their programme, and references to arts, doctrines, or practices not to be shared with the common people are found all over the place in the *Rasā'il*, especially in Section IV (on 'the nomic, divine, and legal sciences'), which the epistle 'On Magic' concludes.

In the classification of the sciences which the Brethren provide in Epistle 7 ('On the Scientific Arts'), it is interesting to note that each one of the three groups of sciences making up the Ikhwān's classification includes at least one science (or art) specifically related with the occult.²⁵ Thus: (1) the group of 'propaedeutical sciences' (*al-'ulūm al-riyādiyya*) comprises 'divination' (under the appellations of *zajr* and *fa'l*) and other 'esoteric sciences' such as *sihr*, 'azā'im, *kīmiyā*, and *hiyal*; (2) the group of 'religious and conventional sciences' (*al-'ulūm al-shar'iyya al-wāḍ'iyya*) includes an explicit reference to the 'science of interpreting dreams'; (3) the group of 'philosophical and real sciences' (*al-'ulūm al-falsafiyya al-ḥaqīqa*) contains a section about 'angelology' (under the appellations of *rawḥāniyyāt*, or *ruhāniyyāt*, and *nafsāniyyāt*). As was already observed by Pierre Lory in his short but remarkable study on magic with the Ikhwān, the threefold division of the Brethren's overall classification fits nicely with the three different aspects of the occult sciences: first, one finds a purely utilitarian aspect, which aims at using magic in view of comfort, health (*tibb*), and wealth (*kīmiyā*). The religious life also benefits from certain practices like dream interpretation, which is legitimized by some hadith or even Qur'anic passages. But 'the great magic', the one which the Brethren are most concerned with, is that by the knowledge of which man is born into his genuine being. As Lory concludes: 'C'est elle [the great magic] qui, fondée sur une conception précise des mondes angéliques, explique le pouvoir des prophètes, des rois, des saints; c'est elle qui permet éventuellement au philosophe d'avoir accès à la *siyāsa*, c'est-à-dire de participer au gouvernement de Dieu sur terre'.²⁶

25 For a systematic comparison of this classification with the sequence of epistles as transmitted in the manuscript tradition, see my 'The Classification of Knowledge in the *Rasā'il Ikhwān al-Ṣafā*', in *The Ikhwān al-Ṣafā*, ed. N. El-Bizri, pp. 58–82.

26 P. Lory, 'La magie chez les Ikhwān al-Ṣafā', *Bulletin d'Études Orientales* 44 (1992), pp. 147–159, here p. 149.

Turning to Epistle 52, it is essential to bear in mind this three-level scheme, which helps us to understand how ramified and intrinsically complex the occult part of knowledge was in the Brethren's conception. In two places of our text, one in the Introduction itself and the other in the long chapter devoted to 'Magic with the Ṣābi'ans, the Ḥarrānians, and the Ḥanīfs', one finds a similar yet not entirely congruous enumeration of the disciplines which, also not explicitly introduced as such by the authors, are meant to make up the bulk of this secret knowledge. It seems worthwhile here to compare these two passages literally (see Table 1, next page).

The two lists differ from one another in some respects. One discrepancy looks rather trifling: medicine comes after the group alchemy–astrology–magic/talismans in the first occurrence, whereas it precedes the same group in the second. Another difference is that the science of talismans stands alone in the second enumeration, whereas it is grouped with that of magic in the first. If anything, this might be an indication that, in the eyes of the Ikhwān, magic was primarily and essentially made of talismans — something which the rest of the epistle, in any case in this short version of it, would seem to confirm, as we shall see. The greatest disparity between the two passages remains, of course, that the science of asceticism appears in the first and is thoroughly absent in the second. How can this discrepancy be accounted for? Surely, a part of the answer lies in the fact that the first enumeration is meant to express the authors' own view, whereas the other corresponds to a reported conception that is here assigned to the initiated people of Ḥarrān.

Enumeration 1 (from the Introduction)	Enumeration 2 (from the passage on the Šābi'ans)
You should know, my Brother, that these sciences [<i>the Brethren actually do not define these sciences, but the context clearly reveals that they are talking here about the esoteric sciences</i>] are divided into five sections: (1) Alchemy [<i>al-kīmīyā'</i>], which banishes poverty and does away with adversity; (2) The science of astrology [<i>aḥkām al-nujūm</i>], through which the science of what has been and what will be is perceived; (3) The science of magic [<i>siḥr</i>] and talismans [<i>ṭillasmāt</i>], by which the subjects are joined to the [rank of] kings and the kings to that of the angels; (4) Medicine [<i>ṭibb</i>], by which health of bodies is preserved and [by which] the occurrences of sicknesses are cured; (5) The science of asceticism [<i>tajrīd</i>], by which the soul gets to know its essence and is ennobled, after its deprivation, above its resting place.	And there are, in the whole of these combinations [<i>the Brethren are here referring to combinations of letters of the two 'secrets' as arranged by the Šābi'ans in their secret rituals</i>], four combinations, each one of which includes the canons and the demonstrations of one science amongst the four [following], namely: (1) Medicine [<i>ṭibb</i>], by which the bodies are cured, and by which illnesses and ailments are expelled, and by which it is made possible to take advantage of the dwelling in a house; (2) The science of alchemy [<i>al-kīmīyā'</i>], by which misery is expelled and by which damages are removed; (3) The science of astrology [<i>aḥkām al-nujūm</i>], by which one is notified about what will happen before it happens; (4) The science of talismans [<i>ṭillasmāt</i>], by which the citizens follow the nature of kings, and kings the nature of the angels.

(Table 1)

The Justification of Astrology and Magic

Now, if we take a look at the actual content of this short version of the epistle, and match up this content to the first enumeration, one is immediately struck by the fact that only some out of the five sciences mentioned are actually considered in the epistle itself. Medicine (*tibb*) and alchemy (*kīmīyā*), namely, the two sciences that have been set up for man's well-being in this world, with no other purpose than to cure him and to make him wealthier in his everyday life, are conspicuously absent from our text. Neither does the science of asceticism (*tajrīd*), which could possibly be assimilated to the practice of mysticism as mentioned in the group of the religious sciences, feature as such in the epistle, although in a few places — as for instance in the passage on the Šābi'ans — our text does include a reference to the 'denuded souls' (*al-nufus al-mujarrada*). In sharp contrast to these, it may be said that the remaining sciences are what concern the authors most in the epistle. In conformity with the title of the treatise, magic (*sihr*), especially talismanic magic, plays a central role in every one of the reports from ancient and modern authorities provided by the Ikhwān, and its use is nowhere regarded as more important than when it is a question of invoking the *rawḥāniyyāt*, that is, the superior spirits or angels that are attached to the stars, whom the people of Harrān would not hesitate to identify as gods. As for astrology (*aḥkām al-nujūm*), a science which the entire corpus of the *Rasā'il* is so lavishly imbued with, it is also frequently at stake in this last epistle and is even variously presented there as a sort of prerequisite for the science of magic and talismans itself. Significantly enough, the two other epistles of the corpus most frequently referred to in our text are Epistle 3 ('On Astronomy', but containing indeed much astrological material) and Epistle 49 ('On the Spiritual Beings').

In fact, as an implication of the emanation scheme which the Brethren took up from Plotinus and the other Neoplatonists, astrology and magic were not clearly distinguished from one another, as Lory rightly noted in his article:

Il faut se souvenir que l'astrologie chez les Ikhwān al-Šafā' (comme celle de nombreux autres auteurs d'orientation mystique) est complètement

compénétrée d'angéologie, et qu'en définitive, les deux visions s'identifient l'une à l'autre[...]. Les sphères célestes sont donc habitées par des anges, et les hiérarchies complexes de ces êtres spirituels s'ordonnent complètement selon la succession des sphères. Inversement, l'astrologie ne trouve son sens qu'en raison de l'influence que les anges déversent, sur ordre du Créateur, sur les mondes inférieurs. Repérer l'impact des influences astrales sur terre, c'est connaître le rôle et la fonction des principales entités angéliques: c'est même, en dernier ressort, établir une certaine communication avec ces *rūḥāniyyāt*.²⁷

In a certain sense, if we were to follow the Ikhwān's form of reasoning to the letter, and if we were to push it to its ultimate consequences, we could say that any astrological influence is magic, since magic is fundamentally the influence of a soul upon another soul — or 'the union of a spirit with a spirit' (*ittiḥād rūḥ bi-rūḥ*), as Ibn Khaldūn would say in his *Muqaddima*. And we should not forget that in Epistle 49 a reference is made, as we have seen, to 'the epistle on the science of the stars and magic and talismans' (*risālat 'ilm al-nujūm wa'l-sihr wa'l-ṭillasmāt*).

At the crossroads of magic and astrology, one finds a science usually referred to as astral magic, which enjoyed great fame in the Middle Ages, both in Islam and in the Latin West. Its most illustrious representative was Pseudo-Majrīṭī's *Ghāyat al-ḥakīm* ('The Aim of the Sage'), an Arabic treatise known to have been written in Spain around the middle of the eleventh century, and then to have passed into Latin (as well as into other, vernacular languages) under the name *Picatrix* in 1256–1258 CE, or shortly after, at the court of King Alfonso X El Sabio.²⁸ Parallels, sometimes lengthy verbal echoes, between the *Ghāya* and the

27 Lory, 'Magie', p. 152.

28 See Pseudo-Majrīṭī, *Ghāyat al-ḥakīm wa-ahāqq al-natijātayn bi'l-taqdīm*, ed. H. Ritter (Leipzig: Teubner, 1933); and Pseudo-Majrīṭī, *Picatrix: das Ziel des Weisen, von Pseudo-Majrīṭī*, tr. H. Ritter and M. Plessner (London: The Warburg Institute, 1962). See also, for the edition of the Latin version, Pseudo-Majrīṭī, *Picatrix: The Latin Version of the Ghāyat al-ḥakīm*, ed. D. Pingree (London: The Warburg Institute, 1986). Modern literature on the *Ghāyat al-ḥakīm*/*Picatrix*, closely related to the history of the Warburg Institute and largely indebted to the pioneering works of Hellmut Ritter, Martin Plessner, Julius Ruska, Paul Kraus, and David Pingree, is immense. For the most up-to-date scholarship, with extensive bibliography on the subject, see the recently published *Picatrix: Image et Magie*, ed. J.-P. Boudet, A. Caiozzo, and N. Weill-Parot, Actes du colloque international de Paris des 11 et 12 mai 2007 (Paris: Librairie Honoré Champion, 2011).

Rasā'il (including the epistle on magic) have long been traced,²⁹ and they have prompted most scholars today to acknowledge the Brethren of Purity as one of the most important sources of the *Ghāya*.³⁰ It must be stressed that these parallels, which are quite remarkable indeed and which one finds in various places of the epistle, are more easily traceable in the long version than in the short, although the passage on the Šābi'ans in the present version offers some interesting points of comparison, as we shall see. Particularly suggestive in this respect is the list of correspondences between planets and metals which the Brethren report while describing the temple of Jirjās:

And they manufactured an image for the seven planets, each one of them worked out with the appropriate material, such as the Sun with gold [*dhahab*], the Moon with silver [*fiḍḍa*], Saturn with iron [*ḥadīd*], Jupiter with quicksilver [*zi'baq*], Mars with copper [*nuḥās*], Venus with tin [*qala'ī*], and Mercury with lead [*usrub*].

Some of these associations — Saturn/iron and Mars/copper in particular — look utterly strange in view of the traditional list as known from Greek Late Antiquity, but they do correspond with those provided in Chapter 10 of the second book of the *Ghāya*, confirming the indebtedness of the latter work to the *Rasā'il*. Correspondences and parallels of this kind between our short version of Epistle 52 and the *Ghāya/Picatrix* will be indicated here and there in the footnotes to our translation. We shall, however, leave the full discussion about textual borrowings, with all of its implications in terms of the still debated questions about the chronology and authorship of the two works involved, for the volume devoted to the long version of the epistle.

In any case, magic and astrology of the type just mentioned above are clearly to be ranged amongst the philosophical sciences of the Brethren's classification, and the authors of the epistle say just so in the present version when they write, as part of their introduction:

29 See Martin Plessner's English summary of the *Ghāya* as part of the introduction to the German translation of the work, pp. lix–lxxv. See also C. Hamès, 'La *Ghāyat al-ḥakīm*: son époque, sa postérité en terre d'Islam', in *Image et magie*, ed. Boudet, Caiozzo, and Weill-Parot, pp. 214–232, especially pp. 219–225.

30 On this, see D. Pingree, 'Some of the Sources of the *Ghāyat al-ḥakīm*', *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 43 (1980), pp. 1–15.

As for the knowledge of the actions of the stars and of their influences upon what is below the sphere of the Moon, [this] comes after the knowledge of their indications. It is part of the spiritual philosophy [*al-falsafa al-rawḥāniyya*], of the divine support, and of the Lord's solicitude.

That those sciences should even be ranged at the very end of the classification, or, better said, at the very top of it, is explicitly mentioned in the same introduction. Thus, referring to the 'pseudo-savants' (*muta'ālimūn*) that regard magic — and presumably the rest of the occult sciences as well — as preposterous, the authors write: 'They do not know that this [science] is part of philosophy, and that it is moreover part of the ultimate sciences of philosophy [*wa-huwa juz' min ākhir 'ulūm al-falsafa*] since it is necessary to learn the preceding sciences before it'. One could not find a better and clearer justification of why the epistle 'On Magic, Incantations, and the Evil Eye' should be the ultimate of the corpus.

There is no need to dwell any longer on the fact that the Brethren of Purity considered magic and the related arts as real, useful, licit (at least as long as they were practised by suitable people), and exceptionally important. The question is rather to appraise how they set about persuading their readers to share their own views.

As is so frequently the case with the Brethren, one must admit that the 'line of argumentation' as developed by the authors in the epistle is unlikely to convince any reader acquainted with the methods of critical argumentation. In fact, although the epistle — in any case, the short of version of it — is nearly all about the validation of these occult sciences, one cannot find in it any sort of proper, 'objective' argumentation by which someone *a priori* not favourably disposed with regard to these sciences might be convinced. What the Brethren have to offer instead in this short version turns out to be made exclusively of a series of arguments from authority, in the manner of: 'It must be true, because Aristotle says it is true'. The validity of these *argumenta ad verecundiam* is weak and is susceptible to convince only those who are already favourable to the cause, as no doubt were the 'brethren' to whom the *Rasā'il Ikhwān al-Ṣafā'* was primarily addressed.

A Collection of Authorities to Back Up the Brethren's Own View

Now, if the recourse to authorities is sure to disappoint the logician, there is no doubt that it will also ravish the historian of ideas, who will find in this epistle a rare opportunity to trace back a considerable set of sayings and doctrines to more or less ancient and famous literary sources. The interest of this short version of the epistle on magic lies in these testimonies and in the way the Ikhwān have modelled them to fit with their own doctrine, much more than in any other aspect.

Considering its relative brevity, the short version of Epistle 52 provides us with possibly the most compact collection of sources within the whole frame of the *Rasā'il*. Across only a few pages, the reader is confronted with authorities as diverse as Plato, Abū Ma'shar, the Torah and the Midrash, the Qur'an, an otherwise not clearly identified 'Book of Properties', and, last but certainly not least, a large set of doctrines and rituals that are assumed to derive from the wisdom of the Šābi'ans of Harrān.

It is to this motley collection of sources, arranged in chapters for the sake of clarity, that the following pages are dedicated.

Presentation and Discussion of Chapters 2 to 7

The short version of Epistle 52 may be conveniently subdivided into the following eight chapters, which have been introduced in the present edition and translation of the text:

Chapter 1 — Introduction

Chapter 2 — Magic with the Greeks: the Story of Gyges

Chapter 3 — Magic with the 'Abbāsids: Meeting at al-Ma'mūn's with
the Man who Claimed to be a Prophet

Chapter 4 — Magic in the Qur'an

Chapter 5 — Magic according to the Jews and the Christians

Chapter 6 — Magic with the Šābi'ans, the Harrānians, and the Hanīf

Chapter 7 — Spells, Incantations, and the Evil Eye

Chapter 8 — Postscript

The introductory and concluding chapters do not need to be presented here, the former because most of its content has been already discussed in our general introduction, and the latter because it does not contain anything more than the Brethren's admonition to their readers to be found at the end of most of their epistles. But the other six chapters deserve to be dealt with at some length and from a viewpoint that could not be expressed exclusively under the form of footnotes to the English translation. It has therefore seemed a good idea to introduce Chapters 2 to 7 by presenting and discussing their contents here in general terms, leaving the footnotes accompanying the translations for more specific and technical considerations.

Chapter 2 — Magic with the Greeks: the story of Gyges

The first authority mentioned by the Ikhwān in their epistle 'On Magic' is Plato. The tale recounted is the well-known story of Gyges, taken from the second book of the *Republic*, where it is placed in the mouth of Glaucon, Plato's own brother and one of Socrates' principal interlocutors in this work. Gyges, according to Plato's interpretation of the story,³¹ was a shepherd working for a certain king of Lydia. Due to a storm and an earthquake, a cavity appeared in the soil at the place where Gyges was tending his sheep. Awed by this, he entered the cavity, where he is said to have seen, amongst other marvels, a horse made of copper, which was hollow and had little apertures. Inside, Gyges also discovered a man, larger than life, and wearing nothing but a golden ring on his hand. Gyges took the ring and climbed back to the surface. Later on, on the day the shepherds meet to make their monthly report to the king, Gyges unintentionally hit the ring, which resulted in him becoming invisible to his companions. Hitting it anew the other way round, he noticed that he had become visible again. Then, understanding the power of the ring and realizing the benefit he could take from it, Gyges managed to get closer to the king's entourage. There, he was not long in seducing the queen and, with her help, in killing the king.

As has already been underlined by various scholars, the Ikhwān quote this passage almost verbatim, making it one of the longest and

31 Plato, *Republic* II.359c–360b.

best-preserved quotations from Plato in the entire bulk of mediaeval Arabic literature.³² From the comparison of the Greek and the Arabic texts,³³ it results that, apart from minor discrepancies in the style and the form, the only genuine and meaningful divergences between the two narratives are: (1) the substitution of 'Lydia' with 'a city of Europe' (or 'a city called Europe') at the beginning of text; (2) the suppression of any mention relative to the queen and her intervention at the end of the story. As I have already noted elsewhere, one would be inclined to postulate, in the former case, some kind of confusion in front of a name unfamiliar to the translator (or the copyist), and in the second, a case of self-censure with respect to a practice deemed to be incongruous from an Islamic standpoint.³⁴

In contrast to Aristotle, whose works — with the notable exception of the *Politics* — were faithfully transmitted to the Muslim-Arab world, it is well known that Plato was received in a much more scattered and garbled form. Citations or pseudo-citations from the Platonic corpus are to be found aplenty in mediaeval Arabic literature, and the 'divine Plato' (*Aflātūn al-ilāhī*) was held in great esteem by most philosophers and scientists, yet the channels of transmission often remain unclear, as if the teaching of the master had passed through a series of deforming filters.³⁵

32 See Walzer, 'Aflātūn', *El2*, vol. 1, pp. 234–236, here p. 235.

33 For a juxta-linear comparison of the Greek and the Arabic, see Baffioni, 'Frammenti e testimonianze platoniche nelle *Rasā'il* degli Ikhwān al-Ṣafā', in *Autori classici in lingue del Vicino e Medio Oriente*, ed. G. Fiaccadori (Rome: Istituto Poligrafico e Zecca dello Stato, 2001), pp. 163–178, here pp. 176–178.

34 See my recent 'Plato Ikhwanianus. Retour sur le récit platonicien de l'anneau de Gygès dans l'encyclopédie des Frères de la Pureté', *Res Antiquae* 7 (2010), pp. 55–62, here p. 56.

35 On the reception of Plato in Islam, see also Rosenthal, 'On the Knowledge of Plato's Philosophy in the Islamic World', *Islamic Culture* 14 (1940), pp. 387–422; F. Klein-Franke, 'Zur Überlieferung der platonischen Schriften im Islam', *Israel Oriental Studies* 3 (1973), pp. 120–139; D. K. Hasse, 'Plato arabico-latinus: Philosophy–Wisdom Literature–Occult Sciences', in *The Platonic Tradition in the Middle Ages: A Doxographic Approach*, ed. S. Gersh and M. Hoenen (Berlin–New York, 2002), pp. 31–66, here pp. 32–34. The Plato Arabus file has also been thoroughly re-investigated in two recent studies by De Smet: 'Le Platon arabe et les Sabéens de Harrān. La « voie diffuse » de la transmission du platonisme en terre d'Islam', *Res Antiquae* 7 (2010), pp. 73–86; and 'L'héritage de Platon et de Pythagore: la « voie diffuse » de sa transmission en terre d'Islam', in *Entre*

That the Ikhwān provide us with a relatively extended verbal quotation from Plato is therefore quite remarkable, as is also the fact that they identify their source with precision: 'We say that, according to Glaucon, Plato, the philosopher, in the second treatise from his book the *Republic*, did mention [the following]...'. By and large, the *Rasā'il* as a whole leaves us with the impression that the Brethren, as with many Arabic thinkers of their time, had only a rather sketchy awareness of who Plato was and what he had written. In her study of Plato's fragments and other evidence as found in the *Epistles*, Carmela Baffioni has shown that these were concerned with only a few arguments or motifs, namely: (1) Socrates' judgement and his sentence to death; (2) a possible relation between Plato and magic; (3) Plato's astronomical conceptions; and (4) the doctrine of reminiscence.³⁶ The number of Plato's works known to them also seems to have been limited, and for the reasons just explained above they could hardly have found complete Arabic versions of these works, since, as Daniel De Smet notes: '... il n'est point établi qu'un seul dialogue platonicien ait jamais été rendu intégralement en langue arabe'.³⁷

So, where could the Ikhwān have derived this long and faithful quotation from? Was it through Galen's summary of Plato's dialogues, which was known to the Arabs at least in part, or — and perhaps more plausibly — via some Neoplatonic doxographical compendium originating in Late Antiquity? The 'voie diffuse' of Plato's reception in Islam only leads us to mere conjectures.

Whatever the case, what is worth noting here is the radical difference between the Brethren and Plato as to the way to interpret the story's function. Plato's purport in recounting the Gyges tale in this form was

Orient et Occident: la philosophie et la science gréco-romaines dans le monde arabe, ed. R. Goulet and U. Rudolph, 57e Entretiens sur l'Antiquité classique de la Fondation Hardt (Geneva-Vandœuvres, 2011).

36 Baffioni, 'Frammenti e testimonianze platoniche', p. 165; Baffioni also notes in this article that all references to Plato pertain to the fourth section of the corpus. For a translation of all relevant passages, see also Carmela Baffioni, *Frammenti e testimonianze di autori antichi nelle Epistole degli Ikhwān al-Ṣafā'* (Naples: Istituto Universitario Orientale, 1994). On Plato's influence on the Brethren, see also Ian R. Netton, *Muslim Neoplatonists; An Introduction to the Thought of the Brethren of Purity (Ikhwān al-Ṣafā')* (London-New York: Routledge Curzon, 2002), pp. 17–19.

37 De Smet, 'Platon arabe', p. 74.

to demonstrate the inherent proclivity of man to act unjustly: as soon as man is sure to escape punishment, he will inevitably take the fullest advantage of this impunity, regardless of the gravity of the crimes he may commit. Significantly, in spite of the peculiar property of the ring, Plato nowhere uses the word 'magic', nor even alludes to it, for magic is simply not what matters him in this tale. Things take a completely different turn with the Brethren. The reason why they take up this narrative must be set against the overall objective of the epistle, namely, to highlight the difference between the good and the bad use of magic and the other occult sciences. Further down in the epistle, near the end of the chapter devoted to the Šābi'ans, the Brethren compare the inappropriate use of magic and talismans to 'the case that Plato the philosopher has reported in his book the *Republic*[...] — the case of the shepherd who killed the king and sat in the kingdom in his place, without being qualified for it nor deserving of it.'

Had Plato provided a narrative where the rightful use of magic was thoroughly endorsed, the Brethren would no doubt have been more inclined to quote from that, since the legitimizing of good magic is precisely what they want to demonstrate in this epistle. But this was not the case, and the Brethren had to content themselves with a story featuring what they interpret as the bad use of magic. In fact, one may catch a glimpse at their embarrassment from the bombastic style of the remark they address to their reader immediately after their quoting of the Gyges tale:

Think over [this]: would you be of the opinion that Plato, the philosopher, with his excellence and his intelligence, would have related this narrative in one of his books (namely, the one he composed on the republic) and that, in spite of this, he would have allowed one to firmly believe and assume that he was of the view that this talisman — I mean, the ring of which mention was made before — had manifested its effects for the sake of the wisdom beyond which there is no end, so as to attain the [full] extent of the power of action, which is apparent in the effect operated by it?

What the Ikhwān are primarily concerned with here is making clear to their reader that Plato himself never endorsed the bad use of magic, and that he would have certainly condemned it if he had had the

opportunity to give his own view. This is obviously a far cry from what the Gyges tale was meant to illustrate, in fact.

Chapter 3 — Magic with the ‘Abbāsids: Meeting at al-Ma’mūn’s with the Man who Claimed to be a Prophet

In this chapter, the Ikhwān report a story, or rather an anecdote, about a man in the entourage of the caliph al-Ma’mūn who claimed to be a prophet. According to the narrative, which is put in the mouth of the astrologer Yaḥyā ibn Maṣṣūr, he and a team of other experts in the science of the stars were asked by the famous caliph to test out the pretension of this man, although they were not informed exactly who he was and what pretensions he had. Having calculated the ascendant, they found a configuration which prompted all the astrologers present to confirm the validity of the man’s allegation. Yet Yaḥyā ibn Maṣṣūr himself responded that it could not be entirely validated, since the part of the chart relating to Venus and Mercury indicated ‘a variety of hocus-pocus’ and ‘the livelihood of imposture.’ Awed by such expertise, the caliph then reveals to Yaḥyā that the man alleges to be a prophet. Asked whether he has something to support his allegation, the man explains: ‘I have a ring with two stones. I wear it and nothing changes with me, but if anyone else wears it, he will start laughing and will not master his laugh until he removes it. I also have a Syrian pen: I take it and I [can] write with it, but if anyone else takes it, his finger will be paralysed.’ The narrator asserts that the part related to Venus and Mercury has already produced its effects, and all the astrologers present conclude that this was a treatment with talismans. At the end of the story, the man claiming prophecy is reported as being granted 1,000 dinars by al-Ma’mūn and as being consulted with by the astrologers, who acknowledge him as ‘one of the most savant people in the science of the stars’.

This story is taken almost word-for-word from a work variously referred to as the *Fī asrār ‘ilm al-nujūm* (‘On the Secrets of the Science of the Stars’) or the *Mudhākarāt fī ‘ilm al-nujūm* (‘Discussions on the Science of the Stars’) and ascribed either to Abū Ma’shar/Albumasar

(d. 886 CE),³⁸ the most famous and influential astrologer in both the Islamic and the Western Middle Ages, or to Shādān ibn Bahr, this otherwise unknown disciple of his whose conversation with the master makes the substance of the treatise. The *Mudhakarāt* appellation better renders the fact that the treatise consists of an exchange of views between Abū Ma'shar and this disciple. Although no edition of the original Arabic has been made so far,³⁹ the work has attracted the attention of modern scholars for various reasons. One reason is that the treatise includes a list of astrological works commonly in use in that period.⁴⁰ Another reason is that it is one of Abū Ma'shar's works to have enjoyed fame in the West, being translated into Greek around the year 1000 CE under the appellation of *Mysteria* and, from there, into Latin as well in the thirteenth century.⁴¹ A yet later avatar of our story, obviously derived

38 See Pingree, 'Albumasar', in *Dictionary of Scientific Biography*, ed. C. C. Gillespie (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1970), vol. 1, pp. 32–39.

39 The project to edit the Arabic, Greek, and Latin versions of the *Mudhakarāt* was one of the tasks left incomplete by David Pingree at the moment of his death. A list of Arabic manuscripts is provided in F. Sezgin, *Geschichte des arabischen Schrifttums, Volume 7: Astrologie — Meteorologie und Verwandtes bis ca. 430 H* (Leiden: Brill, 1979), pp. 147–148, but some of these are apparently wrong attributions; on this, see D. Pingree, 'The Sayings of Abū Ma'shar in Arabic, Greek, and Latin', in *Ratio et superstitio: Essays in Honor of Graziella Federici-Vescovini*, ed. G. Marchetti, O. Rignani, and V. Sorge (Louvain-la-Neuve: Fédération des Instituts d'Études Médiévales, 2003), pp. 41–57, here p. 41, n. 3. Of the extant manuscripts, only Ankara Bibl. J., Sa'ib 1/199 (fols. 1a–26b), dated to the sixth century AH, seems to be complete. A description of the Cambridge MS (Gg. 3. 19) was given by Dunlop in 'The *Mudhakarāt* fi 'ilm an-nujūm (Dialogues on Astrology) attributed to Abū Ma'shar al-Balkhī', in *Iran and Islam in Memory of the Late Vladimir Minorsky*, ed. C. E. Bosworth (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1971), pp. 229–246. The full English translation of our passage appears on pp. 235–236 of that article.

40 See Rosenthal, 'From Arabic Books and Manuscripts', *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 83 (1963), pp. 453–457, especially 'X. A List of Astrological Works from the Discussions of Abū Ma'shar and Shādān', pp. 454–456.

41 The excerpts of the Greek version have been edited in the *Catalogus Codicum Astrologorum Graecorum*; see *Catalogus Codicum Astrologorum Graecorum*, ed. Cumont et al., 20 vols. (Brussels: Académie Royale de Belgique, 1898–1953), vol. 1, p. 40 and pp. 83–84, and vol. 4, pp. 124–127. The text corresponding to our passage is to be found in vol. 5.1, pp. 145–146. For the edition of the Latin excerpts, see, Abu Ma'shar, *Mudhakarāt* (Latin), ed. Graziella Federici-Vescovini as 'La versio latina degli excerpta de secretis Albumasar di Sadan', *Archives d'histoire doctrinale et littéraire du Moyen Âge* 65 (1998), pp. 273–330. Federici-Vescovini

from the Latin version of the *Mudhākarāt*, may be found in Simon de Phares' *Recueil des plus célèbres astrologues* at the end of the fifteenth century: 'Mamon' (for 'Ma'mūn') has now become a king of Greece.⁴²

That the Brethren back up their teaching on the basis of Abū Ma'shar's authority is not in the least surprising. They refer to him in various places of the *Rasā'il* and in all likelihood owe him a great deal of their astrological conceptions. In particular, it would seem that the theory of Saturn-Jupiter conjunctions and the closely related theory of millennial cycles, with their all-important implication for the Ikhwān's own eschatological prospect, are taken up directly from Abū Ma'shar.⁴³

What makes the present reference distinctive is, in addition to the literalness of the quotation, the explicitness of the reference. Hence, in the same way as they had done in the previous chapter with Plato and the *Republic*, the Ikhwān duly acknowledge reference here to both the author and the work by introducing this chapter with the phrase: 'Abū Ma'shar Ja'far ibn Muḥammad, the astrologer, related in his *Book of Discussion with Shādān ibn Baḥr...*'.

The comparison with the original work in Arabic, Greek, and Latin is instructive in several ways. A few divergences may be noted in the mention of proper names, such as those appearing at the beginning of the passage in the chain of the transmitters of this account. Thus, whereas the Cambridge manuscript of the *Mudhākarāt* refers to a curious 'Muḥammad ibn Mūsā (the astrologer), al-Jalis not al-Khwārizmī', both *lām* and *nūn* provide us with 'Muḥammad ibn Mūsā ibn Anas

also published an Italian annotated translation of the Latin version under the title *Sadan. I segreti astrologici di Albumasar* (Turin: Nino Aragno, 2000). A paraphrase of the Latin had been given before by Thorndike in 'Albumasar in Sadan', *Isis* 45 (1954), pp. 22-32 — 'Albumasar in Sadan' being the name under which the treatise was referred to by Pietro d'Abano. See also C. Burnett, '«Albumasar in Sadan» in the Twelfth Century', in *Ratio et superstitio*, ed. Marchetti, Rignani, and Sorge, pp. 59-67.

42 J.-P. Boudet, *Le recueil des plus célèbres astrologues de Simon de Phares* (Paris: Librairie Honoré Champion, 1997), vol. 1, pp. 275-276, with the editor's following remark (p. 275, n. 47a and 47b): 'L'identification de ce prince à un roi grec[...] constitue la conséquence logique de la tradition rapportée par Guido Bonatti, selon laquelle Albumasar aurait étudié à Athènes, alors grand centre intellectuel et astrologique'.

43 On this, see Marquet, 'La détermination astrale de l'évolution selon les Frères de la Pureté', *Bulletin d'Études Orientales* 44 (1992), pp. 127-146; and my *Brotherhood*, pp. 42 and 46.

al-Khwārizmī, a more coherent reading clearly referring to the famous astronomer, geographer, and mathematician of the time. Both *lām* and *nūn* have 'Yaḥyā ibn Maṣṣūr the astrologer' instead of 'Yaḥyā ibn Mūsā' in the *Mudhākarāt*. In one place, the *Rasā'il* version includes astrological particularities that are not to be found in the Cambridge manuscript of the *Mudhākarāt*. Indeed, instead of: 'Because the veracity of claims is [ascertained] by Jupiter, and Jupiter is facing him [supposedly Capricorn, the ascendant] in a favourable manner, only he dislikes this sign and the sign dislikes him,'⁴⁴ our text has the more elaborate:

Because the validity of the allegations [comes] from Jupiter, or from the trine aspect with the Sun, or else from its sextile aspect when the Sun is not malefic. And this [is so] because of the case of the fall of Jupiter, which is in a benefic aspect with it, although it is adverse to this sign and the sign is adverse to it.

More often, however, the original of the *Mudhākarāt* provides us with a more complete and more coherent text. Thus, for instance, the 'Syrian pen' (*qalam shāmī*) of the original provides a clue for the otherwise unintelligible readings of *lām*, *nūn*, and Beirut. In a much more significant way, the divergence affects our very understanding of the story. This is particularly noticeable in the case of the configuration of stars as reported by the group of astrologers. Thus, the *Mudhākarāt* version specifies: 'The Sun and the Moon aligned within a single minute, and the *pars fortunae* [*sahm as-sa'ādah*] and *pars futurorum* [*sahm al-ghayb*] aligned within the same minute as the ascendant, which was Capricorn. Jupiter was in Virgo, in aspect with it [the ascendant], with Venus and Mercury in aspect with it.'⁴⁵ For its part, the *Rasā'il* version, according to both *lām* and *nūn*, has: 'The Sun and the Moon found themselves within the same minute in the ascendant. The ascendant was Capricorn, and Jupiter was in Virgo and in aspect with it!' In

44 Adapted from Dunlop's translation in his 'The *Mudhakarāt*', p. 235.

45 Dunlop, 'The *Mudhakarāt*', p. 235. I have replaced Dunlop's 'Spica Virginis' with 'Virgo'. The Latin version of Abū Ma'shar's *Mudhākarāt*, tr. Federici-Vescovini, p. 299, reads: 'Erant Sol et Luna in ascendente concurrentes invicem per gradus et minuta. Erant autem et pars fortunae et pars futurorum in uno minuto ascendentis. Erat autem ascendens Capricornus, Iupiter autem erat in Virgine configuratus ipsi; autem erat Venus et Mercurius in Scorpione', where one notes 'in Scorpione' instead of 'in aspect with it', as inferred from the continuation of text.

other words, the *Rasā'il* version omits important elements: (1) that the *pars fortunae* and *pars futurorum* coincided in the same minute as the ascendant, that is, Capricorn; (2) that Venus and Mercury were in aspect with the ascendant. It appears from the rest of the account that these elements — especially the mention of Venus and Mercury, in relation to the magic of the ring and the pen respectively — are crucial to understand the very purport of the anecdote.

To whom are these omissions imputable? To the copyists, as one would perhaps think in the first place, or to the Ikhwān themselves? At any rate, the fact that these omissions are found in *lām*, *nūn*, and Beirut alike would invite us not to discard the second possibility too rapidly.

The text of the *Rasā'il* is also at variance with the original in that it ends, somehow abruptly, a few lines before the account's genuine termination. For, after mentioning the 1,000 dinars awarded by al-Ma'mūn to the magician, the *Mudhakarāt* goes on to say about this man: 'He was among the most learned of mankind in the knowledge of the stars, and was one of the greatest companions of 'Ubayd Allāh ibn al-Sarī.' And the account is concluded with two statements by Abū Ma'shar himself, namely: 'Abū Ma'shar said: "And it was he who made beetle talismans in many houses of Baghdad." Abū Ma'shar said: "If I had been in these people's place, I should have expressed a different opinion. I should have said: The claim is false, because the sign is reversed. Jupiter is unfavourable, and the Moon is on the wane, and the stars are in aspect with the ascendant in a deceitful sign, the house of oppressors — I mean the several signs of Scorpio".'⁴⁶

Probably the Brethren did not deem it of interest to quote these last lines because they felt they had already attained their objective by this time, that is, to stress the legitimacy of magic insofar as it is connected to astrology. The ring and the pen of the story are regarded as authentic talismans, and the proof of this is that Venus and Mercury 'have already operated with their effects.' That the man's claim to be a prophet proves to be invalidated by astrology only shows, in the negative way, how

46 Dunlop, 'The *Mudhakarāt*', p. 235. According to Dunlop's conjecture (p. 244, n. 42), based on Ṭabarī, the 'Ubayd Allāh ibn al-Sarī mentioned in the text is 'apparently the same as the governor of Egypt 'Ubayd Allāh ibn al-Sarī ibn al-Ḥakam (from 206/822), expelled in 211/826'.

inextricably natural magic is linked to, and dependent on, the science of the stars. This being assumed, the incomparable authority of Abū Ma'shar in the art of astrology — whose legitimacy, let us just note in passing, is not questioned here — was in itself a reason sufficient for the Brethren to quote from him. Unfortunately, the story does not say how many dinars the magician would have received had his claim to prophecy been as well justified on astrological grounds.

Chapter 4 — Magic in the Qur'an

The word *sihr* ('magic') is formed on an Arabic root (*s-h-r*) that conveys the meaning of 'bewitchment', 'enchantment', and 'charm'.⁴⁷ Under one or another of its lexical derivations, the root appears on fifty-eight occasions in the Qur'an.⁴⁸ In nearly all of the Meccan suras where it occurs, the canvas of narratives looks more or less the same. Clearly, the purport of these accounts is to show that all the prophets preaching monotheistic views, whether they be Biblical figures (such as Noah, Abraham, Lot, or Moses)⁴⁹ or Arabs (such as Hūd, Šāliḥ, Shu'ayb or, of course, Muhammad), are inevitably faced with the accusation of bewitching their own peoples. The Prophet of Islam is thus himself frequently portrayed by his detractors as a *sāḥir* ('magician') — a qualification usually found in combination with one of the following: *kāhin* ('diviner' or 'soothsayer'), *shā'ir* ('poet'), or *majnūn* ('fool', in the sense of 'possessed by the jinn').⁵⁰ By and large, the Medinan suras contain fewer references to magic than the Meccan suras, but they do include, with the well-known story of the angels Hārūt and Mārūt as told in Sura 2, the indisputable *locus classicus* on magic in Islam. The verse runs:

And they followed [instead] what the devils had recited during the reign of Solomon. It was not Solomon who disbelieved, but the devils

47 See T. Fahd, 'Sihr', *EL2*, vol. 9, pp. 567–571.

48 See C. Hamès, 'La notion de magie dans le Coran', in *Coran et talismans. Textes et pratiques magiques en milieu musulman*, ed. C. Hamès (Paris: Editions Karthala, 2007), pp. 17–48, here p. 18.

49 On the Biblical prophets in the Qur'an, see, Tottoli, *I profeti biblici nella tradizione islamica*, *Studi Biblici*, 21 (Brescia: Paideia Editrice, 1999).

50 See Hamès, ed., *Coran*, pp. 20–22.

disbelieved, teaching people magic [*yu'allimūna al-nās al-sihr*] and that which was revealed to the two angels at Babylon, Hārūt and Mārūt. But the two angels do not teach anyone unless they say, 'We are a trial, so do not disbelieve [by practising magic].' And [yet] they learn from them that by which they cause separation between a man and his wife. But they do not harm anyone through it except by permission of Allah. And the people learn what harms them and does not benefit them. But the Children of Israel certainly knew that whoever purchased the magic would not have in the Hereafter any share. And wretched is that for which they sold themselves, if they only knew.⁵¹

What the Brethren have to offer their reader in this chapter is the mere quotation of thirteen passages from the Qur'an where the use of magic is concerned. They do not omit, of course, the Hārūt and Mārūt verse, nor do they leave aside the story of Moses' rod turned into a serpent in front of the people of Pharaoh, as mentioned in Sura 7.⁵² For each of the thirteen passages they quote (namely, 2:102, 5:110, 6:7, 7:109–112, 7:120–121, 7:132, 10:2, 17:47, 17:101, 20:57–58, 20:63, 20:66, 20:73), the Ikhwān duly indicate the name of the corresponding suras — a practice which they seem to have followed only in the places where, like this one, they had to cite a long string of verses.⁵³ Only on two occasions do they add a word of their own, one of which being no more than a rhetorical question in order to get the reader's approval: 'Do you not see that the Qur'an regards their magic as important?'

In all, this chapter leaves the unambiguous impression that the Brethren did not take a genuine interest in what the Qur'an says about magic. To be sure, they were eager to invoke its authority, here as elsewhere, but they did not even bother to wonder, as so many commentators have done, which kind of magic the Holy Book refers to and, this eventually being set, whether the use of that magic is in

- 51 Qur'an 2:102 (Qur'anic quotations in this volume are from *Sahih International*, available at <http://quran.com>). See M. W. Dols, 'The Theory of Magic in Healing', in *Magic and Divination in Early Islam*, ed. Savage-Smith, pp. 87–99, here p. 92; and F. Zappa, 'La magie vue par un exégète du Coran: le commentaire du verset de Harūt et Marūt par al-Qurtubī (XIII^e siècle)', in *Coran*, ed. Hamès, pp. 49–73.
- 52 Qur'an 7:109–112. See A. Fodor, 'The Rod of Moses in Arabic Magic', *Acta Orientalia Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae* 32 (1978), pp. 1–21.
- 53 Netton, *Muslim Neoplatonists*, p. 79, retains two further examples of this, namely, *Rasā'il*, vol. 1, p. 348 and vol. 4, p. 245–249.

any way approved, permitted, or condemned. Or else they did, but quickly realized how risky it would be for them to embark on a proper discussion about these quotations. By merely listing a selection of those passages — in the order of the suras as received in 'Uthmān's Vulgate — they would indeed appear here to use the sacred book as 'an excellent smoke-screen for doctrines which were entirely un-Qur'anic,' to take up Ian Netton's expression.⁵⁴

A more elaborate discussion of the Qur'anic citations about magic should take place in the forthcoming volume dedicated to the long version of the epistle.

Chapter 5 — Magic according to the Jews and the Christians

After quoting from the Holy Book of Islam in the previous chapter, the Brethren now turn their attention to 'what is [to be found] with the other legislators and in their books'. This prompts them, naturally, to invoke the Torah (*Tawraya*, according to *lām*), 'to which two communities are attached, namely, the Jews and the Christians together, and whose validity they both affirm.' This agreement of both communities on the validity of the Torah is stressed again in the lines that follow: 'For the Torah exists in the hands of both the Jews and the Christians, in Hebrew, in Syriac, and in Arabic, and there is no divergence between them about it. On the contrary, they agree with one another on the validity and the reality of what is to be found in it.'

In this chapter, the Ikhwān in fact narrate three stories, which they claim all to derive from the Torah, namely, A. The Story of Esau and the Son of Nimrod; B. The Story of Jacob and Laban; C. The Story of Saul and Samuel. A brief summary of each story is provided hereafter, together with a commentary.

A. The Story of Esau and the Son of Nimrod

Summary

Every time Esau, the son of Isaac, went out to hunt, he was met by the son of Nimrod, who provoked him by telling him: 'Wrestle with me. If I win over you, I shall take your game.' The fact is that the Son

⁵⁴ Netton, *Muslim Neoplatonists*, p. 79.

of Nimrod was wearing the shirt of Adam, on which the figures of all creatures were represented. The hunter Adam would only put his hand on one of these figures, and the corresponding animal would become 'bewildered, stopped, and blind until he [Adam] had come to it and taken it.' This of course gave superiority to the son of Nimrod over Esau in each of their wrestling contests. Time and again, Esau was thrown to the ground and his game was taken from him by his opponent. Esau complained about this situation to Isaac, who, on realizing that the son of Nimrod was wearing the shirt of Adam, advised his son to propose that his opponent henceforth wrestle a contest without the garment — to which the son of Nimrod agreed. This time Esau had the superiority over his enemy. He took the shirt from him, as well as the game, and ran away. From now on, Esau could hunt whatever wild beast he wished, just by putting his hand on the corresponding figure on the shirt. He was now 'possessing insight' of it.

Commentary

Although Esau and Nimrod — rather than Nimrod's son — are both well-known biblical figures, appearing in various places of the Old Testament, the story of the shirt of Adam is nowhere to be found in the Pentateuch. But it does appear, in very much the same way as with the Ikhwān, in the Midrash, as has already been pointed by Yves Marquet and also Ian Netton.

From where did the Brethren take up this story? Given the difficulty of dating most of the Midrash literature, it is unlikely that we could answer this question with any satisfactory decisiveness. On the basis of what they affirm at the beginning of this chapter (namely, that 'the Torah exists both in the hands of the Jews and of the Christians, in Hebrew, in Syriac, and in Arabic'), a transmission via the Middle Eastern Christians seems the most probable. In any event, the Brethren's ascription of this extra-canonical material to the Torah would seem to indicate their relative unfamiliarity with the Old Testament. The same conclusion has been already formulated by Netton, who wrote: 'Here they [the Ikhwān] appear to use the Arabic word *Tawrāt* in a wide sense to indicate the Old Testament, or perhaps just the Pentateuch, in its original Hebrew, as well as the same text in the Arabic and Syriac

translations possessed by the Christians. If this correct, then their mistaken assumption that their account of Nimrod's son and Esau occurs in it is conclusive evidence that the Ikhwān were much less familiar with the Old Testament than with the New.⁵⁵

B. The Story of Jacob and Laban

Summary

Having been at his service for a while, Jacob asks his uncle Laban to let him go back to his country. As for the remuneration, Jacob proposes the following: from amongst Laban's flocks, he shall take all speckled sheep, all lambs that are a mixture of black and white, and all goats that are either white or spotted with black and white — a proposition which Laban accepts. Having thus set aside those animals from Laban's livestock, Jacob then increases his own herd by placing the animals in front of peeled rods of almond and plane trees at the moment when they come to drink from the watering troughs — an operation that he repeats year after year.

Commentary

In this case, the Ikhwān's source is unmistakably canonical. The story of Jacob and Laban is told in Genesis 30:25–43, which provides some details not found in the Brethren's version. Even in its original form, the narrative needs some explanation to be properly understood. Jacob's deal with his uncle looks favourable to the latter at first sight. In the ancient Middle East, it was indeed the norm to have a majority of white sheep and black goats, so that the animals requested as remuneration by Jacob would appear to be the exception. But Jacob's trick consists in multiplying his own herd by having recourse to a ploy, namely, the mating of animals in front of peeled rods of almond and plane trees, whose speckled appearance — the peeling having revealed white stripes — was believed to exert its influence on the reproduction of the flocks. By operating the same way time and again, and by carefully selecting the strong flocks every time, Jacob finds a cunning way to make his herd larger than Laban's.

⁵⁵ Netton, *Muslim Neoplatonists*, p. 74.

The Brethren's version is, as we mentioned, even more elliptic. Its interpretation is further complicated by some kind of confusion in the vocabulary used to render notions such as 'speckled', 'spotted', and 'striped', all present in the original Hebrew and, with some variances, in the Greek. To the question of where the Ikhwān have derived their account from, the safest bet would be to conjecture here, again, a transmission via a Christian intermediary, in all likelihood the same as that we have assumed for the previous story. I am not able to decide whether one should postulate the existence of a Syriac intermediary version between the Hebrew (or the Greek) and the Arabic. Whatever the case, the intriguing fact is that the Ikhwān are seriously mistaken in ascribing this account to 'the second book' (*al-sifr al-thānī*) of the Torah, which is in fact the Book of Exodus. Unless the Brethren took up the story from an alternate, uncanonical version that had different divisions of the text, I would again take this misattribution as evidence of their limited awareness of the ancient Scriptures.

C. The Story of Saul and Samuel

Summary

The third story is somewhat longer than the previous two. It deals with Samuel, whose prophethood is admitted by the Christians and the Jews alike. In the book about him that the two communities possess, it is reported that Samuel had appointed Saul as king of the Jews. Assisted by God in his war against the Amalekites, Saul disobeys his Lord 'in respect to the livestock'. As a result, he is ultimately toppled from his rank and replaced by David.

Samuel has died, and Saul turns his attention to the Philistines in an attempt at killing the fortune-tellers amongst them. Facing the armies of the enemy, and frustrated not to find 'any pacifier [to respond] to his speech[...]: neither magician nor fortune-teller nor sage', he decides to look for a magician himself. He thus implores a sorceress 'to revive a prophet he could seek [advice] from.' Asked by her which prophet he would elect, he replies, 'Samuel'. She indeed revives him, but the vision scares her, since the figure having appeared is that 'of an old man, radiant like the angels of the Lord, wrapped up in a coat,

as if he arose from the earth.' The revived Samuel then asks Saul why he made him return to life, to which Saul replies that he needed to consult him about his fight with the Philistines. Samuel explains to him the reason why God is angry with him and foretells his death for the next day. Saul faints at this announcement, but the sorceress and his companions manage to get him fit for the next day, where the battle with the Philistines indeed results in a disaster for the Hebrews: three of Saul's sons are killed and Saul falls on his own spear. The Sons of Israel appoint David as their new king.

Commentary

This third story presents us with another type of misattribution. The narration comes in reality from the First Book of Samuel, whose existence the Ikhwān are aware of, since they write in the very same chapter: 'He [Samuel] was famous amongst the prophets, and there is a book on him'. Curiously enough, they introduce their own version by stating that the story comes from the 'Book of Annals of the Kings from the Sons of Israel', which is in fact an extra-canonical source for the Book of Kings.⁵⁶

Now, whereas their previous account of the story of Jacob and Laban could be regarded as an altogether faithful adaptation of the model, this one appears rather as a loose paraphrase of only a few sections that make up the original story, which is considerably longer. In fact, the story as they narrate it is mainly taken from Chapters 10, 15, 28, and 31 of 1 Samuel, as Netton has already shown.⁵⁷ As a result of this, the gist of the story in their account is not always clear and the chronology of events not always easy to follow.

Once again, one is led to conclude that the Brethren's familiarity with the Old Testament was limited, and that the existence of various intermediaries should be postulated between the original narrative and their own version.

56 On this, see note 82 of the English translation.

57 Netton, *Muslim Neoplatonists*, p. 75

Chapter 6 — Magic with the Šābī'ans, the Ḥarrānians, and the Ḥanīfs

This chapter is clearly the *pièce de résistance* of the epistle, as it alone occupies almost a third of the text. The nature of the subject also makes it the one requiring by far the largest amount of explanation. The chapter may be conveniently subdivided into eight sub-sections, which we have chosen to introduce in the edition and the translation with the following headings, for the sake of clarity:

- A. Historical Perspective
- B. Philosophical Doctrines
- C. The Eighty-Seven Temples
- D. The Temple of Jirjās
- E. The Initiation Ritual
- F. The Secrets
- G. The Kādhā Feast
- H. Concluding Note

In what follows, we shall provide a detailed summary of each sub-section, focusing on those elements which appear to us especially important for the discussion. The discussion proper will follow each one of these summaries. It will be essentially based on the comparison of our text with other mediaeval Arabic sources on the 'Šābī'ans of Ḥarrān', in light of certain studies amongst the innumerable ones, since Daniel Chwolsohn's pioneering and monumental thesis,⁵⁸ devoted to this enigmatic and notoriously controversial issue.⁵⁹

58 D. Chwolsohn, *Die Ssabier und der Ssabismus*, 2 vols. (repr., Amsterdam: Oriental Press, 1965).

59 Let us mention here, amongst the post-Chwolsohn literature on the 'Šābī'ans' more or less directly concerned with Ḥarrān: Margoliouth, 'Harranians', in *Hastings Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics*, vol. 6, pp. 519–520; J. Pedersen, 'The Sabians', in *A Volume of Oriental Studies Presented to Edward G. Browne on His 60th Birthday*, ed. T.W. Arnold and R.A. Nicholson (Cambridge: CUP, 1922), pp. 383–391; H. Corbin, 'Rituel', pp. 181–246; S. Lloyd and W. Brice, 'Harran', *Anatolian Studies* 1 (1951), pp. 77–111; Massignon, *Essai sur les origines du lexique technique de la mystique musulmane* (repr., Paris, 1954); H. Lewy, 'Points of Comparison between Zoroastrianism and the Moon-cult of Harran' in *A Locust's Leg: Studies in Honour of S. H. Taqizadeh*, ed. W. B. Henning and E. Yarshater (London: Percy Lund, Humphries and Co., 1962), pp. 139–161; J. B. Segal, 'The Sabian Mysteries', in *Vanished Civilizations*, ed. E. Bacon (New York:

The corpus of mediaeval Arabic sources at the modern scholar's disposal is today significantly the same as that already investigated by Chwolsohn. It consists of a number of 'inescapable testimonies', such as Mas'ūdī's *Murūj al-dhahab* and *Tanbih*, Ibn al-Nadīm's *Fihrist*, 'Abd al-Jabbar's *Mughnī*, Shahrastānī's *Milal wa'l-nihal*, Bīrūnī's *Āthār al-baqiyā*, Maimonides' *Dalālat al-hā'irīn* (Hebrew, *Moreh ha-nevukhim*) and Dimashqī's *Nukhbat al-dahr*, to which one may add a series of 'kleinere Texte' taken from heresiographers, historians, geographers, jurists, and lexicographers of all kinds between the ninth and the thirteenth centuries CE.

McGraw-Hill), 1963, pp. 201–220; J. Hjärpe, *Analyse critique des traditions arabes sur les Sabéens harraniens*, PhD Thesis, Uppsala, 1972; J. Hjärpe, 'The Holy Year of the Harranians', *Orientalia Suecana* 23–24 (1974–1975), pp. 68–83; Pingree, 'Sources', pp. 1–15; J. D. McAuliffe, 'Exegetical Identification of the Šābi'ūn', *The Muslim World* 72 (1982), pp. 95–106; C. Buck, 'The Identity of the Šābi'ūn: An Historical Quest', *The Muslim World* 74 (1984), pp. 172–186; M. Tardieu, 'Šābiens coraniques et "Šābiens" de Harrān', *Journal Asiatique* 274 (1986), pp. 1–44; M. Tardieu, 'Les calendriers en usage à Harrān d'après les sources arabes et le commentaire de Simplicius à la physique d'Aristote', in *Simplicius: Sa vie, son œuvre, sa survie*, ed. I. Hadot (Berlin–New York, 1987), pp. 40–57; D. Pingree, 'Indian Planetary Images and the Tradition of Astral Magic', *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 52 (1989), pp. 1–13; T. Green, *The City of the Moon: God: Religious Traditions of Harran* (Leiden: Brill, 1992); F. E. Peters, 'Hermes and Harran: The Roots of Arabic-Islamic Occultism', in *Intellectual Studies on Islam: Essays Written in Honor of Martin B. Dickson*, ed. Michel Mazzaoui and Vera B. Moreen (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1990), pp. 185–215; F. Grenet, 'Religions du monde iranien ancien', *Annuaire EPHE* (1999/2000), pp. 175–180; J. Lameer, 'From Alexandria to Baghdad: Reflections on the Genesis of a Problematical Tradition', in *The Ancient Tradition in Christian and Islamic Hellenism. Studies on the transmission of Greek philosophy and sciences dedicated to H.J. Drossaart Lulofs on his ninetieth birthday*, ed. G. Endress and R. Kruk (Leiden, 1997), pp. 181–191; C. Genequand, 'Idolâtrie, astrolâtrie et sabéisme', *Studia Islamica* 89 (1999), pp. 109–128; D. Pingree, 'The Šābiens of Harrān and the Classical Tradition', *International Journal of the Classical Tradition* 9 (2002), pp. 8–35; J. Hämeen-Anttila, 'Continuity of Pagan Religious Traditions in Tenth-Century Iraq', in *Ideologies as Intercultural Phenomena*, ed. A. Panaino and G. Pettinato, *Melammu Symposia* III (Bologna: International Association for Intercultural Studies of the MELAMMU project, 2002), pp. 89–107; De Smet, 'Platon arabe', pp. 73–86; A. Caiozzo, 'Éléments de rituels images dans les manuscrits de l'Orient médiéval', in *Image et Magie*, ed. J.-P. Boudet, A. Caiozzo, N. Weill-Parot, pp. 57–75. See also A. Frattini and C. Prato, 'I Sebōmenoi (tōn Theōn): una risposta all'antico enigma dei Sabai', <http://www.ricerche filosofiche.it/> (accessed 24 May, 2011).

The very nature of a subject that lends itself to all sorts of confusions and amalgamations and also leaves the door wide open for the possibility of oral channels of transmission; the extreme rarity of presumably first-hand statements (and, correlatively, suspicion about the validity of these); the all-too-visible heterogeneity as well as the ideologically biased spirit of most reports; and, in a more general way, the quasi-impossibility of tracing plausible filiations between our *testimonia* — all this has contributed to obscuring the issue up to the present time. Echoing the ‘inflation sabéenne’ of those ancient sources already denounced by Guy Monnot in his introduction to the French translation of Shahrastānī’s *Milal*,⁶⁰ the proliferation of modern studies on the Šābi’ans of Ḥarrān is also evidence for the still enormous disagreement amongst today’s scholars as to the way to interpret these sources. The spectrum of positions could not be wider, in fact. Thus, according to David Pingree,

[...] what is unusual about Ḥarrān is that a religion (later called Šābianism) developed there, combining elements from Mesopotamia, India, Iran, Syria itself, Neoplatonic and Aristotelian philosophy, Greek astrology, and Ptolemaic astronomy; this new religion spawned forms of magic — astral and psychic — that are described in Arabic texts, written primarily between the ninth and the thirteenth centuries CE, which spread these beliefs and practices over the entire Muslim world, from India to Spain, and which, through Latin and later vernacular versions, beginning in the thirteenth century, profoundly affected Western Europe[...]. The problem faced by modern historians has been that of the mechanism by which the ancient Mesopotamian forms of religious beliefs, strong echoes of

60 See G. Monnot, ‘Les Sabéens de Shahrastānī’, in Shahrastānī, *Livre des Religions et des Sectes*, vol. 2, ed. and tr. D. Gimaret, G. Monnot, and J. Jolivet (Leuven: Peeters-UNESCO, 1993), p. 7: ‘Mais la plupart des Harrāniens se singularisaient par un culte astral très développé, et par des temples voués à chacune des planètes. Il en résulta vite, chez les Musulmans, l’identification de tous les astrolâtres aux Sabéens. Cette circonstance, et la commodité d’un terme aussi utile que vide, amenèrent une inflation sabéenne chez les auteurs arabes, qui voient du sabéen un peu partout dans l’espace géographique et le tableau des religions. Aux « Sabéens » qui s’étaient toujours prétendus tels, une manie ajouta d’autres pseudo-Sabéens qui ont toujours ignoré leur parenté imaginaire aux Sabéens patentés et fictifs’.

which were still apparent in the 'Abbāsid period, were combined with the interests of late Neoplatonic philosophers in the theology of the One and its hypostases, in astronomy, in astrology, in medicine, and in theurgy.⁶¹

Contrasting with this view, De Smet has recently gone as far as to speak of 'le roman des Sabéens de Ḥarrān' and to dismiss the whole issue as 'un mythe de la recherche moderne qui repose sur des bases très minces'.⁶²

Amongst ancient statements about the Ṣābi'ans of Ḥarrān, the passage from the short version of Epistle 52 has only rarely been taken into consideration. In fact, if one excepts Tamara Green's monograph on Ḥarrān, whose information on the Brethren of Purity is exclusively based on a consultation of the work mentioned hereafter,⁶³ the only important investigation directly concerned with our passage remains, to date, Marquet's 'Sabéens et Ikhwān al-Ṣafā', issued in 1966 under the form of double article in *Studia Islamica*.⁶⁴

To be found there, in addition to a French translation of the passage, is an illuminating commentary on it with a great deal of suggestive

61 Pingree, 'Ṣābi'ans', p. 9.

62 De Smet, 'Platon arabe', p. 77. In this article, De Smet reacts more specifically to the view — upheld by various specialists since Tardieu — that, until the tenth century, the Ṣābi'ans of Ḥarrān preserved and even developed the tradition of an Academy in the Platonic (or Neoplatonic) style modelled on, and directly inherited from, its Athenian predecessor, and that Ḥarrān also became a centre where philosophical texts from Greek Antiquity were copied and translated. See also his 'Platon et Pythagore', p. 27: 'Je ne connais aucun texte — qu'il soit écrit en grec, en syriaque ou en arabe, par un auteur païen, chrétien ou musulman — qui fasse état d'une quelconque activité de traduction ou d'enseignement philosophique à Ḥarrān ou qui atteste l'existence dans cette ville d'une bibliothèque, voire d'une «école platonicienne». Néanmoins, il s'agit d'un mythe profondément ancré, dont les origines remontent en Occident au moins jusqu'au XVIIIe siècle, et qui de nos jours est inlassablement répété et présenté comme une vérité solidement établie par bon nombre de chercheurs, aussi bien arabisants qu'hellénistes'. The same scholar is actually preparing a study with the purpose of tracing the historical development of 'the myth'.

63 Green, *City*, pp. 181–190, 207–213. Mistaken references to the Beirut edition in those sections leaves the impression that the author never had the Arabic text of the *Rasā'il* in hand. See also, in line with the four feasts as reported in Epistle 50, Corbin, 'Rituel', especially pp. 208–222.

64 Marquet, 'Sabéens et Ikhwān al-Ṣafā', *Studia Islamica* 24 (1966), pp. 35–80, and 'Sabéens II', pp. 77–109. For a discussion of Marquet's important contribution on this issue, see my 'Les Sabéens de Ḥarrān dans l'œuvre d'Yves Marquet', in *Image et Magie*, ed. Boudet, Caiozzo, and Weill-Parot, pp. 41–56.

comparisons between the rituals and doctrines as reported by the Brethren and those that are known to have existed over the ages in various ancient secret communities and religious-philosophical systems of the Mediterranean and the Middle-Eastern worlds: ancient Mesopotamian cults, Pythagoreanism, Orphism, Mithraism, Hermeticism, and the like. A substantial part of the study is also devoted to a careful, and most useful, comparison of our text with Shahrastānī's report on the Šābī'ans' beliefs and philosophical tenets. Marquet's study was based exclusively on the Beirut edition of the *Epistles*, whose flaws led him sometimes to propound a wrong interpretation. In various places where Beirut is corrupt or deficient, Marquet's great familiarity with the subject nevertheless allowed him to put forward conjectures which, in light of our manuscripts, prove to be excellent, as the present edition makes plain.

The Ikhwān's statement on the 'Šābī'ans, the Ḥarrānians, and the Hanīfs' provides much information that is not to be found elsewhere in mediaeval Arabic literature. Why their account has, with the notable exception of Marquet's study, not been considered by modern scholars on a par with, say, Ibn al-Nadīm's or Shahrastānī's account, is an important question that needs to be tackled here. The answer is probably to be found in the fact that, as opposed to all other statements, which may be viewed as either 'frankly adverse' (like, supposedly, the part of Ibn al-Nadīm's report about the ritual of the 'head' and other similarly barbarian rituals)⁶⁵ or 'relatively neutral' (like, supposedly, Shahrastānī's report) vis-à-vis the doctrines and practices of the Šābī'ans,⁶⁶ the Brethren's account appears to be remarkably sympathetic towards the people of Ḥarrān, their beliefs, and their rituals. So sympathetic, even, that their own body of doctrines, as the Ikhwān themselves let us believe, may be largely indebted to the Ḥarrānian science itself. For us, this means two sorts of difficulties. One is, of course, about the Ikhwān's objectivity: how can we rely on a statement that appears

65 Ibn al-Nadīm, *Kitāb al-Fihrist*, tr. Bayard Dodge as *The Fihrist of al-Nadīm; A Tenth-Century Survey of Muslim Culture*, 2 vols. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1970), pp. 753–754.

66 It remains Hjärpe's greatest achievement to have shown that some of the classical reports, or parts from these reports, were based, to a large extent, on Islamic or Christian anti-Šābī'an propaganda.

so biased by the authors' affinities with the people they describe? The second, directly resulting from the first, is: how can we distinguish what is common to both the Ḥarrānians and the Ikhwān from what belongs only to the Ḥarrānians? Syncretism is one thing, but a 'syncretism of syncretism' — an expression already used for the Ikhwān al-Ṣafā' by Marquet⁶⁷ — is another, and it makes matters more complicated still, as we shall see.

A. Historical Perspective

The historical framework with which the Ikhwān start their account is relatively short, but of great significance.

Summary

The last ones of those who are known to have given credence to, and practised, the 'sciences of talismans' (*'ulūm al-ṭillasmāt*) were the Greeks (*al-yūnāniyyūn*), and different names are used to designate those people, namely, 'Ṣābi'ans' (*al-Ṣābi'ūn*), 'Ḥarrānians' (*al-Ḥarrāniyyūn*), and 'Ḥanīfs' (*al-Ḥanīfūn*). In the transmission process of arts and sciences (*al-ṣanā'ī wa'l-'ulūm*), these sciences ultimately derive from two nations, namely, the Babylonians (*al-Bābiliyyūn*) and the Egyptians (*al-Miṣriyyūn*). There were four 'ancient chiefs' (*ru'asā' awā'ilī-him*), namely, Agathodaimon (*Aghāthadīmūn*), Hermes (*Hirmis*), Homer (*Ūmahris*), and Aratus (*Arāṭus*). Their 'contingents' (*juyūshu-hum*) have split into four groups, whose names are: the Pythagoreans (*al-Fūthāghuriyya*), the Aristotelians (*al-Aristānūniyya*), the Platonists (*al-Aflātūniyya*), and the Epicureans (*al-Afiqūrūsiyya*).

Commentary

One thing is for sure: the level of syncretism shown by our text is awesome, even by the Ikhwān's standards. To affirm that 'Ṣābi'ans', 'Ḥarrānians', and 'Ḥanīfs' are three different names to refer to the same category of people is likely to disconcert anyone involved with an examination of the problem. To assert, moreover, that these people were all Greeks, and that 'the Greeks' are the last ones of those experts in the talismanic art, also appears as a gross simplification

67 Marquet, *Philosophie*, p. 31.

of reality. In his *Tanbīh*, Mas'ūdī mentions Šābi'ans from various nations: Babylonians, Greeks, Egyptians, and even Chinese.⁶⁸ One century later, and in much the same vein, the eleventh-century author Šā'id al-Andalusī will associate Šābi'ans with people from nearly all the nations he deals with in his *Ṭabaqāt*: Indians, Persians, Greeks, Romans, Egyptians, and Arabs.⁶⁹ Whereas these two authors tend to confuse, as do the Ikhwān, the words 'Šābi'an' and 'Ḥanīf' with one another, Shahrastānī's *Milāl* provides us with a well-known passage in which the vision of a 'Šābi'an' is expressly opposed, under the form of a fictitious debate, to that of a 'Ḥanīf'.⁷⁰ But the Brethren do not seem to bother with these subtleties. In their eyes, there is a fair chance that 'Šābi'an' did not mean much more than 'star-worshipper', that a 'Ḥanīf' was simply a 'pagan monotheist', and that a 'Ḥarrānian' was an inhabitant of the city of Ḥarrān, in Northern Mesopotamia, where star-worshippers and pagan monotheists were supposed to live and have their rituals. In Epistle 33, which they devote to the intellectual principles of the Pythagoreans, the Brethren do not hesitate to claim that 'Pythagoras was a sage and a monotheist from Ḥarrān'.⁷¹

The transmission of the talismanic sciences — and, as the text later reveals, of astrology and the occult sciences in general — as viewed by the Ikhwān is another proof of their proclivity for generalizations and amalgamations of all kinds. Ending, as we have just seen, with the Greeks, the chain is meant to originate from the Babylonians⁷² and the Egyptians. Whereas 'the Babylonians' refers, in all likelihood, to the ancient cults of the Moon and other heavenly bodies as practised by the Chaldeans in Ḥarrān and around,⁷³ the reference to 'the Egyptians' is

68 Mas'ūdī, *Kitāb al-Tanbīh wa'l-ishrāf*, ed. M. J. de Goeje (Leiden: Brill, 1967), pp. 161–162.

69 Šā'id al-Andalusī, *Ṭabaqāt al-umam*, ed. Louis Cheikho (Beirut: Imprimerie Catholique, 1912).

70 Shahrastānī, *Kitāb al-Milāl wa'l-nihāl*, ed. M. Kilānī (Beirut: Dār al-Ma'rifa, n.d.) vol. 2, pp. 5–44.

71 See *Rasā'il*, vol. 3, p. 200.

72 Instead of 'the Syrians' as given by Beirut and reproduced by Marquet in his translation ('Sabéens I', p. 36).

73 See Marquet, 'Sabéens II', pp. 88–96; Green, *City*, pp. 19–43; Pingree, 'Šābiāns', pp. 8–9.

to be understood in relation to Hermeticism, which was also believed to have exerted its influence upon the star-worshippers of Ḥarrān.⁷⁴

This last connection seems to be confirmed by the list of 'ancient chiefs' that the Brethren mention in the following line: Agathodaimon, Hermes, Homer, and Aratus. There seems to have been a relatively large consensus amongst Muslim authors of the Middle Ages to acknowledge Agathodaimon and Hermes — both duly recognized as such in early Hermeticism — as either the most important prophets or the principal school-founders of the 'Ḥarrānian Ṣābi'ans' as well.⁷⁵ Based on a list originally provided by Sarakhsī, a disciple of the philosopher al-Kindī, and taken up by Ibn al-Nadīm in the *Fihrist*,⁷⁶ various authors also mention, in addition to Agathodaimon and Hermes, a certain Arānī, and the Greek sage Solon (an ancestor of Plato's on his mother's side).

To name Homer and Aratus as school-chiefs of the Ḥarrānian doctrine was clearly not such common practice, although there is evidence for this as well in Mas'ūdī, who asserts in his *Tanbīh*, about the Egyptian Ṣābi'ans: 'They regard as prophets Agathodaimon, Hermes, Homer, Aratus (the author of a book on the description of the starry sphere), and also Oribasius, Arānī (the first and the second of this name), and others.'⁷⁷ That the same four names appear, in the same order, in both Mas'ūdī's *Tanbīh* and in the *Ikhwān*, would suggest a common source, or at least a common tradition.

It is perhaps in the last affirmation of the Brethren that the distorting effect of syncretism may be observed with the clearest evidence. The *Ikhwān* mention four schools that they believe to have emerged from the original doctrine, namely, the Pythagoreans, the Aristotelians, the Platonists, and the Epicureans. This assertion, which is in my view not necessarily related to the one expressed just before about the four

74 See Marquet, 'Sabéens I', pp. 54–61.

75 On this, see Chwolsohn, *Ssabier*, vol. 1, pp. 780–802. See also L. Massignon, 'Appendice III: Inventaire de la littérature hermétique arabe', in *La Révélation d'Hermès Trismégiste*, ed. R. P. Festugière (Paris: J. Gabalda, 1950), vol. 1, pp. 384–400; and Peters, 'Hermes'.

76 Ibn al-Nadīm, *Fihrist*, tr. Dodge, p. 746. See also F. Rosenthal, *Aḥmad ibn Tayyib al-Sarakhsī* (New Haven, CT: American Oriental Society, 1943), pp. 40–51.

77 Mas'ūdī, *Tanbīh*, ed. De Goeje, pp. 161–162.

'ancient chiefs',⁷⁸ and which does not seem to be supported by any other text of the period, proves only the Brethren's unawareness of even the most basic elements in the history of Greek thinking in Antiquity. In fact, there could hardly be a sharper contrast between *what they owe to* the above-mentioned schools — the Ikhwān's system is lavishly imbued with at least three of them, as everybody knows — and *what they know of* them in terms of historical evolution and significance in the process of transmission of knowledge. One may wonder, as Marquet did, why the Brethren include the Epicureans⁷⁹ (whom they do not seem to be much indebted to) rather than other famous Greek schools of Antiquity, like the Stoics⁸⁰ (to whom they undoubtedly owe a great deal more), but all this is, and is bound to remain, conjectural.

B. Philosophical Doctrines

In this sub-section, which is comparatively much larger than the first one, the Ikhwān provide a synthetic view of the philosophical tenets that they assign to those experts in the talismanic art. Characteristically, nearly all paragraphs of this sub-section begin with the words: 'And they allege' (*wa-za'amū*). In the list of allegations that follow, and even in the ulterior sub-sections of this chapter, it is worth noting that no one of the three names just mentioned — 'Šābi'ans', 'Harrānians', and 'Hanīfs' — ever appears for a second time. Harrān, the city, will be mentioned in the last sub-section of the account, about the Kādhā feast.

Summary

The world is finite since it is spherical. There is no commencement to its existence and no 'second one', as it is dependent on the Creator in the same way the effect is dependent on its cause. There are four things enabling terrestrial affairs to take place: (1) matter (that is, the four elements); (2) souls, animate and inanimate; (3) the impulse of the celestial world

78 For an attempt at connecting the four names of 'ancient chiefs' with these four schools, see Baffioni, 'Secret Sects', p. 16.

79 On this emendation, already put forward by Marquet, see my footnote to the English translation, p. 118.

80 Marquet, 'Sabéens I', p. 56, n. 1, with the following hypothesis: 'Peut-être n'ont-ils pas connu ses œuvres [referring to the works produced by the Stoa], et ses idées ont pu leur parvenir par le canal des autres courants de la pensée grecque.'

on the four elements; (4) the Supreme Divinity's preservation of the faculties of all existing beings and the allotment He has made of all existing beings with respect to the seven planets and the two outer spheres of the system, namely, the sphere of the zodiac and the ninth sphere, which is a tangent to it. Planets influence terrestrial affairs in various ways, as they affect climes, districts, cities, and villages alike.

As for souls, first there are those which are too elevated to be linked to any sort of body. These, which are called 'divine' (*ilahiyya*), fall into two groups: some, the 'angels' (*al-malā'ika*), are good by essence, and people seek to benefit from their good influence; others, the 'demons' (*al-shayātīn*) are bad by essence, and people seek to escape from their adverse effects. To each of the divine souls they address a specific invocation, with a specific incense, and they perform a specific ritual. Then, there are the souls which are attached to the bodies of the stars, whose influence upon the terrestrial world operates, therefore, in two different ways: according to the natural dispositions of their bodies and according to their souls. Finally, there are the souls that are linked to bodies as long as those bodies are alive. It is to this latter category that the human soul belongs, until the time when, after the passing-away of the body to which it has been attached, it departs and passes to the 'Sea of Tā'ūs' (*baḥr tā'ūs*). This is the sphere of ether (*al-athīr*), where the soul will suffer until the moment when it either falls again into an appropriate dwelling in matter or manages to take command of its own salvation.

By considering the character traits and habits of each soul, it is possible to know which road it is going to take. Bestial souls are those whose behaviour is similar to the behaviour of beasts; they will prove unable to do anything other than populating a dwelling and perpetuating their kind. Human and incarnated souls are those which, if they are healthy, may prove to have the capacity to ascend towards the spheres and live there for a while. Yet if these souls are ill, they may also possibly fall down and become attached again to bodies. Every religion and every school of thought leads its adherents to adopt certain kinds of character traits and to perform certain kinds of actions, making these adherents distinct or noteworthy for that. Traits of character are shared by all animal species, but each one is more powerful and apparent in one particular species: bravery with the lion, greed with the

pig, haughtiness with the peacock, and so on. As a rule, the soul will be transported towards the species corresponding to his most specific trait of character at the time of his death.

This method seems to be the opposite of that used by the physiognomist (*ṣāhib al-firāsa*), who infers the traits of character from external appearance. For every body subject to traits of character, felicity and torment will be mixed up with one another, so as to be a lure for these traits, as well as a bond during the whole period of their attachment. Indeed, the Ikhwān add a quotation from Sura 41 of the Qur'an: 'Your Lord is not ever unjust to His servants'.

The Brethren conclude this sub-section by stating — using the first person singular — that they have drawn these tenets from the very foundations and premises of those people, as a validation of their school with respect to magic and talismans. The rest, they say, was left aside because of its obviousness, or else because it is mentioned in the 'Book of Properties' (*Kitāb al-Khawāṣṣ*), as for instance the action of the magnet.

Commentary

Although most Arabic sources dealing with the Ṣābi'ans of Ḥarrān include a note on their doctrine,⁸¹ Shahrastānī provides the most detailed account. As mentioned above, Marquet's double article includes a systematic comparison of the data in both texts, which he organized in the following manner: (1) God; (2) the spiritual beings; (3) the world; (4) the beings here below / man's destiny; (5) the souls' retribution and metempsychosis; (6) astrology.⁸² For the sake of brevity, what follows here is a short summary of Marquet's argumentation, along the same lines and structure as his, together with his own concluding words. It does not pretend in any way to substitute for the original, which the reader is thus advised to consult, and for which the precise indications of the passages discussed are duly mentioned.⁸³

81 See Chwolsohn, *Ssabier*, vol. 1, pp. 679–825, for a thorough discussion of the sources available.

82 Marquet, 'Sabéens I', pp. 62–80.

83 References are to the Cairo edition of Shahrastānī's *Kitāb al-Milal wa'l-nihal*, ed. M. Badrān, 2 vols. (Cairo, 1947–1955). An annotated translation into French, equally based on the Cairo edition, has appeared since; see Shahrastānī, *Milal*,

In spite of the numerous merits of Marquet's demonstration, it seems necessary to make a serious *caveat*. As has been stated above, it is implicit throughout the comparison of texts that Shahrastānī provides an altogether seemingly neutral and objective account, whereas the Ikhwān — whose sympathy for, and indebtedness to, the Šābi'ans Marquet thoroughly assumes — would have turned their description of the Šābi'an doctrine into something much more acceptable for Muslims in general and Shi'i, nay Ismaili, Muslims, in particular. As a result, what Marquet compares in fact is not so much the Šābi'an doctrine as viewed by Shahrastānī and the Ikhwān respectively, as the Šābi'an doctrine in both accounts *with respect to* that of the Ikhwān, on the assumption that the latter owes a great deal of its substance to the former, and even that a first-hand transmission existed between the Šābi'ans of Ḥarrān and the Brethren of Purity.⁸⁴

(1) God: Shahrastānī and the Ikhwān agree on the fact that God, according to the Šābi'ans, is the Creator of the world, that this world depends on Him as the effect depends on the cause, and that God is utterly transcendent. But whereas Shahrastānī evokes a God that is at the same time one by essence and multiple, as being incarnated (*ḥulūl*) in the heavenly beings, the Ikhwān refrain from assigning such a 'pagan' and un-Islamic tenet to the Šābi'ans, having recourse instead — at least in their own philosophy — to the Neoplatonic concepts of 'Universal Intellect' and 'Universal Soul' in order to save God's unity.

ed. and tr. Gimaret, Monnot, and Jolivet. The section on the Šābi'ans is found on pp. 97–172 of the second volume.

- 84 See De Smet, 'Platon et Pythagore', p. 27: 'Ainsi, Yves Marquet a voulu expliquer la présence de nombreux éléments pythagoriciens et platoniciens dans les *Rasā'il Ikhwān al-Šafā'* en supposant que les Ikhwān avaient fréquenté les Sabéens de Ḥarrān. C'est à Ḥarrān qu'ils auraient été initiés à la philosophie pythagoricienne et platonicienne: à mesure qu'ils progressaient dans leur initiation, les Sabéens leur montraient et leur expliquaient certains livres de Platon et de Pythagore'. De Smet also notes (p. 28): 'Il n'y a évidemment aucune preuve que les Ikhwān — dont on ignore d'ailleurs l'identité précise, si ce n'est qu'ils étaient établis à Bassora, pas très loin de Bagdad — aient jamais mis les pieds à Ḥarrān'. As De Smet also rightly points out, Marquet's last work, namely, *Pythagoriciens*, rests entirely on the assumption that the Brethren were taught philosophy by the Šābi'ans.

(2) The spiritual beings: Shahrastānī's report consists in saying that the spiritual beings are forms that are despoiled of matter, and that the Ṣābi'ans regard them as naturally pure in terms of substance, hierarchic station, and actions — a conception that closely parallels the Ikhwān's own theory, except that in their case, again, the Intellect and the World Soul are introduced to serve as intermediaries between God and those spiritual beings. Another clear point of convergence is the assertion, in both accounts, that there are spiritual beings attached to the planets in order to govern them and others — either good ('the angels') or bad ('the demons') by essence — which remain unattached, although the modalities of their actions are not exactly the same in the *Milal* and in the epistle 'On Magic'.

(3) The world: The Ṣābi'ans posit the same kind of theory according to both Shahrastānī and the Ikhwān, to account for the influences of the stars — owing to the spiritual beings that are attached to them — on the four elements that constitute the sublunary world. The distinction made between universal effects originating from universal spiritual beings on the one hand, and particular effects arising from particular spiritual beings on the other hand, is also similar in both accounts. What differs, not between the two reports but between the Ṣābi'an doctrine and the Brethren's own representation is, as has been already mentioned, that God is said to be incarnated in the former view, whereas it befits the World Soul to act as intermediary in the latter.

(4) The beings here below / man's destiny: According to Shahrastānī's presentation, matter, whose obscurity contrasts with the light of the spiritual beings, is responsible for the evil and the corruption in this world. Corporeal bodies differ from one another according to the combinations of the four elements with which they are made up. Man, too, is made up of the four elements and shares with all other living species the possession of a vegetative and an animal soul, both of which incite him to come closer to the animal condition. Yet he alone also possesses an angelic soul, by which he is induced to approach the spiritual beings, that is, the angels. Although the human soul is, in a way, determined by the temperament, it also keeps a certain free will that makes most people hesitate between the two directions. Only those who are helped by God's mercy — as, for instance, the prophets — are

definitely attracted to the angelic condition. All these elements, even sometimes the terminology itself, are to be found in the *Rasā'il* as well. In Marquet's view, they fit so well with the Brethren's doctrine that one might think that this presentation was taken directly from the *Epistles*.

(5) The souls' retribution and metempsychosis: The Šābi'ans in Shahrastānī's account postulate the existence of an infinity of astral cycles, each with a period of 36,425 years⁸⁵ and each beginning with the appearance of a perfect man named Adam. Thanks to God's incarnation, the beginning of each cycle is also marked by the appearances of a couple of each animal species in each clime by which the species will be perpetuated up to the end of the cycle. The same beings are incarnated again, and more or less the same things occur in the following cycle, endlessly. Metempsychosis is the way the souls are compensated, in this world, as a result of their behaviour in the previous cycle. As for the Brethren, they speak of two different kinds of human souls: the healthy one, able to ascend towards the heavenly spheres, and the ill soul, which, after death, is constrained to go to the sphere of ether — the highest and hottest of the spheres of the world here below — so as to be chastized. Either this soul ends up finding a way to its salvation or else it is then forced to descend again to earth so as to reincarnate itself. Depending on the dominant character trait at the time of death, the Šābi'ans of the Brethren are able to predict in which animal species a soul is going to be reincarnated. In this case, Marquet is forced to admit a compatibility far less obvious between the Šābi'an tenets and the Brethren's own beliefs: 'Pas question, pour eux [the Ikhwān], qu'une âme se réincarne, ni surtout qu'une âme humaine se réincarne dans un corps d'animal, même si elle est descendue plus bas que bien des animaux.'⁸⁶ As for astral cycles, the Brethren clearly do not assign the same function to them as do the Šābi'ans. But it remains a fact that great cycles — and most especially a 36,000-year

85 I think Chwolsohn (*Ssabier*, vol. 1, pp. 768–769) was right to point that 36,425 years corresponds to the multiplication by 25 of 1,461 years, that is, the Sothis period referred to as the 'Egyptian Great Year' by the late Roman author Censorinus in his famous enumeration of great cycles (*De Die Natali* 18.11). See also note 147 on p. 131 below.

86 Marquet, 'Sabéens I', p. 74.

cycle determined by the movement of equinoctial precession⁸⁷ — do play a crucial role in their philosophy.

(6) Astrology: Both Shahrastānī and the Ikhwān mention that astrology was invented in order for people to get closer to the spiritual beings, with a double objective: first, to have a better life in this world, by obtaining satisfaction for a need; secondly, to obtain the possibility of going to the world hereafter, by purifying one's soul. Concerning the rituals performed, both statements also agree in underlining the astro-magical character of their components (sacrifices, incantations, foods, gestures, dress, and the like), which are meant to correspond to the nature of the spiritual being invoked. Likewise, they also both make clear that the construction of temples to the spiritual beings is decided on astrological grounds.

As expected, Marquet concludes this comparison of data by stressing how much the Ikhwān themselves are indebted to the Šābi'an doctrine — in spite of some clear divergences of view which they sought to amend:

Les Ikhwān se sont séparés des Harrāniens sur des points importants de doctrine: incarnation divine, éternité du monde, création et hiérarchie des êtres spirituels parfaits, le mal, la réincarnation et la rétribution, enfin la prophétie. Mais il est clair que la doctrine harrānienne (hermétisme magico-astrologique et hermétisme « philosophique » pénétré dès l'origine de pythagorisme, de platonisme, d'aristotélisme, d'épicurisme et de stoïcisme) a servi de base à la doctrine des Ikhwān. Ceux-ci ont seulement corrigé les points inacceptables pour eux, musulmans et shī'ites (encore que l'influence harrānienne reste sensible même sur ces points-là) à l'aide du néo-platonisme d'une part, des données bibliques ou chrétiennes et surtout coranique de l'autre.⁸⁸

C. The Eighty-Seven Temples

Out of those principles, the people about whom the Ikhwān talk are said to have inferred and elaborated new speculations.

87 On this, see my *Annus Platonicus; A Study of World Cycles in Greek, Latin and Arabic Sources* (Louvain: Peeters, 1996), pp. 143–145.

88 Marquet, 'Sabéens I', pp. 79–80.

Summary

They have thus posited that, since the stars and the souls exert their influences on the bodies, and since some of them exert a propitious influence, it became necessary to approach them and to implore them in order to restore what is corrupt, with ultimately two aims in mind: first, the goodness of life in this world, and second, the acquisition of freedom in the world hereafter.

Performing natural actions in accordance with the nature of a star or a soul, yet without any concern for the astrological science will prove to be rather inefficient, since the star or the soul will have been elected by volition only. Likewise, using the method of astrological elections, yet without any consideration for the natural actions (as the people who are ignorant of the art of talismans and magic usually do), will prove to be equally inefficient, since the election of the star or the soul will have been done by nature only. The only method to reach the objective is, therefore, to combine the two sciences of astrology and magic, joining nature and volition with one another.

By observing which cities fall under the authority of a given star at the moment when it is in its 'exaltation' (*sharaf*), in its 'domicile' (*bayt*), and in its 'decan' (*wajh*), and by waiting for the moment when the star comes into some of these 'dignities' (*huzûz*), one could start the building of a temple — a temple whose shape would be appropriate for that star in the city for which this dignity had been determined.

Those people are also said to have established a rule for the rituals and to have fixed them in a constitution which they left with the 'custodians' (*sadana*). It included a list of the matters that it was thought fitting to ask for when the star was in one of its dignities, together with a list of the feasts to be celebrated for the star in its particular temple throughout the year. Anyone needing to know which temple had been allotted to the star would thus find it and, this done, would make a vow to the right temple. He would go out on the appropriate day of a feast and perform the action prescribed in order to obtain satisfaction from it.

This point is illustrated with some examples of astrological configurations — with the places of exaltation of the Sun and the Moon being calculated with respect to the ascendant — that enable one to perform magic with respect to certain particular issues.

Those people have dedicated temples to the planets, in agreement with the number of their dignities: one to the Sun at the time of its exaltation, another one to the Moon at the time of its exaltation, and so on with all the planets. And because they knew from experience the powers of the fixed stars in terms of influence, they have dedicated temples to those fixed stars as well, as for instance to the 'Dog of the Giant' (*kalb al-jabbār*), that is, Sirius. In addition to these, they have also made other temples to unattached souls, as in the case of Pluto, the King of Hell and the Abyss, Poseidon, the King of the Sea, and various others. In all, they have completed eighty-seven temples.

Commentary

The Ikhwān's emphasis in this sub-section is on the necessary complementarity between astrology and natural magic, since astrology is concerned with the nature of the stars, while magic is concerned with their volition. This complementarity is the justification with which they credit the Ṣābi'ans for having chosen to build their temples at moments that were believed to be the most appropriate.

The Brethren speak of three kinds of temples: for the planets, for fixed stars, and for deities unattached to celestial bodies. Each planetary temple is meant to be shaped in the form required by the dignities of the planet and the city on earth where these dignities can be determined to be most efficient.

The classical sources in which information may be found on the Ṣābi'an temples, their shapes, and locations on the surface of the earth are Mas'ūdī's *Murūj al-dhahab*,⁸⁹ Shahrastānī's *Kitāb al-Milal wa'l-niḥal*,⁹⁰ and Dimashqī's *Nukhbat al-dahr fi 'ajā'ib al-barr wa'l-baḥr*,⁹¹ to which one should add a reference to Abū Ma'shar's *Kitāb fi buyūt al-'ibādāt* (the 'Book on Houses of Worship') as preserved by Bīrūnī in the *Āthār*.⁹² This material has been usefully investigated by Daniel

89 Mas'ūdī, *Al-Murūj al-dhahab*, ed. 'Abd al-Ḥamid, 4 vols. (Cairo, 1948), vol. 2, pp. 236–264.

90 Shahrastānī, *Milal*, ed. Badrān, p. 790; see also Shahrastānī, *Milal*, tr. Gimaret, Monnot, and Jolivet, vol. 2, pp. 171–172.

91 Dimashqī, *Nukhbat al-dahr*, in Chwolsohn, *Ssabier*, vol. 2, pp. 380–414; see also Dimashqī, *Nukhbat al-dahr fi 'ajā'ib al-barr wa'l-baḥr*, tr. A. F. Mehren as *Manuel de cosmographie du Moyen Âge* (Amsterdam: Meridian, 1964), pp. 41–46.

92 Bīrūnī, *Al-Āthār al-bāqīyya*, ed. C. E. Sachau, 2 vols. (London: Kegan Paul, 1910),

Chwolsohn,⁹³ Jan Hjärpe,⁹⁴ and Charles Genequand,⁹⁵ and is also briefly discussed by David Pingree.⁹⁶ As has been pointed out by various scholars, the historical existence in Harrān of geometrical temples for the planets, such as those described by Mas'ūdī, Shahrastānī, and Dimashqī, is most unlikely. Both Genequand and Pingree highlight the pivotal role played by Abū Ma'shar, an expert in forgeries, in the transmission of this bulk of doctrines and beliefs. This he may have achieved via the *Kitāb fi buyūt al-'ibādāt* but probably also via the *Kitāb al-Ulūf* (the 'Book of Thousands') with its legendary reconstruction of the history of science.⁹⁷

The Brethren do not go into the details of these geometrical constructions, but they share the theoretical principles subtending those views with the above sources, with the *Ghāyat al-hakīm*, and with other texts of astral magic. What is peculiar to their account is the indication that the number of temples completed by the Šābi'ans throughout the world was eighty-seven. The figure is given by *lām*, *nūn*, and Beirut, and is further confirmed by an allusion, later in the description, to the names of the 'eighty-seven angels, male and female', together with the name of Jirjās. In fact, as both this statement and the next section (on the temple of Jirjās) make clear, we should consider a total of eighty-eight temples (with as many angels) in all, thus including the temple of Jirjās.

How was this figure arrived at? The Brethren do not tell us, nor do they seem to give their reader enough information for him to guess. In addition to the seven planetary temples, they only mention as examples a few temples devoted to a star (or a catasterism) and some others devoted to unattached souls. Eighty-eight looks like a symbolic value, just as is the 'nine and nine' (or ninety-nine) mentioned later on in the text in relation to the number (of times, supposedly) the priest

p. 205.

93 Chwolsohn, *Ssabier*, vol. 2, pp. 366–379 and pp. 637–647 (for Mas'ūdī), pp. 380–414 and 647–698 (for Dimashqī).

94 Hjärpe, *Analyse*, pp. 68–83.

95 Genequand, 'Idolâtrie', pp. 109–129, especially pp. 110–122.

96 Pingree, 'Šābiāns of Harrān', pp. 8–35, especially pp. 26–29.

97 Pingree, *The Thousands of Abū Ma'shar* (London: The Warburg Institute, 1968).

presses the iron ring on the young man's thumb. In the footnotes to the translation I nevertheless suggest a way to interpret this figure.

D. The Temple of Jirjās

From now on the Brethren will focus their account on one single temple, no doubt regarding it as especially important. The temple is described in great detail.

Summary

They also made a temple at a time when all the planets were in their dignities. This temple is made of two symmetrical parts, one for the men and one for the women. It consists, in each case, of a big hall, orientated to the north, and with no opening of any kind in its walls so as to remain in the most complete obscurity when the door, on the southern side, is closed.

The twelve zodiacal signs were marked with their names, and each one of the planets was represented with the appropriate material: the Sun with gold, the Moon with silver, Saturn with iron, and so on. These planets were shaped according to the form they had in the sign of their exaltation (as is mentioned in the books of astrology). Then, in front of these images, there was a mat, with seven discs of chalk displayed in the manner of targets. On each disc there was a censer relating to a particular planet. These were ranged according to the rank of the planet (from Saturn, the farthest-removed from the idols, up to the Moon, the closest one) and possessed a number of rings in proportion to this rank (from seven for Saturn, to one for the Moon). Each censer had a distinct incense: aloeswood for the Sun, frankincense for the Moon, and so on.

On the left side of the planets, there was a series of utensils: a jug, three long rods of tamarisk that had been cut before the cry of the cock, a knife of iron with a handle of iron, and an iron ring whose fine stone, the dimension of a finger-nail, was engraved with the image of Jirjās, 'chief of the Iblis' (*ra'īs al-Abālisa*). There, the young people entered into their religion (*dīn*). There, cocks were sacrificed. There, the two secrets (which are mentioned further down in the text) were recited.

Commentary

Since Marquet's article, it is commonly assumed that Jirjās (as found in the Beirut edition; the name could as well be read 'Jurjās' or 'Jarjās') is to be identified with the Greek Gorgon,⁹⁸ itself assimilated with Hecate, or, more precisely, the triple or triple-faced Hecate at a later stage.⁹⁹ In addition to a phonetic resemblance between the names, this identification rests on a supposed similarity of function between the demon of ancient Greek mythology and the deity referred to in the present text. True enough, the ancients conceived the Gorgons (usually in the plural) as evil beings whose hideous appearance they often used to emblazon on a great variety of objects for an apotropaic purpose. All these elements would seem to fit well with the present account and the description that follows in the text. But Marquet's identification also has its flaws. First, to derive 'Jirjās' from Γοργώ is a conjecture that has problems from the linguistic point of view. Marquet himself must have realized this since he writes in a footnote: '*Jirjās*: en grec Γοργώ, mais aussi Γοργάς' ('Gorgas' being a far less attested form of the name). Secondly, and in my view much more significantly, there is not a single document of presumably Ṣābi'an provenance that attests to the importance of a cult to the Gorgon in Ḥarrān. Chwolsohn, usually so eager to draw parallels or links between personifications of all sorts, does not even mention the Gorgon. How is this silence of our sources to be explained, especially when we consider the Ikhwān's emphasis on the uniqueness of the temple of Jirjās, the only one to have been erected 'at a time when all the planets were in their dignities'? I would consider the lack of any evidence to support Marquet's identification with the Gorgon as a major argument against it.

98 Marquet, 'Sabéens I', p. 45.

99 Marquet, 'Sabéens II', pp. 86–87: 'Il semble que notre Gorgone ḥarrānienne ait été assimilée à Hécate et ait représenté les deux Hécates: l'Hécate «simple» et l'Hécate «triple». L'Hécate simple, assimilée à Séléné et représentant la lumière de la lune, était bienfaisante. L'Hécate triple, ou infernale, portière de l'enfer et gardienne de Cerbère, assimilée à Perséphone, était malfaisante. On la représentait parfois sous la forme d'une lune à la face ricanante. Elle avait donné naissance à des démons affreux.... Déesse de la magie, elle avait été l'initiatrice des pratiques magiques funestes.'

An indication found in *Nabatean Agriculture*, allegedly translated into Arabic by Pseudo-Ibn Waḥshiyya, may offer us an alternative solution. But before we turn to this work we need to make some preliminary remarks on the Brethren's account taken as a whole. The first observation is precisely regarding the necessity of considering the Ikhwān's chapter on Ḥarrān, including the sub-section on the Kādhā feast at the end, as forming one single unit. Indeed, towards the end of the Kādhā feast sub-section, the authors note the following:

And, up to this day, they go out on the twentieth day of Nisān of every year, so as to expect the advent of this idol. And they call that feast the feast of Kādhā. And their waiting for the advent of that idol is like the waiting of the Jews for the Messiah. And they preserve the left wing of the cock that has been sacrificed in the hall of the men and they attach it to the bellies of the pregnant women and to the necks of the young men, in the manner of an amulet.

In addition to other important precisions such as the place of the Kādhā feast in the calendar and the unique significance of the feast in terms of expectations for its worshippers, the text includes an element that unambiguously connects that feast with what the Brethren have previously said about Jirjās, its sanctuary, its rituals, and its secrets. For 'the hall of the men' as they mention here — with the explicit reference to the wing of the sacrificed cock — is naturally the same as that which they describe at some length at the beginning of the account. This means that, in the Brethren's view, the temple of Jirjās is the same as the one where the Ḥarrānians would go on the twentieth day of Nisān of every year. Ibn al-Nadīm and Bīrūnī agree in reporting that this is the day on which a pilgrimage was made to Dayr Kādhā in the outskirts of Ḥarrān, and al-Nadīm underlines the importance of that day in the Ḥarrānian calendar.¹⁰⁰

100 See Ibn al-Nadīm, *Fihrist*, tr. Dodge, p. 767: 'On the twentieth day they go out to Dayr Kādī, which is a sanctuary near one of the gates of Ḥarrān known as Bāb Funduq al Zayt. They slaughter three *zabrukh*, a *zabrukh* being a bull. One is for the god Cronus, who is al-Zuhāl (Saturn); one is for Arīs, who is al-Mirrikh (Mars), the Blind God; and one is for the Moon, which is Sīn. They also slay nine lambs: seven for the seven deities, one for the god of the jinn, and one for the Lord of the Hours. They also burn [offerings of] many lambs and cocks.' See

Now, the author of *Nabatean Agriculture* stresses the similarity between two stories, one Šābi'an and the other Christian, and the related days of feast in each calendar. The primitive story is that of the Babylonian Tammūz (eponymous of the month), a god of vegetation and regeneration who, as a life-death-rebirth deity was mourned at a certain period of the year. What Pseudo-Ibn Waḥshiyya has to say about this god, in relation to which the story of Tammūz developed with the Šābi'ans of Ḥarrān, and about how it should be connected to a story told amongst the Christians, all deserves to be quoted here at some length. I shall quote here from the English translation of the relevant section by Jaakko Hämeen-Anttila in his recent 'Continuity of Pagan Religious Traditions in Tenth-Century Iraq':

All Šābians, both Babylonian and Ḥarrānian, weep and lament for Tammūz in a feast of theirs which is attributed to Tammūz.[...] When I was translating this book, I read in it that Tammūz was a man about whom there is a story and that he was killed in a horrible way only once, and there is no more to his story. They have no knowledge of him except that they say: 'So we have known our fore-fathers to weep and lament during this feast ascribed to Tammūzā'. So I say that this is a memorial feast which they held for Tammūz in the ancient times and which has continued until the present although the story about him has been forgotten because of the remoteness of his time. In our times, no one of them knows what his story was and why they actually weep for him. The Christians have a memorial feast which they hold for a man called Jūrjīs who, so they claim, was killed many times in horrible ways, but he returned to life each time, until he died at the end of the story which is too long to be explained. It is written down in a book which the Christians possess and they hold a memorial feast of Jūrjīs. The story of this Tammūz which we already mentioned is just like that of Jūrjīs. I do not know whether the Christians heard of the story of Tammūz who lived in the ancient times and they changed the name of Jūrjīs at his place and then related the story of Tammūz under the name of Jūrjīs and disagreed with the Šābians concerning the time (of the feast). The Šābians hold the memorial feast of Tammūz on the

also al-Birūnī, *Āthār*, tr. Sachau, p. 317: 'Hilāl Nisān: 20. Feast of the assembly at Dair-Kādhi'.

first day of Tammūz and the Christians hold the feast of Jūrjīs at the end of Nisān or a little before it.¹⁰¹

This testimony casts some light, it would seem, on the Ikhwān's account. Linguistically, it provides perhaps a clue to the name 'Jirjās' (or 'Jurjās'), and Hāmeen-Anttila himself had caught a glimpse of this in a note: 'The name [Jūrjīs] is curiously close to that of the god or demon Jirjās mentioned in *Rasā'il Ikhwān al-Ṣafā'* IV, 296'. On either of the various forms it may take in an Arabic transliteration — 'Jirjās', 'Jurjīs', or even 'Jirjīs', as we have seen in the case of the Platonic Gyges, above in the epistle — this name is much more easily derivable from the Greek name Γεώργιος (etymologically, 'farmer'), all the more so in a Christian context, than it is from the Gorgon. The other interesting detail is the date of the feast. Pseudo-Ibn Waḥshiyya explains that the Christian day of mourning for Jūrjīs/St. George takes place 'at the end of Nisān or a little before it', an assertion that fits well with Ibn al-Nadīm's indication that the Kādhā feast is celebrated on the twentieth day of Nisān.

On the amalgamation between Christian and Ṣābi'an doctrines, Hāmeen-Anttila rightly observes:

The transmission of pagan material to Christianity is often obvious. The mechanisms of this transmission are also relatively clear but I cannot refrain from mentioning here that, according to al-Maqdisi (*Bad'*, IV, 42), some Christians in the vicinity of Ḥarrān had adopted Ḥarrānian doctrines. What he probably should have said, is that some Ḥarrānians had converted — sincerely or not — to Christianity, bringing along with them much of their religious lore and wisdom. Instead of weeping for Tammūz they were now weeping for St. George.¹⁰²

The Ikhwān's section on Kādhā is, as we shall see, the only part for which a quasi verbal parallel — namely, in the *Fihrist* of Ibn al-Nadīm — may be provided. On the basis of what is frequently observed in al-Nadīm's report on the Ḥarrānians, would it be so absurd to postulate a certain level of Christian contamination in the case of the Ikhwān as well?

101 Quoted from Hāmeen-Anttila, 'Continuity', pp. 89–107, here pp. 98–99. Hāmeen-Anttila points out that the St. George's feast is on the 23rd of April.

102 Hāmeen-Anttila, 'Continuity', p. 100.

The level of syncretism shown by those accounts on Harrān, and by our text in particular, invites us to a certain prudence, and we are certainly well advised not to embark for explanations that pretend to be simple and decisive.¹⁰³ It is not impossible, although most improbable in my view, that the Brethren's description keeps some trace of an amalgamation previously made between the antique Gorgon and St. George/Tammūz.

Turning to those elements that make up the scenery of the temple of Jirjās, we meet with other difficulties of the same nature. The Ikhwān mention the orientation of the hall to the north, the representations of the planets, their corresponding incense and discs, a variety of utensils designed for the initiation ceremony, and, of course, the cock to be sacrificed. As Tamara Green notes:

There is much in this performance that is familiar. The setting itself is easily recognizable, for the statues of planetary gods, the representations of the signs of the zodiac, the seven discs representing the celestial spheres, and demonological and name magic all find their antecedents in Chaldean astrology, late antique Greek philosophy, and Hermetic theurgy as well as Mithraic doctrine. Nevertheless, the text does not yield an easy identification of a particular cult. Indeed, as Marquet himself has admitted, every element affords multiple interpretations.¹⁰⁴

A good example of this is precisely that of the cock. The *Fihrist*, especially in the section devoted to the Šābi'an calendar of feasts, refers time and again to the custom of sacrificing cocks. In its quality of announcer of the day to come, the cock has become a universal symbol of the victory of the light over darkness, and of rebirth after death. Marquet draws parallels with Pythagoreanism, Orphism, and Mithraism,¹⁰⁵ whereas Green adds further possible connections with the cock-like creature Sraosa of the Mazdeans and even with the late

103 Green, *City*, p. 210, suggests yet another interpretation, in my view inconclusive: 'It is also possible that Jirjas may conceal as well the Persian Ahriman, which is, similarly, the lord of the demons. Supporting evidence for this view might be adduced from the description of the *adyton*, with its signs of the zodiac and representations of the planets, both of which play, of course, an essential role in Mithraic doctrine'.

104 Green, *City*, p. 209.

105 Marquet, 'Sabéens II', pp. 87–88.

antique figure Abraxas.¹⁰⁶ As for the Brethren, who no doubt admired the bird a great deal for its capacity to cause people to 'wake up from the torpor of ignorance and the slumber of negligence' (to quote one from their most-beloved assertions), they feel it natural, as shall be seen in the next sub-section, to link the sacrifice of the cock by the Šābi'an priest with the last injunction about it as made by Socrates to his companion before his death.

Another example of a symbol that may be regarded as universal is the orientation to the north. Here again, Ibn al-Nadīm provides much evidence in the context of Harrānian Šābi'anism. He frequently refers to a ritual called the 'mystery to the north', usually associated with a jinn and with demons, and also states that the Šābi'ans 'have adopted one direction for prayer, which they have fixed towards the North Pole in its course'.¹⁰⁷ This time, Green points to similar rituals as part of the ancient Mesopotamian demonology, but we might as well adduce the motif of the two solstitial gates — one for the gods and the other for the humans — as elaborated upon a Pythagorean basis by various authors from Classical Antiquity.¹⁰⁸

E. The Initiation Ritual

Next comes the sub-section where an initiation ceremony, taking place inside the hall of the men, is minutely described by our authors, very much as a living scene to be looked at.

Summary

The chief of the priests enters the place, shortly before sunset. Having locked the door, lit the lamps, and taken the appropriate ceremonial posture, he starts giving a long and solemn speech, which is due to last until the cry of the cock. The sermon is addressed to Jirjās, whose power the priest invokes and whose clemency he implores at that moment

106 Green, *City*, pp. 210–211.

107 Ibn al-Nadīm, *Fihrist*, tr. Dodge, p. 746.

108 On this, see Guénon, 'Les Portes solsticiales', *Études traditionnelles* (1938), pp. 217–221; W. Hübner, 'Crater Liberi. Himmelspforten und Tierkreis', in *Bayerische Akademie der Wissenschaften Philosophisch-Historische Klasse, Heft 3* (Munich: C.H. Beck, 2006). See also my 'Le zodiaque de l'Énéide', *Latomus* 52 (1993), pp. 318–349.

in order to introduce a young man to 'our call' (*fī da'wati-nā*) and to allow him to hear the secret of 'our angels' (*sirr malā'ikāti-nā*). He warns that he is ready to sacrifice to Jirjās its fierce and awe-inspiring enemy — an enemy which various metaphors in the text invite the reader to identify with the cock.

When the morning comes, from amongst the people of his call who are wishing to hear the secret, one of the young men is undressed, fastened with a bandage, and introduced into the hall. Having at his side someone serving as his guarantor (*kafil*), he is led, walking backwards, to the chief of the priests. The priest solemnly asks him whether he wishes to enter the religion and have the secret revealed. Swearing on the young man's head, the priest also warns him not to divulge the secret and asks the guarantor for confirmation of all this. Whereupon, the priest recites the names of all the angels, male and female (there are eighty-seven of them), as well as the name of Jirjās, over the young man's head.

Then, at the moment when the priest grasps the knife, the guarantor intervenes to beg him to sacrifice the cock instead of the man, as a ransom or an offering in his place. The guarantor is asked by the priest to hand over to the young man his own ring, as a pledge that the secrets will not be revealed. The cock is sacrificed on the young man's neck, with a last address to Jirjās: 'O Jirjās, King of the Iblis, accept this victim and leave this young man to his parents and to the angels'. The iron ring, which has already been heated on a lamp, is branded on the young man's thumb ninety-nine times, and in some other places, using the tamarisk rods. The young man is dressed up with new clothes and leather boots, and a turban-cloth fastens his waist. The priest finally gives him a pinch of salt, tracing the form of a triangle with it. He does the same — *in all likelihood the entire procedure* — with each of the other companions.

Meanwhile, the crowd of people stays outside the hall of the secret, in the temple or nearby, performing their ablutions, accomplishing their vows and slaughtering various animals as offerings to the angels, and cocks specifically to Jirjās — a practice that the Ikhwān illustrate by referring to Socrates' last injunction in this world as reported by Plato in the *Phaedo*, namely, 'Slaughter a cock for me in the temple. It is a vow of mine'. The crowd outside also eat various sorts of meats,

except for cocks, which are consecrated to the secret and which only the elder priests eat inside the hall of the secret.

Commentary

Much of what has been said of the preceding sub-section could now be repeated. The elements making up the ritual as described here, although forming together a story not told elsewhere, are all individually comparable to motifs or creeds found in other, more or less ancient cults. The invocation of a spirit by a priest, the role of the guarantor, the substitution of the victim with an animal, the iron ring and the brand on the initiate, even his entry backwards and his nudity and binding before the initiation begins, all this is so common that it does not make much sense to look for historically traceable borrowings. One may attempt to distinguish those elements which are resolutely un-Islamic from those that might have some relation with Islam, as Carmela Baffioni did in her aforementioned study on the 'secrets sects' in the *Rasā'il*:

Many of the common elements of these kinds of ritual — whatever their origin may be: objects like the jug or the branches, the sacrificial victims and especially the cock, the knife and the ring (whose material may symbolize Saturn), the seal, the symbolic gestures of the boy and the priest, the symbolic clothes, the substitution for the victim — are quite alien to Islam, and some of them (e.g., the prayer after purification, the offerings to the planets with immolation, the cocks, the burning of victims, the change of garments, the signet stones, the setting of the table, the eating of sacred food, the shrine, the salt) are also mentioned by Ibn al-Nadīm. Other elements, however, such as some of the ritual gestures, the holy invocations, the purification rites, the *samā'*, clipping the nails and shaving, the sacrifice of animals, the prohibition to eat certain of them, may have some connection with Islam.¹⁰⁹

Now it is true that our classical sources on the Šābī'ans — Mas'ūdī, Ibn al-Nadīm, and Pseudo-Majrīṭī in the first instance — offer many close parallels with the Brethren's description. In a study devoted to astral magic in the *Haft Peykar* ('Seven Portraits') of twelfth-century Iranian author Neẓāmī, Živa Vesel nicely presented the four main elements or steps of the procedure, which may be summarized as

109 Baffioni, 'Secret Sects', p. 23.

follows: (1) to gather together the attributes of the planet whose description is given in the astrological works: the cloth with the colour of the planet; the ring made from its metal and bearing its stone; the suffumigation of its incense, and so on; (2) to elect the day in the week corresponding to the planet according to the 'Chaldaic' system and a specific astral conjunction; (3) to utter the prayer to invoke the planet, eventually with the sacrifice of animals; (4) to respect the prohibitions and specific prescriptions about food, to be in a 'purified' state, and to practise a rigorous asceticism.¹¹⁰

All those elements find their place in our text, and we shall indicate some of these parallels in the footnotes to the translation. But, in the end, the same two basic questions remain fundamentally unanswered: what should we consider as properly Šābī'an in this hotchpotch of rites and symbols? And to what extent should we believe that the Brethren themselves subscribed to these kinds of conceptions?

F. The Secrets

In this sub-section, the Brethren provide the reader with an explanation of what the secret consists of. In contrast to the previous sub-section, where only the secret of men was referred to, here the Ikhwān deal with both the men's and women's secret at the same time.

Summary

When the initiation of all the young men has been performed, the chief priest starts letting them hear the secret. In fact, there are two speeches, both longer than the suras of the Qur'an: one for the men (and exclusively for them) and one for the women (and exclusively for them). They contain the same number of words and letters as one another. But if one takes them together and inserts a word from one between every two words from the other, it will result in many combinations. Four amongst these combinations are said to include the 'canons' (*qawānūn*) and the 'demonstrations' (*barāhīn*) of the following four sciences: (1) medicine (*al-ṭibb*), by which the bodies are cured and ailments expelled; (2) alchemy (*'ilm al-kimiyā*), by which misery is expelled and

¹¹⁰ Ž. Vesel, 'Réminiscences de la magie astrale dans les *Haft Peykar* de Nezāmi', *Studia Iranica* 24 (1995), pp. 7–18, here p. 9.

damages are removed; (3) astrology (*'ilm al-ḥujūm wa-aḥkāmi-hā*), by which one is notified about what will happen before it happens; (4) the science of talismans (*'ilm al-ṭilasmāt*), by which the citizens reach the nature of kings, and kings the nature of angels.

The reason why those sciences cannot be unveiled to 'the mass of the common people' (*al-jumhūr min al-'āmma*) is the fear that would fill the elite (*al-khāṣṣa*) if the vulgar, with their evident lack of discernment, their evil natural dispositions, and their bad habits, were to acquire knowledge of sciences such as alchemy or medicine. It is thus a necessity to safeguard these sciences from those who are not worthy of them and who resemble the case reported by Plato in the *Republic* (and mentioned at the beginning of the present epistle), namely, the case of the shepherd who killed the king and took his place without being qualified for it nor worthy of it.

Commentary

This is arguably the most original part of the Brethren's account. With the mention of the two secrets, whose mixing with one another in the appropriate way gives birth to combinations that reveal the 'inner meaning' of the four hidden sciences, it also seems to me the most fantastic part of it. And if similarities or echoes should be mentioned, I would be inclined in this case not to point so much to eventual models of a remote past as to decisively modern elaborations (or, admittedly, re-elaborations) in the manner of Jorge Luis Borges' *Biblioteca de Babel* or Peter Greenaway's *Prospero's Books*.

My impression is that the Brethren do not borrow anything here, but rather work out something which fits with their own theories. It is curious indeed that the four sciences here referred to correspond almost exactly with those they have listed in the introduction to this epistle, that is, from totally outside the Harrānian context. Likewise, the justification of preserving this kind of knowledge from the common people looks like the mere repetition of what they had written at the beginning of the epistle: it does not seem to have any link with the sort of Ṣābi'an material they may have used for the rest of their account. The allusion to the previously mentioned story of Gyges should naturally be understood in the same way.

G. The Kādhā Feast

In this last part of their account on the Šābi'ans, the Brethren deal with a celebration that is being held on the twentieth day of Nisān in Kādhā, a place which the text situates to the east of Ḥarrān. The passage includes various names of deities, such as Qūlūs or Rabbat al-Till, that are not easy to identify in the manuscripts at our disposal. Fortunately, this section is also the only one for which a verbal parallel may be found in a mediaeval source, namely, in Ibn al-Nadīm's *Fihrist*, as has been noted earlier. The comparison of both texts, which show many textual correspondences with one another, helps us, in part, to make up for what would have otherwise been left largely to mere guesses. The details of this will appear in the footnotes to the translation.

As we have stated above, it is important to understand that this text is the continuation of that about the temple of Jirjās and the ritual performed therein, as described in great detail by the authors. This is inferred from the indication that, as part of the Kādhā celebrations, the Šābi'ans 'preserve the left wing of the cock that has been sacrificed in the hall of men'. This is not to say that the Brethren have used the same source for both the Jirjās and the Kādhā sub-sections. We might as well contemplate the possibility of an assemblage of different reports, in the same way as we observe in the case of Ibn al-Nadīm. It is not possible to trace back the origin of the Brethren's information, but it seems likely that they share with the author of the *Fihrist* a common source of information for the Kādhā feast.

H. Concluding Note

The Brethren conclude their long account by explaining that it corresponds to what they have heard and come to know regarding the rehabilitation of astrology and the sciences that derive from it, namely, the sciences of magic and the sciences of talismans.

Chapter 7 — Spells, Incantations, and the Evil Eye

With this penultimate chapter, just ahead of the concluding lines of the epistle, we find at last the justification for the exceptionally long title given to the *risāla* in the manuscript tradition, namely, '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 demons of the earth, the jinn, the devils, and the angels are; and on the means of their deeds and mutual influences'. As a matter of fact, this chapter about spells, incantations, and the evil eye is technically the only one which does indeed respond to the generic title in some way.

In order to affirm the reality of magic and to legitimize its practice, the Brethren start by enumerating a certain number of examples of effects or influences that anyone may observe in the surrounding world. The attraction of the magnetic stone for iron, the utility of the 'tail of the wolf' (a plant) for colic, or the damage caused by the sea-hare (a poisonous mollusc) to the lung: these examples are taken from each one of the three natural kingdoms, as one can see. But instead of providing a detailed list of these influences here, the authors content themselves with advising their readers to consult the 'Books of Properties'.

What follows is of a distinctly more philosophical nature. The Ikhwān recall Plato's theory of the soul, or better said, of the three souls: the appetitive, the irascible, and the rational. Their purport is to demonstrate how the rational soul exerts its influence on the two bestial souls by taming them and subjugating them in the measure of its own capacities. Naturally enough, the Brethren advise their readers to read from works by philosophers, such as the ethical treatises 'on the reformation of the traits of characters', but they do also make reference here to more theologically orientated works such as the treatises 'on the promise and the threats' for the hereafter.

These considerations about the taming of the two lower souls by the superior one lead them to contemplate a series of 'influences' exerted by man upon animals in order to steer and domesticate them. They mention some incitements under the form of whistling or chanting so as to make the animal — horse, elephant, camel, etc. — move or stop. Interestingly enough, they compare the influences upon souls with those upon bodies as performed by drugs and remedies. Talismans and spells are examples of the same nature. By knowing their (secret) properties, one can exert influence upon a body or a soul. Here again, the Ikhwān do not mention more than a few examples of talismans,

such as the talisman for the scorpion and the talisman for the wasp. They also mention the case of a man overpowering another man in an instant, comparing this to the sparks that 'suddenly appear from a fire and fall down on objects and burn them'.

In terms of textual sources, the last sub-section — on the evil eye and related issues — is probably the most interesting of this part of the epistle. In the absence of explicit Qur'anic citations, the Ikhwān have recourse to several prophetic traditions in order to demonstrate the reality of the evil eye and the reality of the magic designed to protect one from it. Amidst these Islamic references, they also report the Christian apocryphal tradition of Jesus addressing plants and stones as if they had indeed been endowed with souls.

Key to the Manuscripts

Although the present edition is concerned with the short version of Epistle 31 only, and has to operate it with respect to the long version and, in turn, to operate both in the general framework of the corpus, for this reason, I reproduce here the list of all the manuscripts at our disposal for the establishment of both the short and the long versions.

Manuscripts

- MS Am. Arab. 1681 (2 of 297) dated 1130 CE¹
- MS Bod. Arab. 3639 (2 of 307) dated ca. 1100 CE
- MS Brynm. 1331 (2 of 340) dated 1170 CE
- MS Capriolo 870 (2 of 347) ca. fifteenth century CE
- MS Capriolo 871 (2 of 347) dated 1477 CE
- MS Bod. Arab. 3639 (2 of 307) ca. fifteenth century CE

¹ This is the oldest known parchment of the *Kitāb al-Ḥikm* according to E. David, *Les livres de l'Alchimie et l'occultisme au Moyen Âge* (Paris: Éditions du Centre de Recherche sur l'Occultisme, 1975), p. 29.

(fol. 520b) [p. 283]

Epistle 52a
On Magic
I

[Being the eleventh epistle from the fourth
section of the *Epistles of the Brethren of Purity*,
on the Theological Sciences]*

In the name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful

On the quiddity [ماهية] of magic [سحر],¹ incantations [عزائم], the evil eye [عين], incitements [given to animals] [زجر],² intuition [وهم],³ and spells [زقي];⁴ on the modalities [كيفية] of the actions of talismans [طلسمات];⁵ on what the demons of the earth [عُقَّار الأرض],⁶ the jinn, the devils, and the angels are; and on the means of their deeds and mutual influences. The objective is to clearly expound that in (fol. 521a) the world there are autonomous and imperceptible agents that are called spiritual beings [روحانية].⁷

* This title has been standardized to match the others of this series; *lām* reads simply 'The eleventh of them', and adds the eulogy: *To Him we call for help*.

1 Note that the introductory line provided by MS Atif Efendi 1681 [ع] for the long version is similar, but not absolutely identical, to this one. It reads: 'On the quiddity [ماهية] of magic [سحر], incantations [عزائم], spells [زقي], divination [كهنات], auguries [فال], and auspices [زجر]'.

2 On *zajr*, originally a kind of augury based on the flight of birds, see T. Fahd, *La divination arabe* (Paris: Sindbad, 1987), pp. 438–450. From what the Ikhwān say of this practice below in Chapter 7, one should nevertheless infer that none of the definitions given by Fahd fits here. By *zajr*, the authors seem to refer to the general practice of taming various sorts of animals by giving them incitements.

3 The word *wahm* conveys a wide range of meanings in Arabic. These may be more or less positive, such as conjecture, guess, presentiment, imagination, fancy, illusion, deception, or error. The word appears in Chapter 7. The context does not allow us to determine the meaning with great accuracy, but it enables us to rule out negative connotations; in the translation, we have opted for the general and quite neutral 'intuition'.

4 See T. Fahd, 'Rukya', *EI2*, vol. 8, p. 600: 'Rukya, corresponding to Latin *carmen*, magical chant, consists of the pronouncing of magical formulae for procuring an enchantment'. See also Fahd, 'La connaissance de l'inconnaissable et l'obtention de l'impossible dans la pensée mantique et magique de l'Islam', *Bulletin d'Études Orientales* 44 (1992), pp. 32–44, p. 39. For the present translation, we have decided to render it with 'spell' and reserve 'charms' for the less frequent *nushar*.

5 The Arabic word *ṭilasm* (pl. *ṭilasmāt*), origin of 'talisman', derives (via the Persian) from the Greek τέλεσμα, whose original meaning seems to be the fulfilment of a religious rite by endowing an object with potency. On talismans, see Canaan, 'Decipherment', pp. 125–177.

6 The 'demons of the earth' are frequently mentioned in connection with Solomon's building of the Temple in Jerusalem; see, for instance, Ginzberg, *The Legends of the Jews* (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1968–1969), vol. 4, pp. 149–154. For the Arabic 'ummār (sg. 'āmīr) as designating demons, see Kazimirski, *Dictionnaire*, vol. 2, p. 366.

7 It should be remembered here that the *rawḥāniyyāt* ('spirituals' or 'spiritual beings') form the subject of Epistle 49 ('On the Modalities of the States of the

Chapter 1

Introduction

You should know, may God stand by you, my brother, that in the fifty epistles that precede this epistle,⁸ we have mentioned the varieties of science [علم] and the marvels of wisdom [حكمة]. We have classified them and have gathered together in them many sciences, a lot of objectives, and thoughtful wisdom. And we have clearly expounded them in accordance with what the levels [5] of the apprentices and the ranks of the students making use of them require. Yet just as it would not be appropriate for us to provide science to anyone unconcerned with it and not knowing its merit, likewise it is neither permissible nor allowed for us to forbid it from anyone seeking guidance [مسترشد] and studying it.⁹ For in this respect there is no point in being stingy with regard to someone who deserves it. It is fitting that those whom this epistle by our noble brethren has reached should hand over from it to all deserving people what is within the grasp of their understanding and

Spiritual Beings'), to which the present *risāla* refers in various places, and which in turn refers to this one; see the Introduction above (pp. 9–10). In Epistle 3 ('On Astronomy'), another of those epistles most frequently referred to in the present *risāla*, the Brethren define angels as 'excellent souls[...] that had once been incarnated but then had purified themselves, acquired perception, and separated from their corporeal envelopes, their essence becoming autonomous. They have been victorious and free, and have wandered in the emptiness of the spheres and the width of heavens. They shall rejoice, be happy, and take pleasure as long as the heavens and the earth exist'; see *Rasā'il*, vol. 1, pp. 142–143 (all such references are to the Beirut edition, unless otherwise noted). In the subsequent lines of that passage, the Brethren also define jinn and devils as 'evil and corrupted souls, which had once been incarnated but had then separated from their corporeal envelopes without being endowed with perception and without being polished. Having remained blind, deaf, and mute, they have been spread over the darkness[...] and have fallen into the abyss of the intermediate world[....] This is their condition up to the day they will be resurrected'.

8 On these indications, see the Introduction, pp. 7–8.

9 Forbidding science to those who are unconcerned with it and, conversely, providing it to those to who deserve it is a topos in the *Rasā'il*. This counsel already appears immediately after the 'Table of Contents' (*Fihrist*) that is given at the beginning of the corpus in the editions (see, for instance, *Rasā'il*, vol. 1, pp. 44–45). Poonawala notes that MS Atif Efendi 1681 'adds the above counsel very briefly at the end of the table of contents on the very authority of Abū Sulaymān (al-Maḡdīsī), one of the alleged compilers of the *Rasā'il*, according to Abū Ḥayyān al-Tawḥīdī'; Poonawala, 'Arabic Critical Edition', pp. 45–46.

known to be profitable to them and appropriate to their rank, gradually, according to the classification that we have established in the epistle of the *Fihrist* [the Table of Contents].¹⁰ Every time that the soul ascends to some degree in science and reaches some rank in understanding, it is raised up to what comes next and carried on towards what lies next, until the soul reaches the limit of its perfection — this [progression being made] [p. 284] according to four sections.

The first section [10] is that of the mathematical sciences [رياضية], with which one begins. The second section, that of the corporeal and natural sciences [جسمانية طبيعية], follows it. The third section, that of the sciences of the soul and the intellect [نفسانية عقلية], comes next. The fourth section, that of the nomic and divine sciences [ناموسية إلهية], is the last of them.¹¹

This epistle is the last one of the epistles from the fourth section, and it is the fifty-first. In this epistle we should like to mention the quiddity of magic [سحر]¹² and how talismans take effect. For these matters are like any known science or knowledge and [also] like some of the applied wisdom; we shall provide testimony for them with what we have heard from the savants [العلماء] and what we have got to know from the books of the ancients before us who lived in the past.

You should know, my brother, may God stand by you, that we see today, when hearing about magic, that most of the heedless people regard as preposterous whoever believes in it, and they deny their debt to whoever places it in the collection of the sciences which one [15] must examine and by the knowledge of which one becomes well

10 This reference to the 'Table of Contents' (*Fihrist*, not to be confused with Ibn al-Nadīm's work) as an epistle of its own is interesting. As I have pointed in the Introduction (pp. 7–8), the issue of whether to consider it as such or not is one of the many variables to be taken into account in determining the sum-total of epistles — a task which I would consider impossible to achieve given the present state of our knowledge regarding the manuscript transmission of the *Rasā'il*.

11 For a comparison of these four groups of sciences (which effectively correspond with the four sections and headings as preserved by the manuscript tradition) and the classification of the philosophical sciences as given in Epistle 7, see my 'Arts scientifiques', pp. 231–258, and 'Classification', pp. 58–82, especially pp. 72–77. In the manuscripts, the fourth section is traditionally given as 'the section of nomic, divine, and legal sciences'.

12 See Fahd, 'Sihr'.

educated — those being the pseudo-savants, the new-comers amongst the philosophers of our time, those who stay behind and who claim to be part of the elite amongst the distinguished people. This is because they consider the few who become impassioned with this science and who get absorbed in its study without any knowledge of it [to be] a stupid and brainless man or a light-headed woman or a foolish and stupid old woman. They remove their souls from the company of the man whose case is like this whenever hearing about magic and talismans, [with] disdain towards him, so as not to be linked with ignorance or with credulity about lies and fables. In doing so, those idiots amongst those studying this science study it with objectives that are idiotic and despicable to them, with no knowledge whose study is of necessity, nor [which has] purpose or objective to it. [20] They do not know that this [science] is part of philosophy [فلسفة], and that it is moreover part of the ultimate sciences of philosophy, since it is necessary to learn the preceding sciences before it.¹³

Amongst these [sciences there is] the science of the stars, which is the knowledge of three things: the stars [كواكب], the spheres [أفلاك], and the zodiac [بروج].¹⁴

13 The Brethren's point in this paragraph is to show that the validity of magic and the other secret sciences is generally spoiled in the eyes of the average man (i.e., the 'heedless people' above) by those people unable to get more from these sciences than a basic and superficial outlook. It is in fact those 'liars' whom the Ikhwān make responsible for the whole misunderstanding about the occult sciences. A passage very much in the same vein, and with more or less the same formulation, will be found at the end of Chapter 7.

14 In Epistle 3 ('On Astronomy'; see *Rasā'il*, vol. 1, p. 114.10–16), the science of the stars (*'ilm al-nujūm*) is said to be divided into three parts, which could *grosso modo* be identified with the following disciplines: (1) astronomy; (2) *computus* and time-measuring tables; (3) astrology. In Epistle 36 ('On Revolutions and Cycles'), the Brethren are concerned with astronomy and, to a much greater extent, astrology; see my *Révolutions*.

The zodiac has twelve zodiacal signs, the spheres are nine,¹⁵ and the known stars are 1,029, seven of which are planets, as we have mentioned in the third epistle [Epistle 3: 'On Astronomy'] of the first section from our book — [an epistle] which gives access to the science of the stars and the sum of what is required from this in view of its introduction.¹⁶

In addition to the zodiac, the stars, and the spheres, [p. 285] there are also the two nodes [عقدتان], (fol. 521b) of which one is called the Head, and the other the Tail.¹⁷ The Head indicates what is propitious, and the Tail indicates what is calamitous. These two [nodes] are neither stars nor apparent bodies, but rather [they are] concealed matters. The concealment of their essence [نات], and the apparentness of their actions, is an indication that in the world there are souls that are concealed to sensation [حس]. Their actions are apparent, whereas their essences are concealed; they are called the spiritual beings [روحانيين].¹⁸ We have

- 15 In the following order: Moon, Mercury, Venus, Sun, Mars, Jupiter, Saturn, the starry sphere, and the all-encompassing sphere (on the inner surface of which are fixed the zodiacal signs), whose existence is required to account for the equinoctial movement of precession. This all-encompassing sphere (*falak al-muhit*) is to be identified with the Prime Mover, and its period corresponds to the period of the diurnal motion, from east to west, in which all celestial bodies participate. On this, see my *Révolutions*, p. 54.
- 16 Cf. Epistle 3 ('On Astronomy'), which provides a more elaborate version of the same statement; *Rasā'il*, vol. 1, p. 115.3–6: 'There are 1,029 stars of a great size, which are perceived by observation. Amongst them, there are seven which are called planets [*sayyāra*], namely: Saturn, Jupiter, Mars, the Sun, Venus, Mercury, and the Moon.' The figure of 1,029 is to be understood as the sum of 1,022 (the number of the fixed stars as traditionally received since Ptolemy) and 7 (the number of 'wandering stars', that is, the planets).
- 17 The two nodes, technically referred to as '*ra's al-jawzahr*' (literally, the 'Head of the Dragon') and '*dhanab al-jawzahr*' (the 'Tail of the Dragon'), are the two lunar nodes, which correspond to the points of the sphere in which the Moon crosses the ecliptic from the south to the north and from the north to the south respectively. The revolution of these points, whose importance was usually held on a par with the planets themselves, plays a crucial role in the determination of eclipse cycles, as the Brethren report in Epistle 3 (see *Rasā'il*, vol. 1, p. 143). Mediaeval astrologers believed that the 'Head' exerted a beneficent influence, whereas they regarded the 'Tail' as malevolent. On this notion and the origin of this appellation, see my *Révolutions*, pp. 62–64; and Willy Hartner and Paul Kunitzsch, 'The Pseudoplanetary Nodes of the Moon's Orbit in Hindu and Islamic Iconographies', *Ars Islamica* 5 (1938), pp. 113–154. For the nodes in Islamic iconography, see Caiozzo, *Images*, pp. 213–228.
- 18 Faithful to their syncretic approach to reality, the Brethren do not hesitate to

mentioned them in the epistle that precedes this epistle [Epistle 49: 'On the Spiritual Beings'].¹⁹ They are the genera of angels, and the tribes of jinn, and the groups of devils.²⁰

The adherents of the sciences [5] of magic and talismans know this. Read that epistle of ours that is before this epistle, so as to understand this meaning at the completion and perfection of it [the previous epistle] once you have read it. What exists in this world in terms of actions from the spiritual beings will be confirmed to you, as we have mentioned, clearly expounded, and commented on in it [that epistle].

As for the knowledge of the actions of the stars and of their influences upon what is below the sphere of the Moon, [this] comes after the knowledge of their indications. It is part of the spiritual philosophy [الفلسفة الروحانية], of the divine support, and of the Lord's solicitude. The first of the savants related to this science was Ptolemy, the author of the book *Almagest* and of other books in this science.²¹ And there were other savants as well.

You should know, my brother, that the stars of the celestial sphere [10] are angels of God and of the realm of His skies. God, how powerful and lofty is He, has created them for the cultivation of His world, for the organization of His creatures, and for the governing of His arrangement. They are the vice-regents of God on His earth. They govern His servants and preserve the laws of His prophets by the

identify astronomical abstractions such as the two lunar nodes with spiritual beings in the manner of those referred to further down in the epistle by the Šābi'ans of Harrān. In Epistle 3 ('On Astronomy'), in a passage where they deal at some length with the two nodes and their secret essence, the Ikhwān also mention the spiritual beings as corresponding to either angels, jinn, or devils; see *Rasā'il*, vol. 1, pp. 142–143.

19 As already noted in the Introduction, this and other subsequent references to 'the epistle that precedes this epistle' are to Epistle 49, dealing with the spiritual beings, and not to Epistle 50 or Epistle 51. This bears evidence for some rearrangement in the sequence of the *Rasā'il*.

20 This is the same formulation and context as in Epistle 3 ('On Astronomy'); see *Rasā'il*, vol. 1, p. 142.

21 Ptolemy is the Brethren's classical authority on both astronomy and astrology. The *Almagest* is the ancient work referred to by far the most often in the *Rasā'il*. According to Baffioni, it is mentioned twenty-three times, while Euclid's *Elements* is cited fourteen times, and Aristotle's *Categories* and *De Interpretatione* eight times only; *Frammenti*, p. 36. As far as astrology is concerned, the Muslim world owed a great deal to Ptolemy's *Tetrabiblos*, also known as *Ἀποτελεσματικά*.

execution of their decrees, for His servants, for the sake of their well-being and the preservation of their order, under the best conditions.

You should know, my brother, that no one will be able to know the modalities of the influences of these stars and their acts upon whatever exists in this world in terms of bodies, spirits, and souls, except those who are firmly established in science, those who have attained a high degree in knowledge, those who examine the divine sciences, and [thise] who are supported by the support of God and by the inspiration they get from Him.²²

[15] You should know that the prime power [أَوَّلُ قُوَّةٍ] emanates from the Universal Soul [نَفْسُ الْكُلِّيَّةِ] towards the world, into the superior and luminous individuals, that is, the fixed stars [كَوَاكِبُ الثَّابِتَةِ], then, next to them, into the planets [كَوَاكِبُ السَّيَّارَةِ], then, next to them, into the four elements [أَرْكَانُ] that are below them, then into the existing individuals, namely, [p. 286] the minerals [مَعَادِنُ], the plants [بَنَاتُ], and the animals [حَيَوَانَ].²³

You should know, my brother, that the emanation [سَرِيَانُ] of the powers of the Universal Soul into all the universal and particular bodies is like the emanation of the light of the Sun and of the stars into the air and the projections of their rays towards the centre of the earth.

You should know that when it happens that, in a certain period of time, the planets find themselves at their apogees [أَوْجَاتُ]²⁴ or in their exaltations [أَشْرَافُ],²⁵ [20] and that some of them find themselves in the

22 That the prediction of future events is regarded as a privilege for those who are inspired by God is an idea that the authors also develop in Epistle 28 ('On the Limits of Human Knowledge'). See my 'Limites', pp. 479–503.

23 On the emanation scheme as developed by the Ikhwan on the basis of Plotinus' theory, see, for instance, Nasr, *Introduction*, pp. 51–74; and my *Brotherhood*, pp. 17–33.

24 The apogee (*awj*; Greek ὕψος) and the perigee (*hadid*; Greek ταπεινωμα) are the two points of a given orbit that are respectively the farthest from, and the closest to, the earth. As opposed to Ptolemy, who held that the Sun's apogee was fixed, Muslim scientists generally believed that the apogees of all the planets, except for the Moon, moved by the same motion as the starry sphere; see al-Bīrūnī, *Kitāb al-Taḥḥīm li-awā'il šinā'at al-tanjīm*, § 195; translated by R. Ramsay Wright as *The Book of Instruction in the Elements of the Art of Astrology* (London: Luzac and Co., 1934), p. 104.

25 The 'exaltation' (*sharaf*; Greek, ὕψωμα; Latin, *altitudo*) is the sign — sometimes even the degree of the sign — in which a planet is believed to exert its major

most excellent ratio [نسبة], which is called the musical [موسيقى] ratio [نسبة],²⁶ [then] those faculties from the Universal Soul are delighted and establish the conjunction of those stars with this world; then, the affairs of existents [كائنات] proceed according to the most equilibrinous mixture, the most natural disposition, and the best order. Such conditions are called happiness.

But if the case happens to be the opposite of that which I have mentioned,²⁷ the affairs will be the opposite. This is not due to the prime design, but rather to accidental causes, as we have clearly expounded [يُن] in the epistle on views and doctrines [Epistle 42: 'On

influence. The canonical list of the correspondences between planets and their exaltation signs is as follows: Moon in Taurus; Mercury in Virgo; Venus in Pisces; Sun in Aries; Mars in Capricorn; Jupiter in Cancer; Saturn in Libra. See Bouché-Leclercq, *L'Astrologie grecque*, pp. 193–199. See also my *Révolutions*, p. 85 for references to Greek and Arabic authors.

- 26 The theory of proportion (*nisab*) is the specific subject of the short Epistle 6 ('On Arithmetical and Geometrical Proportions'); see *Rasā'il*, vol. 1, pp. 242–257. The Brethren summarize there a theory which was well known from Antiquity, having already been developed by Archytas of Tarentum in the fourth century BCE. For a definition of the arithmetic, geometric, and harmonic (or musical) means, see Heath, *Greek Mathematics*, pp. 85–86: 'We are told that in Pythagoras' time there were three means, the arithmetic, the geometric, and the subcontrary, and that the name of the third ("subcontrary") was changed by Archytas and Hippasus to "harmonic". A fragment of Archytas' work *On Music* actually defines the three; we have the *arithmetic* mean when, of three terms, the first exceeds the second by the same amount as the second exceeds the third; the *geometric* mean when, of the three terms, the first is to the second as the second is to the third; the "subcontrary, which we call *harmonic*", when the three terms are such that "by whatever part of itself the first exceeds the second, the second exceeds the third by the same part of the third" [...]. Iamblichus, after Nicomachus, mentions a special "most perfect proportion" consisting of four terms and called "musical", which, according to tradition, was discovered by the Babylonians and was first introduced into Greece by Pythagoras. It was used, he says, by many Pythagoreans, e.g., (amongst others) Aristaeus of Croton, Timaeus of Locri, Philolaus and Archytas of Tarentum, and finally by Plato in the *Timaeus*.' The classical example for this 'musical proportion' is: $6:8 = 9:12$. On proportional relationships with respect to the Brethren's theory of music, see also Wright, 'Music and Musicology', pp. 214–247, especially, pp. 218–222.
- 27 This is the first of various occurrences in this epistle where the first person singular is used instead of the plural. These apparent slips of the pen are found elsewhere in the *Rasā'il*. The issue of whether the final compilation of the epistles (or at least some of them) is due to several authors or to only one (whose identity would in any case remain a matter of conjecture) is one of the multiple vexed issues surrounding this corpus.

Views and Religions'], in the chapter [باب] on the reasons and causes of vices.²⁸ Inform yourself, my brother, (fol. 522a) from there.

You should know, my brother, that, amongst people, there is no validity for anyone as to the knowledge of existents prior to their coming-to-be, since this is disturbed by life. On the contrary, this science is desired in order that one might be raised up to one's noblest part, and the vice therein be known thanks to the knowledge of causes and reasons, and the soul be woken up from the torpor of negligence and the slumber of ignorance; and [in order that] it resurrect from the death of sin, and the eye of discernment open up for it, and [that] it might know the realities of existing beings and confirm the issue of the return and asceticism in this world; and [in order] that the disasters of this world look unimportant to it [5], and that it not be sad or worried when it gets to know the necessities of the decrees of the stars and the sphere, as God's Messenger, God bless him and grant him salvation, mentioned, stating, 'To whoever practises asceticism in this world, disasters will look unimportant'.²⁹ The confirmation [تصديق] of this is the speech of God Most High [تعالى]: '*In order that ye may not despair over matters that pass you by, nor exult over favours bestowed upon you*'.³⁰

You should know, my brother, that these sciences are divided into five sections. The first is alchemy [كيميا], which banishes poverty and does away with adversity. The second is the science of astrology [أحكام النجوم], through which the science of what has been and what will be is perceived. The third is the science of magic [سحر] and talismans [طلسمات], by which subjects are joined to [the rank of] kings [p. 287] and kings to that of angels. The fourth is medicine [طب], by which the health of bodies is preserved and [by which] the occurrences of sicknesses are cured. The fifth is the science of asceticism [تجريد],

28 On this, see the Introduction, p. 8. The assertion that unfavourable phenomena exist in this world, but that they are due to accidental causes and are not part of the prime design is another topos of the *Rasā'il*. One finds the same argument in a more elaborated form at the end of Epistle 36 ('On Revolutions and Cycles'); see *Rasā'il*, vol. 3, pp. 264–265; and my *Révolutions*, pp. 100–101.

29 This seems to be a Shi'i hadith, whose most ancient authority seems to be Kulaynī, *Al-Uṣūl min al-Kāfi, Kitāb al-Imān wa'l-kufr. Bāb dhamm al-dunyā wa'l-zuhd fī-hā, raqm al-hadith*, 15 (Beirut, Dār al-Aḍwā', 1405/1985), vol. 2, p. 132.

30 Qur'an 67:23.

by which the soul gets to know its essence and is ennobled, after its deprivation [تجرد], above its resting place.³¹

In our epistle on the stars [Epistle 3: 'On Astronomy'], we have already talked about what may be [regarded as] the introduction to the knowledge requisite prior to this epistle.

Verily, the science of magic and talismans follows on from the astrological sciences, which it is subsequent to and dependent on. The benefits [that one can draw] from it are numerous and well known. Reports on talismans and their abundance have been heard. Amongst them, [there is] the report [on the talisman]³² which is for starlings and their carrying of olives,³³ and the talisman which is for the crocodile, and the talisman for bugs, and the talisman for snakes, and the talisman for scorpions, and the talisman [15] for wasps.³⁴ And there are others [i.e., talismans] about which reports have continuously been heard from people with whom connivance does not work, [for they are] in different periods and have separate approaches.

31 For a comparison of this list with that provided in Chapter 6, see the Introduction, pp. 13–14.

32 The word for 'talisman' does not appear here in the manuscripts, but the rest of the phrases make it clear that it must be added.

33 The story about this talisman is told by various Muslim authors, including Mas'ūdī, since the time of Ibn Khurradādhbih. It is usually said to derive from Balīnās, referring here in fact to Pseudo-Apollonius of Tyana. Regarding it as one of the four marvels of the world, Mas'ūdī (*Murūj*, ed. and tr. Barbier de Meynard and Pavet de Courteille, vol. 4, p. 94) speaks of a bronze tree in Rome surmounted by the statue of a starling also made of bronze. The legend has it that when the statue of the bird whistled, it would attract an enormous quantity of starlings, each carrying three olives, and that this magical harvest would enable the people of Rome to get enough oil for the whole year. In the *Muqaddima*, Ibn Khaldūn mocks Mas'ūdī for accepting this as genuine history; see Ibn Khaldūn, *Muqaddima*, tr. Rosenthal, p. 37: 'Al-Mas'ūdī reports another absurd story, that of the Statue of the Starling in Rome. On a fixed day of the year, starlings gather at that statue bringing olives from which the inhabitants of Rome get their oil. How little this has to do with the natural procedure of getting oil!' For other references about this legend, including Yaqūt (who explicitly refers to it as a talisman) and a fifteenth-century Ottoman avatar, see Yerasimos, *Fondation*, pp. 91–92.

34 Most of the talismans mentioned here are for animals feared for their bites or stings, which is hardly surprising since this is precisely what justifies the recourse to magic. On the interpretation of these talismans, see note 224 below.

Chapter 2

Magic with the Greeks

That said, it is a necessity for us to take in hand those individuals who disavow this science and who treat as a liar anyone giving credence to its validity on the basis of testimonies, parts of which were mentioned by the ancients in their books and recorded from their reports. Of this [anecdotal evidence] will be reported what has a patent notoriety. The subject of this will not be concealed from those who study it, and whoever talks about it will not be treated as a liar — [this is to make sure] that the idiots cannot find a way to treat us as liars.

The Story of Gyges

We say that, according to Glaucon [أغلقون],³⁵ Plato, the philosopher, in the second treatise [مقالة] from his book the *Republic*,³⁶ did mention [the following], stating:

Jirjīs [جرجيس],³⁷ who was of the people of the city [named] Europe,³⁸ [20] was a man who tended sheep, and he was an employee of a ruler who reigned over the city Europe in that period. In that time, there happened to occur rains and, with them, earthquakes. A piece of earth broke away, and a cavity was formed in the place where the man who tended sheep

35 Beirut has here “*alā ‘ulūw fi qadri-hi*” (‘with respect to the height of its power’, translated as such by Baffioni in her *Frammenti*), which is far-fetched and does not make good sense. The manuscripts provide something in the style of *a’lūman* (for *lām*) or *‘al-khalq min*’ (for *nūn*), both unintelligible. The emendation provided here — *aghluqun* — fits with the Greek original, since the account of Gyges is put into the mouth of Glaucon (Greek, Γλαύκων), Plato’s own brother and one of Socrates’ major conversants in the *Republic*.

36 See Plato, *Republic* II.359c–360b. For a thorough discussion of the passage, see the Introduction above, pp. 20–24.

37 A deformation of the original name Γύγης, no doubt influenced by the usual Arabic transliteration of the Greek name Γεώργιος, ‘George’ (as for instance in the name of the eighth-century Christian physician Jirjīs ibn Bakhtishū). For a possibility of contamination between this name and that of ‘Jirjās’ in Chapter 6, see the Introduction above, p. 58.

38 The Arabic is ‘*madīnat urubbā*’, which could here be translated with either ‘a city of Europe’ or ‘a city [named] Europe’. From the subsequent occurrence of the expression a little further down, dealing with the ruler who reigned over the same city, one has to infer that the second translation is the correct one. For this variation from the Greek original, see the Introduction, p. 21.

was. When the man saw that cavity, he marvelled at it and walked down to it. And there he saw marvellous things. There was, amongst all the things he saw, a horse worked out with copper, with small openings inside. He inspected the interior of the horse from those openings. (fol. 522b) As a matter of fact, inside the horse [there was] a dead human whose height, from what could be seen, was greater than the measure of a human; and he [that human] wore absolutely nothing [other] than a golden ring on his hand. He took that ring and walked away from the cavity.³⁹

It was agreed that the shepherds would gather together once a month, following their custom in terms of gathering together, [p. 288] in order to communicate to the king the issue of their flocks of sheep. This shepherd was present with them and he was wearing that ring. But while he was sitting with the other shepherds, it happened that he hit the ring with his hand and that he turned it around his finger, so that the stone was [now facing] the inner side, on the side that lay next to [5] his palm. But when he did that, he disappeared from [the sight of] those who were sitting with him, so much so that they did not notice that he was sitting, and they did not see him. They started talking about some affair — as [if this was] an indication that he had left them. And he marvelled at this speech. Then he hit his hand on his ring and turned its stone to the outside. But as he turned it, the people started to see him. When he understood that, he tried out his ring [to see] whether this power was in it. And he found that the very same matter happened, namely, that when he turned the ring to the inner side, he concealed himself and was veiled from view, and when he turned it to the outside, he became visible and people noticed him. From this moment, after experiencing this episode with his ring, he behaved amicably and resorted to tricks in order to be

39 Cf. Plato, *Republic* II.359d–e (tr. Shorey): '[The licence that I mean would be most nearly such as would result from supposing them to have the power which men say once came to the ancestor of] Gyges the Lydian. They relate that he was a shepherd in the service of the ruler at that time of Lydia, and that after a great deluge of rain and an earthquake the ground opened and a chasm appeared in the place where he was pasturing; and they say that he saw and wondered and went down into the chasm; and the story goes that he beheld other marvels there and a hollow bronze horse with little doors, and that he peeped in and saw a corpse within, as it seemed, of more than mortal stature, and that there was nothing else but a gold ring on its hand, which he took off and went forth [...]'.

amongst the number of deputies to the king. And when he got [close] to him, he killed him and became king at once.⁴⁰

Conclusion by the Ikhwān al-Ṣafā'

Think over [this]: would you be of the opinion that Plato, the philosopher, with [10] his excellence and his intelligence, would have related this narrative in one of his books (namely, the one he composed on the republic) and that, in spite of this, he would have allowed one to firmly believe and assume that he was of the view that this talisman — I mean, the ring of which mention was made before — had manifested its effects for the sake of the wisdom beyond which there is no end, so as to attain the [full] extent of the power of action, which is apparent in the effect operated by it? On the contrary, the reason which urges those newcomers to regard as a lie and to disavow something like this is their laziness, their meagre longing for learning and understanding, and their lack of shame!

Those individuals carry the burden of what they do due to their ignorance of these sciences, and [due to] the fact that they treat as a liar whoever gives credence to their validity, because they find this easier for them and [15] lighter [in terms of] burden.

Take care, my brother, not to take their path, nor to follow their examples, nor to enter into partnership with them, nor to imitate them!

40 This final phrase is, along with the above-mentioned reference to a 'city called Europe', the only part of the text which is seriously at variance with the original Greek, since it completely ignores the role played by the king's wife in the plot as reported by Plato. Cf. Plato, *Republic* II.359e–360b (tr. Shorey): '[...] And when the shepherds held their customary assembly to make their monthly report to the king about the flocks, he also attended wearing the ring. So as he sat there it chanced that he turned the collet of the ring towards himself, towards the inner part of his hand, and when this took place they say that he became invisible to those who sat by him and they spoke of him as absent; at that he was amazed, and again fumbling with the ring turned the collet outwards and so became visible. On noting this he experimented with the ring to see if it possessed this virtue, and he found the result to be that when he turned the collet inwards he became invisible, and when outwards visible; and becoming aware of this, he immediately managed things so that he became one of the messengers who went up to the king, and on coming there he seduced the king's wife and with her aid set upon the king and slew him and possessed his kingdom'. On all this, see the Introduction above, p. 21.

Rather, let study forever be your thought, [let] the attaining of reality [be] your objective, and [let] your greed be in the acquisition and the comprehension of wisdom, so that you may be happy with that and successful with the happy people and the martyrs.

Chapter 3

Magic with the 'Abbāsids: Meeting at al-Ma'mūn's with the Man who Claimed to be a Prophet

Then Abū Ma'shar Ja'far ibn Muḥammad, the astrologer, related in his *Book of Discussion* [p. 289] with Shādān ibn Baḥr:⁴¹

Muḥammad ibn Mūsā ibn Anas al-Khwārizmī⁴² reported to me: Yaḥyā ibn Manṣūr⁴³ the astrologer reported to me: 'We arrived, a group of astrologers and myself,⁴⁴ at al-Ma'mūn's [place]. Around him there was a group and a man who claimed prophecy [نبا] — someone whom we did not know. Al-Ma'mūn had called upon the judges, but they had not shown up yet. And he said to me and to those of the astrologers present, [20] "Go and take [the measure of] an ascendant [طالع]⁴⁵ regarding an

41 The 'Discussion' (*Mudhākara*), or more generally 'Discussions' (*Mudhākārāt*), refers indeed to a work ascribed to Abū Ma'shar, which the Ikhwān quote from here verbatim. On this, see the Introduction, pp. 24–29.

42 Al-Khwārizmī, the famous astronomer and mathematician of al-Ma'mūn's time. See G. J. Toomer, 'Al-Khwārizmī', pp. 358–365. See also Dunlop, 'Khwārizmī', pp. 248–250.

43 On this scientist, the senior astronomer (and astrologer) at the court of al-Ma'mūn, see J. Vernet, 'Yaḥyā ibn Abī Manṣūr', pp. 537–538.

44 This section begins with a hadith-like chain of transmitters, whose *matn* starts with the phrase: 'We arrived, a group of astrologers and myself'. 'Myself', the narrator of the whole story to follow, is thus logically to be identified with the last member of the *isnād*, namely, Yaḥyā ibn Abī Manṣūr.

45 The 'ascendant' (*tālī*; Greek, ὠροσκόπος; Latin, *ascendens*) is, on the eastern horizon of a given place, the point of the zodiac (and, by extension, the zodiacal sign) emerging at a given moment. Its importance is due to the fact that it is the point of reference for the whole astral chart. From this point are counted the twelve 'houses' (*buyūt*) of 30° each and each associated with a peculiar 'allotment' (here referred to as *qisma*) regarding human life, according to the following order: the 1st from 0° (the 'ascendant') to 30°: 'house of life' (*ḥayāt*); 2nd from 30° to 60°: 'house of wealth' (*māl*); 3rd from 60° to 90°: 'house of the brothers' (*ikhwa*); 4th from 90° to 120°: 'house of the fathers' (*ābā*); 5th from 120° to 150°: 'house of the children' (*awlād*); 6th from 150° to 180°: 'house of illnesses' (*amrāḍ*);

allegation of a man about a thing he alleges, and about the powers that the sphere indicates about him, in terms of sincerity or falsehood on his part". Besides, al-Ma'mūn had not informed us that [this man] claimed to be a prophet.⁴⁶

'So we went to one of those courtyards, determined the ascendant, and provided a sketch of it. The Sun and the Moon found themselves within the same minute in the ascendant. The ascendant was Capricorn [جدي], and Jupiter [مشتري] was in Virgo [سنبلة] and in aspect [ينظر] with it!⁴⁷ And all those present, except for me, said: "What he alleges is valid."

7th from 180° to 210°: 'house of wives' (*azwāj*); 8th from 210° to 240°: 'house of death' (*mawt*); 9th from 240° to 270°: 'house of travels' (*asfār*); 10th from 270° to 300°: 'house of power' (*sultān*); 11th from 300° to 330°: 'house of hope' (*rajā*); 12th from 330° to 360°: 'house of enemies' (*a'dā*). The complete list is given by the Brethren in Epistle 3 ('On Astronomy'); see *Rasā'il*, vol. 1, p. 136. See my *Révolutions*, p. 23, for Greek and Arabic references. For the *dodekatopos*, the Greco-Egyptian model of this system, see Bouché-Leclercq, *L'Astrologie grecque*, pp. 280–281.

46 Cf. Abū Ma'shar, *Mudhakarāt* (tr. Dunlop): 'Abū Ma'shar said, I was informed by Muḥammad b. Mūsā, the astrologer, al-Jālīs not al-Khwārizmī, that Yaḥyā b. Mūsā al-Nadīm related to us, "I once visited al-Ma'mūn when a number of astrologers were with him, also a man who claimed prophecy, who had already appeared. Unknown to us, *qādis* and legal experts had been sent for to examine him, but had not yet arrived. Al-Ma'mūn said to me and the astrologers who were present, Go and take an ascendant for a man's claim in a certain matter, and let me know what the angel (*malak*) shows you regarding its (or 'his') truth or falsehood. But al-Ma'mūn did not inform us that the man claimed to be a prophet[...].'

47 The 'aspect' (*naẓar*; Latin, *aspectus*) is a fundamental notion in astrology. Planets were believed to have a certain number of privileged relationships with one another according to the geometric angles of the figure that they form within the circle of the zodiac. Planets distant by 180° (the angle of a straight line, corresponding to a distance apart of six signs) are said to be in 'opposition' (a stronger malefic aspect). Planets distant from one another by 120° (the angle of an equilateral triangle, corresponding to a distance apart of four signs) are said to be in the stronger benefic 'trine aspect'. Planets distant by 90° (the angle of a square, corresponding to a distance apart of three signs) are said to be 'square' (a weaker malefic aspect). Planets distant by 60° (the angle of a hexagon, corresponding to a distance apart of two signs) are said to be in the weaker benefic 'sextile aspect'. In the present example, the aspect is trine and therefore regarded as benefic, with Jupiter in Virgo and the ascendant (with both the Moon and the Sun) in Capricorn, that is, a distance apart of four signs. Zodiacal signs may also be described as having a 'trine' or 'quaternary' relation with one another, but in this case it is a constant relationship which does not vary according to charts. For instance, Aries, Leo, and Sagittarius make up one of the four triplicities (*muthallathāt*), namely, the fiery triplicity. On these triplicities,

'But I said, on my part: "He [speaks] with validity, and the evidence for it lies in what pertains to Venus [زهرة] and to Mercury [عطاردية], yet the validation he seeks is not valid, since it is neither fulfilled nor set in good order."

'He said to me: "How [do you know] (fol. 523a) this from [the reading]?"⁴⁸

see my *Révolutions*, p. 67. See also Titus Burckhardt, *Mystical Astrology According to Ibn 'Arabi*, tr. Bulent Rauf (Aldsworth: Beshara Publications, 1977), pp. 18–20.

- 48 Cf. Abū Ma'shar, *Mudhakarāt* (tr. Dunlop): '[...] So we came to a certain castle, and we determined the ascendant and set it formally down. The Sun and the Moon coincided in a single minute and the *pars fortunae* (*sahm as-sa'adah*) and *pars futurorum* (*sahm al-ghayb*) coincided in the same minute as the ascendant, which was Capricorn. Jupiter was in *Spica Virginis* facing him, with Venus and Mercury facing towards it. All the people who were present asked what the man's claim was, but I kept silent. Al-Ma'mūn said to me, You give your opinion. I said, He is seeking confirmation, and has a proof from Venus and Mercury. But confirmation of what he claims is not complete and not organized. How do you know this? He asked [...]. *Sahm as-sa'adah* (literally, 'the Part of Fortune') and *sahm al-ghayb* (literally, 'the Part of Secret') are notions related to the specific theory of the 'parts' or 'lots' (*sahm*, pl. *sihām*; Latin, *pars* or *sors*), which was much favoured in ancient astrology. The Part of Fortune, which was known already to Ptolemy and usually regarded since as the most important of all parts, is defined by al-Birūnī in this way: 'The Part of Fortune is a point of the zodiac, the distance of which from the degree of the ascendant in the direction of the succession of signs is equal to the distance of the Moon from the Sun in the opposite direction. The method of determining this is to find the place of the Sun (Place 1), then that of the Moon (Place 2); the ascendant is Place 3. Then subtract Place 1 from Place 2 beginning with the signs'; *Tafhīm* § 475, tr. Wright, pp. 279–281. In the same paragraph, al-Birūnī provides a thorough explanation of the methods of calculation, with examples. The Part of Secret (also variously referred to as the Part of Daimon, or the Part of Spirit) is the second in importance. It is calculated with the same elements as the Part of Fortune — namely, the ascendant, the Sun, and the Moon — but in reverse order regarding the two luminaries. In § 476 of the *Tafhīm*, Birūnī deals with lots other than the Part of Fortune and notes that 'Ptolemy recognized only one Part of Fortune, but others have introduced an excessive number of methods of casting lots at nativities. We reproduce in tables those which Abū Ma'shar has mentioned[....] It is impossible to enumerate the lots which have been invented for the solution of horary questions, and for answering enquiries as to the prosperous outcome or auspicious time for action; they increase in number everyday'. Then follows the expected table, taken from Abū Ma'shar, of the 'following 97 different lots, 7 of which belong to the planets, 80 to the houses and 10 to neither [that] are those most commonly in use'; tr. Wright, p. 282. For each lot is given the method of calculation, both for diurnal and nocturnal computations, as for instance: 'Ascendant + Moon – Sun' in the case of the Part of Fortune by day and 'Ascendant + Sun – Moon' for the Part of Fortune by night. The Part of Daimon (or Spirit) is the exact reverse of these calculations,

'I said: "Because the validity of the allegations [comes] from Jupiter, or from the trine aspect [تليث] with the Sun, or else from its sextile aspect [تسدید] when the Sun is not malefic. And this [is also] because of the case of the fall [هبوط]⁴⁹ of Jupiter, which is in a benefic aspect with it, although it is adverse to this sign and the sign is adverse to it. And this does not fulfil the validation and the confirmation. And what they [the other astrologers] have said about what pertains to Venus and Mercury is a variety of hocus-pocus and the livelihood of imposture."⁵⁰

'He marvelled at this and said: "You, your achievement is due to God."⁵¹

'Then he said: "Are you aware of who this man is?"

'I said: "No."

'He said: "This man alleges he is a prophet!"

[5] 'I said: "O you, Commander of the Believers, does he have anything in support of this? Ask him!"

'He [the alleged prophet] said: "I have a ring with two stones. I wear it and nothing changes with me, but if anyone else wears it, he will start laughing and will not master his laugh until he removes it. I have a Syrian

namely, 'Ascendant + Sun – Moon' by day and 'Ascendant + Moon – Sun' by night. The rest of the lots are calculated in a similar way, but combining these results with other elements such as the planets, as for instance in the case of the lot 'Life' in the 'First House', whose calculations by day and night are: 'Ascendant + Saturn – Jupiter' and 'Ascendant + Jupiter – Saturn' respectively; and 'Pillar of Horoscope' in the 'First House' as well, with 'Ascendant + Spirit – Fortune' by day and 'Ascendant – Spirit + Fortune' by night. In the present report, the Sun and the Moon are said to coincide within the same minute in the ascendant. It must be noted that these notions of lots, which form an essential part of the narration in the *Mudhakarāt*, do not appear at all in the Ikhwān's version, but it is not possible to decide whether this omission pre-dates the redaction of Epistle 52 or not.

49 The 'fall' (*hubūṭ*; Latin, *casus*) is the sign (or the degree of the sign) in which the influence of the planet is the weakest. The 'fall signs' are diametrically opposed to the 'exaltation signs' (on 'exaltation', see note 25 above), namely, Moon in Scorpio; Mercury in Pisces; Venus in Virgo; Sun in Libra; Mars in Cancer; Jupiter in Capricorn; Saturn in Aries. See my *Révolutions*, p. 89, for Greek and Arabic references.

50 Cf. Abū Ma'shar, *Mudhakarāt*, tr. Dunlop: '[...] I said, Because the truth of claims is from Jupiter, and Jupiter is facing him in a favourable manner, only he dislikes this sign and the sign dislikes him. Consequently the verification and confirmation are not complete, and what they say of the proof from Mercury and Venus is merely a kind of adornment and embellishment and imposture which is considered admirable and desirable[...]

51 The expression means something like, 'How excellent you are!'

pen.⁵² I take it and I [can] write with it, but if anyone else takes it, his finger will be paralysed."

[p. 290] 'I said: "My lord, Venus and Mercury have already brought about these things with their effects."⁵³ Al-Ma'mūn ordered him to do what he had said, and he did it. And we came to know that it was a remedy [obtained] with talismans.⁵⁴

'Al-Ma'mūn did not cease [to be] with him for many days, until he renounced the claim of prophecy. He described the tricks he had made use of and operated with, regarding the ring and the pen. Then al-Ma'mūn presented him with 1,000 dinars. Then we met with him after that, since he was one of the most savant people in the science of the stars.⁵⁵

52 Neither *lām* (*sāfiy*) nor Beirut (*shāniy*, with an unconvincing explanation in the note) make sense, and *nūn* (*min* or *man*?) is even more incoherent. The emendation (*shāmiy*, 'Syrian') is based on Abū Ma'shar's text; see the Introduction, p. 27.

53 This phrase is to be understood against the associations of traditional astrology, for which Venus was linked with beauty, love, and the realm of fine ornaments (hence, the stone ring) whereas Mercury was naturally related to the art of writing, secretarial tools, and so on (hence, the pen). In Epistle 3 ('On Astronomy'), in a passage exceptionally rich in metaphors, the Ikhwān mention the traditional associations as such: 'You should know, my brother, that the Sun is like the king amongst the planets, and all of them are, in comparison, like bodyguards and soldiers. The Moon is like the prime minister and the chief of the delegation. Mercury is like the secretary. Mars is like the commander of the army. Jupiter is like the judge. Saturn is like the keeper of the treasure houses. Venus is like the slave girl and the servant'; see *Rasā'il*, vol. 1, p. 150.

54 Cf. Abū Ma'shar, *Mudhākarāt* (tr. Dunlop): '[...] He said, Bravo! And went on, Do you people know this man? We said, No. He said, He claims the prophecy. I said, Commander of the Faithful, has he anything to confirm it? So he asked him, and he said, Yes, I have a ring with two bezels. I put it on and nothing happens. Another puts it on, and begins to laugh and cannot stop laughing till he draws it off. And I have a Syrian (*Shāmi*) pen with which I write. Another takes it, and his fingers do not move. I said, My master, this is Venus and Mercury, they have done their work. So al-Ma'mūn ordered him to do what he claimed. We said, This is a kind of talisman[...]

55 Cf. Abū Ma'shar, *Mudhākarāt* (tr. Dunlop): '[...] Al-Ma'mūn persisted with him for many days till he confessed and renounced the claim of prophecy. He described the trick which he had used in regard to the ring and the pen. Al-Ma'mūn gave him 1000 dinārs. I later met him, and he was amongst the most learned of mankind in the knowledge of the stars, and was one of the greatest companions of 'Ubayd Allāh b. al-Sarī. Abū Ma'shar said, And it was he who made beetle talismans in many houses of Baghdad[...]. On the concluding lines in Abū Ma'shar's *Mudhākarāt*, see the Introduction above, p. 28.

Chapter 4

Magic in the Qur'an

As for what is mentioned in various places in the Qur'an, with respect to magic, and whose mention is repeated, [there is] amongst others what is mentioned in the *Sūrat al-Baqara*. This is what God Most High, how powerful and lofty is He, said, *It was not Solomon who disbelieved, but the devils disbelieved, teaching people magic and that which was revealed to the two angels at Babylon, Hārūt and Mārūt. But the two angels do not teach anyone unless they say, 'We are a trial, so do not disbelieve by practising magic.'* [And yet] they learn from them that by which they cause separation between a man and his wife. But they do not harm anyone through it except by permission of Allah.⁵⁶

If, from the power and the science of magic, one could already ensure the separation of man and wife, what would be left after that? Or would there be a doubt about this narrative [خبر], after what is uttered [15] by the Qur'an, whose validity we know?

And God, how powerful and lofty is He, said in the *Sūrat al-Mā'ida*, '[...] And when I restrained the Children of Israel from [killing] you when you came to them with clear proofs, and those who disbelieved amongst them said, "This is not but obvious magic".'⁵⁷

And He said in the *Sūrat al-An'ām*, And even if We had sent down to you, [O Muhammad], a written scripture on a page and they touched it with their hands, the disbelievers would say, 'This is not but obvious magic'.⁵⁸

And He said in the *Sūrat al-A'rāf*, Said the eminent among the people of Pharaoh, 'Indeed, this is a learned magician / Who wants to expel you from your land [through magic], so what do you instruct?' / They said, 'Postpone [the matter of] him and his brother and send among the cities gatherers / Who will bring you every learned magician'.⁵⁹ Do you not see that the Qur'an regards their magic as important?

56 Qur'an 2:102. As noted above, all Qur'anic quotations in this volume are from *Sahih International*, available at <http://quran.com>.

57 Qur'an 5:110.

58 Qur'an 6:7.

59 Qur'an 7:109–112.

And He said, [20] also in that sura, *And the magicians fell down in prostration [to Allah]. / They said, 'We have believed in the Lord of the worlds'.*⁶⁰

And in that sura also, *And they said, 'No matter what sign you bring us with which to bewitch us, we [p. 291] will not be believers in you'.*⁶¹

And He said, in the *Sūrat Yūnus*, *Have the people been amazed that We revealed [revelation] to a man from among them, [saying], 'Warn mankind and give good tidings to those who believe that they will have a [firm] precedence of honor with their Lord'? [But] the disbelievers say, 'Indeed, this is an obvious magician'.*⁶²

And He said, in the *Sūrat Banī Isrā'il*, *We are most knowing of how they listen to it when they listen to you and [of] when they are in private conversation, when the wrongdoers say, 'You follow not but a man affected by magic'.*⁶³

And [He said] in that [sura], *And We had certainly given Moses nine evident signs, (fol. 523b) so ask the Children of Israel [about] when he came to them and Pharaoh said to him, 'Indeed I think, O Moses, that you are affected by magic'.*⁶⁴

And He said, in the *Sūrat Tāhā*, *He said, 'Have you come to us to drive us out of our land with your magic, O Moses? / Then we will surely bring you magic like it, so make between us and you an appointment, which we will not fail to keep and neither will you, in a place assigned'.*⁶⁵

And in that [sura] also, *They said, 'Indeed, these are two magicians who want to drive you out of your land with their magic and do away with your most exemplary way'.*⁶⁶

And in that [sura], *He said, 'Rather, you throw.' And suddenly their ropes and staffs seemed to him from their magic that they were moving [like snakes].*⁶⁷

60 Qur'an 7:120-121.

61 Qur'an 7:132.

62 Qur'an 10:2.

63 Qur'an 17:47.

64 Qur'an 17:101.

65 Qur'an 20:57-58.

66 Qur'an 20:63.

67 Qur'an 20:66.

And in that [sura], '[...]Indeed, we have believed in our Lord that He may forgive us our sins and what you compelled us [to do] of magic. And Allah is better and more enduring.'⁶⁸

Chapter 5

Magic according to the Jews and the Christians

And this [is so], my brother, as you can hear and see from what the Qur'an has mentioned repeatedly about magic in those passages — do you view it as vain and without foundation? God forbid that someone of the creatures be bewitched if we say that now — so that one [should] come back to what is [to be found] with the other legislators [أصحاب الشرائع] and in their books, that is, what they profess as religion and what they acknowledge as valid. Amongst those things, there is what is written in the Torah, to which two communities, namely, the Jews and the Christians together, are attached and whose validity they both affirm. For the Torah exists both in the hands of the Jews and of the Christians, in Hebrew, in Syriac, and in Arabic, and there is no divergence between them about it.⁶⁹ On the contrary, they agree with one another on [10] the validity and the reality of what is to be found in it.

A. The Story of Esau, Son of Isaac, and of the Son of Nimrod, Son of Canaan

There [is to be found] what is written in the story of Esau,⁷⁰ namely, [the following]:

⁶⁸ Qur'an 20:73.

⁶⁹ For this reference to the Torah as being acknowledged by both the Christians and the Jews, see the Introduction above, p. 31.

⁷⁰ In Louis Ginzberg's *The Legends of the Jews*, one reads the following account, based upon a series of ancient midrashim: 'Adam's clothes [...] had belonged to Nimrod. Once when the mighty hunter caught Esau in his preserves, and forbade him to go on the chase, they agreed to determine by combat what their privileges were. Esau had taken counsel with Jacob, and he had advised him never to fight with Nimrod while he was clothed in Adam's garments. The two now wrestled with each other, and at the time Nimrod was not dressed in Adam's clothes. The end was that he was slain by Esau. Thus the garments worn by Adam fell into the hands of Esau, from him they passed into Jacob's, and he bequeathed them to Joseph'; see Louis Ginzberg, *Legends*, vol. 2, p. 139

Esau, son of Isaac, was a master of hunting. Every time he went out hunting, the son of Nimrod, son of Canaan, went out to [meet] him and told him, 'Wrestle with me so that, if I win over you, I take your game'. The son of Nimrod, son of Canaan was wearing the shirt of Adam, with which he went out from the Garden and on which were [to be seen] images of every creature of God Most High: wild beasts, birds, and sea-animals. When Adam, God bless him and grant him salvation, wished to hunt one of the wild beasts [p. 292] or other [creatures], he used to put his hand on its image on the shirt, and that game remained bewildered, stopped, and blind until he had come to it and taken it. And [15] every time the son of Nimrod wrestled with Esau, son of Isaac, he took him and threw him to the ground and took his game from him.

But since this [situation] kept on for Esau, he complained to his father, Isaac, God's prayers and salvation be upon him, of what he was enduring under the son of Nimrod.

And Isaac told him, 'Describe the shirt for me.' And he described it for him.

And Isaac told him, 'This is the shirt of Adam. You shall not win as long as it is on him. When he comes to you to ask you to wrestle, tell him, "Take off the shirt," and wrestle with him once he has done that. Verily you shall win over him, and once you have won over him, take the shirt and come back.'

(with extensive reference to ancient material — including *Hadad and Da'at* on Genesis 25:29–32 — in vol. V, pp. 276–277). See also *Midrash Rabbah*, LXIII: 13 (on Genesis 25:32), tr. Rabbi H. Freedman and Maurice Simon (London: The Soncino Press, 1961), vol. 2 (Genesis II), p. 569: 'Behold, I am at the point to die. Another interpretation is that Nimrod was seeking to slay him [Esau] on account of the garment which had belonged to Adam [and which Esau now possessed], for whenever he put it on and went out into the field, all the beasts and birds in the world would come and flock around him.' For further later Midrash elaborations of the story, see Netton, *Muslim Neoplatonists*, p. 73. In a passage from the story of the Animals versus Man in Epistle 22, the Ikhwan state about Adam and Eve's hair, that they 'served as their coat, carpet, cloak, and defense against cold and heat'; Lenn E. Goodman, *Ecological Fable*, p. 161; see also the new edition, Goodman and McGregor, *The Case of the Animals*, p. 134. This passage is reported by Stephen D. Ricks in 'The Garment of Adam in Jewish, Muslim, and Christian Tradition', in *Temples of the Ancient World*, ed. D. W. Parry (Salt Lake City: Deseret/FARMS, 1994), pp. 705–739. The author of this otherwise well-informed study does not seem to know of the story of Esau and (Ibn) Nimrod as told by the Ikhwan in Epistle 52.

And Esau went out, wishing to hunt. And the son of Nimrod came to him, according to his habit, and asked him to wrestle. Esau told him, 'Take off your garment and then we shall wrestle.'

The son of Nimrod took off the shirt and [20] threw it [down], and Esau took off his garment, then they wrestled with one another. And Esau threw him down to the ground and sat on his chest. Then Esau jumped [up], and he took the shirt and the game, and proceeded to run in the open country. And the son of Nimrod lacked strength and could not catch him up.

And he brought the shirt to Isaac and he [Isaac] told him, 'Put it on, my little son.'

But he [Esau] said, 'I fear that the son of Nimrod might take it in the open country.'

But [Isaac] said, 'My little son, as long as the shirt will be on you, he shall not win over you. And if you proceed to go hunting and wish to hunt something, put your hand on its image on the shirt, and it (fol. 524a) will stop for you until you take it.'

And when Esau wished to hunt some wild beast, he put his hand on its image on the shirt, and it stopped, blind without seeing, until Esau would come and take it. And from that moment, he went and came back, possessing insight about the shirt.

This is also a famous narrative, that is known to all those who acknowledge the validity of the Torah,⁷¹ amongst the Jews and the Christians, and who in no way reject it.

B. The Story of Jacob and Laban

Also in the Torah, in the second book of it, is the story of Jacob, peace be upon him, and Laban, his [maternal] uncle, which states:

When Rachel gave birth to Joseph, Jacob said [5] to Laban, 'Send me away and leave me out, so that I may be free and go to my country, my place and my earth, with my children, and give me my wives with whom I have been at your service.'⁷²

71 For the misattribution to the Torah of this story deriving in fact from ancient midrashim, see the Introduction above, pp. 32–33.

72 Cf. Genesis 30:25–26 (tr. Green): '(25) And when Rachel had borne Joseph, Jacob said to Laban, Send me away so I may go to my own place and to my

Laban said, 'Inform me how much your remuneration is, so that I may give it to you.'⁷³

And Jacob said, 'I provide benefits and tend your flock and I watch for them night and day. I strive for the whole of your flock. Set aside all those amongst them which are red-coloured, and all those which are speckled [أبقع], all lambs which are spotted [مبقع] with white on [p. 293] black, and all those from amongst the flock which are pied [أملح] with white, and all those from amongst the goats which are hornless [أجالح] and white.⁷⁴ Let this be my remuneration, and I [shall] bear witness to the herd today. But if after this day there is an increasing [of it] with respect to what is dust-coloured [أغبر] or speckled or pied with white, or [if] there is a growth from amongst the goats or what is spotted with black and white from amongst the sheep, this will be my remuneration.'⁷⁵

[10] And Laban said, 'Yes, let it be as you have mentioned.'⁷⁶

And he set aside on that day the hornless billy-goats and those pied with white, and all rams of his sheep that were hornless or speckled or red-coloured, and all that were white amongst them, and all that were spotted with black and white, and he put them in the hands of his child. And Jacob separated the pastures of his flock and the pastures of Laban's

country. (26) Give my wives and my children, (for) whom I have served you, and let me go.'

73 Cf. Genesis 30:26-28 (tr. Green): '(26) [...] for you know my service (with) which I have served you. (27) And Laban said to him, If I have found favor in your eyes, please (stay); I have carefully watched, and Jehovah has blessed me on account of you. (28) And he said, Set your wages upon me, and I will give[...]'

74 Cf. Genesis 30:29-32 (tr. Green): '(29) And he said to him, You know what I have earned you, and what your livestock has become with me. (30) For you had little before me, and it has spread into a multitude, and Jehovah has blessed you at my coming; and now when shall I work, I also, for my own house? (31) And he said, What shall I give you? And Jacob said, You shall not give me anything. If you will do this for me, I will remain; I will tend your flock and will keep (it). (32) I will pass through all your flock today, removing from there every speckled and spotted sheep, and every black sheep among the lambs, and the spotted and speckled goats; (these) shall be my wages.'

75 Cf. Genesis 30:33 (tr. Green): '(33) And my righteousness shall testify for me in the day to come, when you come in about my wages before you; everyone that is not speckled and spotted among the goats, and black among the lambs, it (shall be) stolen with me.'

76 Cf. Genesis 30:34 (tr. Green): '(34) And Laban said, Yes, truly, let it be according to your word.'

flock, and he set between them the measure of a three-day walk. And the flock of each one of them was secluded in a place.⁷⁷

And Jacob tended all that was left from Laban's flock. And Jacob took tender rods of almond and plane trees, and he peeled skins from them and made whiteness as [a result of] peeling and made whiteness and skins, and he planted the rods he had peeled in [15] the stream where one gets water in the place where the flock come to the water in order to drink, facing the flock.⁷⁸ And they were happy and their offspring started moving in their wombs when they saw the rods. And the flock brought forth hornless and pied [offspring].⁷⁹ And every year, before the moment when the flock singled out who would be pregnant, Jacob planted those rods in the place where one gets water, and he did not plant them for the rest of the flock.⁸⁰ The man got rich and his livestock got more numerous.⁸¹

And this is also in the Torah, which no one disproves. You should know it, my brother.

- 77 Cf. Genesis 30:35–36 (tr. Green): '(35) And on that day he removed the striped and spotted lambs, and all the spotted and speckled goats, every one which (had) white, and every black one among the lambs; and he gave into the hands of his sons. (36) And he put three days' journey between himself and Jacob[...]'
- 78 Cf. Genesis 30:36–38 (tr. Green): '(36) [...] and Jacob was feeding the remaining flocks of Laban. (37) And Jacob took for himself rods of a fresh white tree, and the almond, and of the plane tree; and he peeled white stripes in them, laying bare the white on the rods. (38) And he set the rods which he had peeled by the troughs by the water troughs, where the flocks came to drink, across from the flocks; and they were in heat when they came to drink.'
- 79 Cf. Genesis 30:39 (tr. Green): '(39) And the flocks were in heat before the rods, and the flocks bore striped, speckled and spotted.'
- 80 Cf. Genesis 30:40–42 (tr. Green): '(40) And Jacob separated the lambs, and set the faces of the flock toward the striped and every black one in the flocks of Laban; and he put his own droves by themselves, and did not put them with the flock of Laban. (41) And it happened that whenever the strong flocks conceived, Jacob usually placed the rods before the eyes of flocks before the troughs, that they might conceive by the rods. (42) And the flocks being feeble, it was not his custom to place (them); and the weak usually were for Laban, and the strong for Jacob.'
- 81 Cf. Genesis 30:43 (tr. Green): '(43) And the man increased very much, and he had many flocks, and female slaves, and male slaves, and camels, and asses.'

C. The Story of Saul and Samuel

Then [there is to be found] also the Books of Annals [أخبار] of the Kings from the Sons of Israel,⁸² which for the Jews takes the same course as the Torah. There it is mentioned that there was amongst them a prophet called Samuel. He was famous amongst the prophets, and there is a book about him. The Christians and the Jews [20] admit and give credence to his prophethood and the loftiness of his power, and they possess his book.⁸³ And it is reported in the book that he appointed a king for the Jews, whose name was Saul [طالوت].⁸⁴

And God Most High supported him for the killing of Amalek,⁸⁵ and he did it, except that he disobeyed in respect of the livestock.⁸⁶ The king was toppled from his rank, and David was anointed instead of

82 The 'Book of the Chronicles of the Kings of Israel' — here referred to as 'the Books of Annals of the Kings from the Sons of Israel' — is in fact a lost work which, in the same way as the 'Book of the Chronicles of the Kings of Judah' is mentioned within the Book of Kings a certain number of times (eighteen and fifteen times respectively). On this, see Menahem Haran, 'The Books of the Chronicles "Of the Kings of Judah" and "Of the Kings of Israel": What Sort of Books Were They?', *Vetus Testamentum* 49, Fasc. 2 (1999), pp. 156–164, especially pp. 156–159. As mentioned in the Introduction (p. 35), this lost work is extra-canonical, so the Brethren are quite right when they affirm that it 'takes for the Jews the same course as the Torah'.

83 The Brethren speak of only one Book of Samuel, in agreement with the Jewish tradition.

84 Cf. 1 Samuel 10:1 (tr. Green): 'And Samuel took the vial of oil and poured on his (Saul's) head, and kissed him, and said, Is it not because Jehovah has anointed you as leader over His inheritance?'

85 Cf. 1 Samuel 15:1–3 (tr. Green): '(1) And Samuel said to Saul, Jehovah sent me to anoint you king over His people, over Israel; and now, listen to the voice of the words of Jehovah. (2) Thus says Jehovah of hosts. I will visit Amalek with what he did to Israel, how he set himself against him in the way, when he came up from Egypt. (3) Now go, and you shall strike Amalek and destroy all that he has; and you shall put to death (all), from man to woman, from little one to suckling, from ox to sheep, from camel to ass.'

86 Cf. 1 Samuel 15:13–15 (tr. Green): '(13) And Samuel came to Saul, and Saul said to him, Blessed (are) you of Jehovah; I have performed the word of Jehovah. (14) And Samuel said, What (is) this bleating of the sheep in my ears? And the lowing of the oxen which I hear? (15) And Saul said, They have brought them from Amalek, because the people had pity on the best of the flock, and of the oxen, in order to sacrifice to Jehovah your God; and the rest we have destroyed.'

him,⁸⁷ on travel [سيرا],⁸⁸ and Samuel died. And Saul busied himself with killing magicians and fortune-tellers, and amongst them was killed who was killed, and fled who fled.⁸⁹ And he [Saul] turned to the people of [p. 294] the Philistines so as to fight with all the fortune-tellers amongst them.⁹⁰ But fright pervaded him, because of the multitude of armies raised against him.⁹¹ (fol. 524b) And he did not find any pacifier [to respond] to his speech, as was his habit as prophet: neither magician, nor fortune-teller, nor sage. And he got anxious about this.⁹²

He said to his relatives, 'Look for a magician for me; I shall ask him about the matter of my circumstances.'

One suggested a sorceress to him.⁹³ He had faith in her and asked her to revive a prophet he could seek [advice] from.⁹⁴ She asked him

87 Cf. 1 Samuel 15:35 (tr. Green): 'And Samuel never again saw Saul until the day of his death, for Samuel mourned for Saul; and Jehovah repented that He had caused Saul to reign over Israel'; and 1 Samuel, 16:13 (tr. Green): 'And Samuel took the horn of oil and anointed him [David] in the midst of his brothers; and the Spirit of Jehovah came upon David from that day onward.'

88 The text is severely corrupt here. *Lām* provides '*nasaja la-hu dawūd sitran*' ('and David weaved for him a veil') which is nowhere to be found in the original text. The expression 'on travel' is awkward as well, since it does not appear as such in the Bible either. But its use may have resulted from an unfortunate attempt at paraphrasing and summarizing the text according to the following scheme: God sends Samuel as prophet. Samuel, while on travel, anoints David. Later on, Samuel dies to be resurrected by the sorceress.

89 This phrase, which is not in the original, looks like an interpolation.

90 Cf. 1 Samuel 28:3-4 (tr. Green): '(3) And Samuel was dead, and all of Israel had mourned for him, and buried him in Ramah, even in his city. And Saul had taken away those having familiar spirits, and the wizards, out of the land. (4) And the Philistines had gathered and had come in, and camped in Shunem; and Saul gathered all Israel, and they camped in Gilboa.'

91 Cf. 1 Samuel 28:5 (tr. Green): 'And Saul saw the camp of the Philistines, and his heart trembled and feared greatly.'

92 Cf. 1 Samuel 28:6 (tr. Green): 'And Saul asked of Jehovah, and Jehovah did not answer him, either by dreams, or by Urim, or by prophets.'

93 Cf. 1 Samuel 28:7 (tr. Green): 'And Saul said to his servants, Seek out for me a woman possessing a familiar spirit, and I will go to her and inquire of her. And his servants said to him, Behold, a woman possessing a familiar spirit (is) in Endor.'

94 Cf. 1 Samuel 28:8 (tr. Green): 'And Saul disguised himself and put on other clothing, and went, he and two of the men with him; and they came to the woman by night. And he said, I beg of you, divine to me by the familiar spirit, and cause (him) whom I will say to you to come up to me.'

which prophet he would choose to be revived. He chose Samuel, and she revived him. She got frightened at the sight of him and cried for help.⁹⁵

But Saul told her, 'Do not be frightened! What did you see?'

She said, 'I saw an old man, radiant like the angels of the Lord, wrapped up in a coat, as if [5] he arose from the earth.'

And Saul knew that it was Samuel. He went closer to him, and he prostrated himself in front of him.⁹⁶

And Samuel told him, 'Why did you make me return and revive me?'

Saul said, '[This is a time] I am at a loss [إصاقت بي الأرض],⁹⁷ because of the people of the Philistines and their fight against me, and the cessation of God's support of me, and the fact that He deprives me of clemency. I called you to consult you about my affairs.'⁹⁸

Samuel said, 'God Most High transferred the kingship to your companion. He was angry at you and at the Sons of Israel, because of what you had done regarding the livestock of Amalek. He was the one assisting the Philistines against you and [He was the one who] made them victorious. And you will proceed together with us, tomorrow, amongst the dead'.⁹⁹

95 Cf. 1 Samuel 28:11–12 (tr. Green): '(11) And the woman said, Whom shall I bring up to you? And he said, Bring up Samuel to me. (12) And the woman saw Samuel, and cried out with a loud voice; and the woman spoke to Saul, saying, Why have you deceived me, for you (are) Saul?'

96 Cf. 1 Samuel 28:13–14 (tr. Green): '(13) And the king said to her, Do not be afraid; for what have you seen? And the woman said to Saul, I have seen a god coming up out of the earth. (14) And he said to her, What (is) his appearance? And she said, An old man is coming up, and he is covered with a robe. And Saul knew that he (was) Samuel, and bowed (his) face to the earth, and prostrated himself.'

97 The expression translated literally is, 'The earth has shrunk for me'.

98 Cf. 1 Samuel 28:15 (tr. Green): 'And Samuel said to Saul, Why have you disturbed me, to bring me up? And Saul said, I am grievously distressed, and the Philistines are fighting against me, and God has departed from me and has not answered me any more, either by the hands of the prophets, or by dreams; and I called for you to make known to me what I should do.'

99 Cf. 1 Samuel 28:17–19 (tr. Green): '(17) And Jehovah is doing for Himself as He spoke by my hand; and Jehovah is tearing the kingdom out of your hand and giving to your neighbour, to David. (18) Because you did not listen to the voice of Jehovah, or execute the fierceness of His anger on Amalek, therefore Jehovah is doing this thing to you today. (19) Yea, Jehovah is also giving Israel into the hands of the Philistines along with you; and tomorrow you and your sons (shall be) with me. And Jehovah shall give the camp of Israel into the hand of the Philistines.'

Then Saul went out and, because of this, sank to the ground unconscious.¹⁰⁰ And the sorceress recognized him and came closer to him, together with those who were with him, [10] and they did not cease to be with him until he became fit [again]. She provided hospitality to them for the night, and they departed in the morning.¹⁰¹ The fight was fierce and defeat befell the Hebrews. They [the Philistines] multiplied the killing amongst them.¹⁰² Three of the sons of Saul were killed, and he leant on his spear and took it out from his back.¹⁰³ And the Sons of Israel gathered together to name David as king, and he fought whoever defied them.

All this is equally supplied by the Annals. And of these [reports], there is one which is dedicated to the philosophers, and there is one which is dedicated to the prophets and to the Books of Laws, and there is one about what is reported in the Qur'an as regards mention about magicians and magic, as we have reported in what precedes [this].¹⁰⁴

100 Cf. 1 Samuel 28:20 (tr. Green): 'And Saul hurried, and fell the full length of his stature, to the earth, and greatly feared because of the words of Samuel; and there was no power in him, for he had not eaten bread all that day, and all that night.'

101 Cf. 1 Samuel 28:21–25 (tr. Green): '(21) And the woman came to Saul, and saw that he was greatly distressed and said to him, Behold, your servant has listened to your voice, and I put my life in my hand, and I obeyed your words which you spoke to me. (22) And now, I beg of you, you also listen to the voice of your servant, and I will set before you a bit of bread, and eat, and there shall be strength in you when you go on the way. (23) But he refused, and said, I will not eat. But his servants urged him, and the woman also, and he listened to their voices and rose from the earth, and sat on the bed. (24) And the woman had a fat calf in the house; and she hurried and killed it, and took flour, and kneaded it, and baked unleavened bread of it; (25) and brought near before Saul, and before his servants; and they ate, and rose up, and went on during that night.'

102 Cf. 1 Samuel 29:1–2 (tr. Green): '(1) And the Philistines gathered all their armies to Aphek; and Israel was pitched at a fountain which (is) in Jezreel. (2) And the rulers of the Philistines were passing on by hundreds, and by thousands; and David and his men were passing on in the rear with Achish.'

103 Cf. 1 Samuel 31:4–6 (tr. Green): 'And Saul said to his armor-bearer, Draw your sword and and thrust it through me, lest they come, these uncircumcised ones, and shall thrust me through and roll themselves on me. But his armor-bearer would not, for he was greatly afraid; so Saul took the sword and fell upon it. (5) And his armor-bearer saw that Saul was dead; and he fell, he also, on his sword, and died with him. (6) And Saul, and three of his sons, and his armor-bearer, and all his men, died on that day together.'

104 The Brethren seem to recapitulate here the sources they have been previously

Conclusion by the Ikhwān al-Ṣafā'

Do you believe that all this is a lie and without foundation, and idiocy and stupidity on the part of whoever reports it to those who feign amazement [but who] disavow it in their souls, [15], regarding as a lie what they hear about because of their ignorance, [whereas] they are overbearing towards them, with haughtiness and arrogance, because of their lack of intelligence, the small-mindedness of their sciences, and their inadequacy in acquisition of the real sciences?

[p. 295] Those people find disavowing and lying easier for them. God is the Helper: let us ask Him for the goodness of success and choice.

Chapter 6

Magic with the Ṣābi'ans, the Harrānians, and the Hanīfs

A. Historical Perspective

We say that the last ones of those about whom we have heard, those giving credence to the sciences of talismans and their effects, whose information was passed down to us and whose traces have reached us, [they] are the Greeks [يونانيون]. According to them, those [believers in talismans] have different names in the view of the people: Ṣābi'ans [صابئون],¹⁰⁵ Harrānians [حارانيون],¹⁰⁶ and Hanīfs [حنيفون].¹⁰⁷ They had taken, then, the roots of their sciences from the Babylonians [بابليون]¹⁰⁸ and the Egyptians [مصريين], according to the exchange of the arts and the sciences

quoting from, namely, Plato ('a report dedicated to the philosophers'); the Judeo-Christian Torah ('a report dedicated to the prophets and to the Books of Laws'); and the Qur'an. Note that there is no trace of Abū Ma'shar's *Mudhakarāt* here.

105 There is full agreement between the manuscripts and Beirut on *Ṣābi'ūn*.

106 The reading *Harrāniyyūn* is given by *nūn*, which thus plainly confirms Marquet's emendation ('Sabéens I', p. 36) of *Harrāsūn* as found in Beirut (and *lām*).

107 The two manuscripts have *Hanūfiyyūn* (possibly *Hatūfiyyūn*), whereas Beirut has the unintelligible *Hatūfūn*. The correction *Hanifūn*, already suggested by Marquet ('Sabéens I', p. 36), is largely supported by the manuscripts.

108 Our testimonies are at great variance here: Beirut has *Suryāniyyūn* ('the Syrians'); *lām* has an implausible *Rabbāniyyūn*; and *nūn* has *Bābiliyyūn*, which we have adopted since it fits much better with the context. All implications from the reading 'Syrians' (which was naturally the one endorsed by Marquet and all the other scholars having worked on Beirut alone) must therefore be discarded.

in the countries, according to the governments and the religions [20] that had arisen there. And amongst the ancient chiefs [رؤساء] there were four: Agathodaimon [أغاثايمون],¹⁰⁹ Hermes [هرمس],¹¹⁰ Homer [أوميرس],¹¹¹ and Aratus [أراطس].¹¹² Then their contingents [جيوش] divided into

109 Nūn has *Aghādhīmūn* (one of the usual Arabic forms for Agathodaimon), which we retain here. Beirut and *lām* have something like *A'ādimāyūn*. On Agathodaimon, see M. Plessner, 'Aghāthūdhīmūn', pp. 254–255; Ullmann, *Natur- und Geheimwissenschaften*, pp. 175–177 (Agathodaemon). As mentioned in the Introduction (p. 10), Agathodaimon also appears in a passage from Epistle 44 ('On the Belief of the Brethren of Purity') in association with various other prophets, ranging from Adam to Muhammad. The text about Agathodaimon reads: 'Would you feel like entering the temple of Agathodaimon, in order to contemplate the spheres woven by Plato — these are only spiritual spheres [*afḷāk rawḥāniyya*]', and not those pointed at by the astronomers' (*Rasā'il*, vol. 4, p. 19.8–9). On this, see Corbin, 'Rituel', pp. 187–188: 'L'invitation à entrer dans le Nouveau Temple y est formulée en termes qui en mentionnent explicitement le Sabéisme idéal par un rappel d'Agathodaimon que les Sabéens reconnaissaient comme leur prophète'. Baffioni, 'Secret Sects', p. 14, suggests that the reference to Plato in the passage from Epistle 44 may be to the *Epinomis*.

110 Both manuscripts and Beirut agree on *Hirmis*. See Baffioni, 'Secret Sects', p. 14: 'In our *Encyclopaedia* we find three quotations about Hermes[...]. Two of them, alluding to astral religion, note Hermes' Sabeian origin. In Ep. 3, [vol. 1,] pp. 137.23–138.2 we read that, thanks to his wisdom, he was able to divest himself of his body and ascend to the sphere of Saturn, where he revolved with the sphere for thirty years, by which time he had acquired experience of all the states of the sphere. Afterwards, he came down to earth again and taught astronomy to mankind. The same account is given in Ep. 5, [vol. 1,] pp. 225.19–226.4, where Qur'an 19:57 is also quoted for the second time; in Ep. 9, [vol. 1,] p. 297.10–2, with regard to how God created His vicary on earth, there is a reference to the "fourth *sifr* of Hermes' work", which may be an allusion to Enoch's book about Adam's cycle'. On Hermes, and especially the legend of Hermes Trismegistus in Arabic literature, see Massignon, 'Inventaire', pp. 384–400; Gundel, *Astrologoumena*, pp. 10–27; Ullmann, *Natur- und Geheimwissenschaften*, pp. 368–378 (Hermes and Hermeticism); Pappacena, 'Ermete Trismegisto', pp. 263–283; van Bladel, 'Sources', pp. 285–293; van Bladel, *Arabic Hermes* (New York: OUP, 2009). See also, for later Latin developments of the legend, Burnett, 'Three Hermes', pp. 231–234.

111 The reading *Umahris* comes, here again, from *nūn*, whereas *lām* and Beirut provide us respectively with something like *armahris* and *lumhars*. Marquet's proposal to emend the Beirut variant with *Umahris* (for Homer) is quite remarkable.

112 The correct reading *Arāṭus* is given, this time, by *lām* (and Beirut); *nūn* has something like *Arṭalus*, which may be discarded. The comparison with other Arabic statements about the Šābī'ans has led some scholars to take this name as referring to Arānī, but the correspondence of our text with Mas'ūdī (who provides the same list in his *Tanbīh*), makes it clear that 'Aratus' is to be preferred here; see the Introduction, p. 43. On this rather curious inclusion of Homer and

Pythagoreans [أفلاطونية],¹¹³ Aristotelians [أرسطائية],¹¹⁴ Platonists [أفلاطونية],¹¹⁵ and Epicureans [أفقيزوسية].¹¹⁶

B. Philosophical Doctrines

They allege that the world is finite in its dimension, since it is spherical in shape.¹¹⁷ And they allege that there is no commencement to its existence and no second one [ليس لوجوده مبدأ وثان],¹¹⁸ but, rather, that it

Aratus, two Greek poets a priori not connected with Hermeticism, see Marquet, *Pythagoriciens*, p. 11: 'Les Harrâniens, comme les Grecs de basse époque, croyaient sans doute aux significations ésotériques des vers homériques. Quant à Aratos, poète de l'époque macédonienne et séleucide, sans doute est-ce son poème astronomique, les *Phénomènes*, qui lui vaut son prestige chez ces Harrâniens.' Aratus' astronomical poem, so influential in Greek and Roman Antiquity, was in fact a typical product of the Alexandrine milieu, containing a great variety of subtle allusions and riddles (on this, see for instance my 'Knot of the Heavens'). I would argue that this peculiarity may have contributed to the notoriety of this work in Arabic Hermeticism.

- 113 The reading *Fūthāghuriyya* is provided by Beirut only (the two manuscripts have unintelligible variants here), but the context makes it clear that it is the correct one.
- 114 Beirut and *lām* both have *Aristānūniyya*, which the context makes obvious. *Nūn* is unintelligible.
- 115 Beirut and *lām* both have *Aflātūniyya*, obvious in this context. The name is missing in *nūn*.
- 116 *Nūn* (*al-Afiqūrsiyya*) confirms here Marquet's remarkable intuition ('Sabéens I', p. 37). *Lām* and Beirut have: *al-Aq'ūrsiyya*, which Baffioni ('Secret Sects', pp. 15–16) suggests linking with the Greek ἀρχοντικός, but the argument seems to me far-fetched. True, the mention of Epicureans looks odd here since, as Baffioni remarks, the Brethren's awareness — and, broadly speaking, Islamic awareness — about Epicurus and Epicureanism was almost nonexistent. But the name was known, and I would take its inclusion here as yet further evidence for the Brethren's lack of familiarity with the history of philosophical traditions of Antiquity.
- 117 Note the implication of the phrase: the world is said to be finite 'because' ('*li-anna-hu'*, given by both manuscripts) it is spherical and not 'except for the fact that' ('*illā anna-hu'*) it is spherical, as given by Beirut.
- 118 One has to choose here between Beirut ('*mabda' thānin*') and *lām* ('*mabda' wa-thānin*'). Beirut is problematic, as was already noted by Baffioni, 'Secret Sects', p. 17: 'The pattern "*mabda' thānin*" is, to my knowledge, very rare in the *Rasā'il*, and used in reference to the numbers (see, e.g., Ep. 1, [vol. 1,] pp. 58.22–59.5). Now, such a construction postulates an object *x*, the *awwal* of a series, as distinct from another object *y*, which is *thānin* in reference to *x*. We may therefore infer that in our text as well the *mabda' thānin* is to be denied to another *mabda'*, in this case, the only one. Such an idea contradicts Kindī's [as reported by Ibn

is dependent on the Creator, how powerful and lofty is He,¹¹⁹ as the dependence of the effect with respect to its cause. And they allege that the phenomena of the terrestrial world take place by means of the [following] things:

(1) Matter, subject to mixture (fol. 525a) and composition, that is, the four elements.

(2) Souls, those moving and those immobile in their individuals.

(3) The impulse from the celestial world towards the four elements and [the things] generated from them, in order for them to get prepared to receive the influences of souls in terms of motion and immobility, union and separation, heat and cold, humidity and dryness — [influences] by which the artist [صانع] consolidates the influence of the art [صنعة] on matter for every thing produced.

(4) The preservation by the supreme divinity, how lofty is His loftiness, of the powers of all existing beings upon them [عليها] [i.e., the elements], the support of His help to them [لها] [existing beings], [5] the completion by Him of their objectives and aims, and the distribution of existing things amongst the seven planets.

And they allege that the fixed stars are allotted to the planets, mixed with their powers, assisting them with respect to their actions. And they allege that the ninth sphere is in contact with the sphere of the fixed stars and that it is the sphere that terminates with the sphere of the zodiac, formed with images [صور] that distinguish it,¹²⁰ [and they allege] that each one of its degrees is divided into two parts, one on the north and the other one on the south, including images that one has come

al-Nadīm] statement about the Sabeian doctrine that the world has an eternal and unique author, devoid of attributes, and to whom the qualities of the caused beings are not referable'. We have thus preferred *lām*, whose reading would seem to better agree with Ibn al-Nadīm's report, namely, 'These people [the Harrānian Šābi'ans] agree that the world has a prime cause [the transcendent deity] who is eternal and a unity, rather than multiple'; Ibn al-Nadīm, *Fihrist*, tr. Dodge, p. 746.

119 In agreement with their own understanding of the concept of *Ḥanīf*, we note from this kind of statement that the Ikhwān had no problem in identifying the God revered by the Šābi'ans with the God of the Muslims.

120 The zodiacal sphere is the only one of the heavenly spheres that is made of 'images' (*suwar*), namely, the twelve 'images' or 'representations' corresponding to the twelve zodiacal signs or catastersisms.

to know out of regard for the influences that arise from them over the period [of time], as [p. 296] the specialists of talismans have reported.

And when they allotted the terrestrial issues [10] to the planets and organized them under their direction and the influence in them, they proceeded also along this way with respect to areas, climes, districts, cities, and villages.¹²¹

As regards souls, for them [i.e., those crediting magic] there are those which are not linked to bodies [جسم] and which do not live in the lineage [جنث],¹²² one way or another, because of their elevation above them [i.e., bodies], and of their rising above their filth and their squalor. They call these souls the divine [ones].

And, for them [the believers], those are divided into two kinds.¹²³

121 This is the foundational doctrine for astrological geography. The literature from Classical Antiquity provides us with a series of associations between regions of the earth — particularly, the seven climes — and the planets and the zodiacal signs. On this, see Bouché-Leclercq, *L'Astrologie grecque*, pp. 327–347 and my 'astrologische Geographie', pp. 85–104 and 'Oikoumenè hypouranios', pp. 25–69. These notions, including the theory of seven climes, are formulated in Epistle 4 ('On Geography'). The reason why geography is dealt with in Epistle 4 — thus breaking the conventional order of the quadrivium of mathematical sciences (arithmetic, geometry, astronomy, and music) — is that geography was regarded as the earthly counterpart to the science of the stars, in the manner of an appendix to the indubitably nobler science of astronomy.

122 The comparison of Beirut with the readings of our two manuscripts raises a problem here. Whereas Beirut has the implausible *janna* (corrected by Marquet to *juththa*) and then, in various subsequent occurrences, the word *juththa* (also to be found in the similar passage from Epistle 49, but again according to Beirut only), *nūn* (confirmed at least in two cases by *lām*) has the less common word *jīnḥ* (a variant of *jīn*, meaning 'race' or lineage') which I would suggest to take as the *lectio difficilior*. The word *juththa* is, in fact, problematic. As opposed to the more neutral *jasad* — equally mentioned in the passage —, it primarily refers to the body as a corpse, or a cadaver or a carcass (as in Epistle 3, 'On Astronomy'; see *Rasā'il*, vol. 1, p. 137.7 and also, further down in the present epistle, in the passage dealing with physiognomy), and this clearly does not fit with one of the subsequent occurrences, where the word is applied to the stars. It would be instructive to consult the manuscripts available for the passage in Epistle 49.

123 Compare the testimony to follow with the slightly abridged but essentially identical passage from *Rasā'il*, Epistle 49, vol. 4, p. 244.11–22 (tr. Baffioni): 'We have already mentioned that some earlier [philosophers] held that souls are divided into two kinds: (1) those which do not dwell in a body (*juththa*) and are not attached to bodies (*ajṣām*), and they are divided into two kinds: (1a) those which are good *per se*, namely the angels, and (1b) those which are evil *per se*, namely the devils. And (2) other souls are attached to the bodies (*juththa* [sic])

The first kind is good by essence, and its individuals are called angels. They [the believers] seek to get closer [يَتَقَرَّبُونَ]¹²⁴ to them [angels], in order to appropriate the good. And the second kind is bad by essence, and its individuals are called devils. They [the believers] seek to get closer to them [devils], in order to get rid of their bad. And they assign to each one [15] of them a distinct invocation [دَعَاء], a determined incense [يَخُور], and a sequence of rituals [عَمَل], by way of which they attain what they wish.¹²⁵

Other souls are linked to the lineage [جَنَتْ] of the stars and do not depart from it. And these are nevertheless linked and behave in this terrestrial world according to two categories of behaviour:

(1) By way of the natures of the bodies [أَجْسَاد] [to which they are linked], as is reported in the books of astrology.

(2) By way of their souls.

Other souls are linked to bodies [أَجْسَاد] without departing from them and without renouncing them, except to the extent that their spirit [رُوح] departs as a result of their passing-away. Of this class of souls, there is one species [نَوْع] that lives in the human lineage [جَنَتْ] and behaves [in accordance] with it and in it and does not depart from it, except on the occasion when the soul departs from the rest of the individuals — animals and plants — while passing to the Sea of Tāūs [طَاوُس],¹²⁶ namely, [20]

of the stars, are inseparable from them and do not detach from them (*taṣbiru 'an-hā*) but to a certain extent, and these act (*mutaṣarrifa*) in the world by two types of actions (*taṣarruf*): (a) in the natures of their bodies (*ajsād*) according to what is recorded in the books about the dispositions of the stars, and (b) in their souls. And other souls are attached to the bodies (*ajsād*), do not separate from them and do not detach from them (*taṣbiru 'an-hā*) other than to the extent that they separate from the body (*juththa*) for its corruption. And among this class of souls there is a species which dwells in the human body (*juththa*) and does not separate from it but like the souls of the other animal and vegetal beings separate [from them], and the place to which they arrive (*maṣīru-hā*) is the Sea called Tūs, to be punished there unless (*illā an*) they seek a delay in falling into matter, where their staying will be proper and they will have the power to attain their redemption.'

124 Both Marquet ('Sabéens I', p. 38) and Baffioni ('Secret Sects', p. 18) assume that this word means 'to offer a sacrifice', but I would see that as over-interpretation.

125 On these elements as part of the Šābi'an initiation ceremonies, see the Introduction, pp. 62–63.

126 Marquet ('Sabéens I', p. 38) suggests, without conviction, the 'lunar ocean'. But the 'Sea of Tāūs' (*baḥr tāūs*) in the present context might well be directly

the sphere of ether, in order [for them] to suffer there until they ask for the reversal of this and the descent into a matter that is fitting for their dwelling, and in order [for them] to take command of the realization of their salvation.

And they [the believers in magic] allege to be able to know the path of these [souls] by pondering character traits [أَخْلَاق] and habits. If they find [one soul] similar to the beasts [بَيْمَة] in its behaviour, having a nature [طَبِيعَة] without a thought about the support of a religion or [about] the examination of a doctrine, then, regarding it, they decree that its soul is the soul of a beast, for which nothing is fitting but only the fact of populating a house and perpetuating the species of mankind [نَوْعَ إِنْسَانِيَة]. As for the other (fol. 525b) species, these are souls for which it is possible that, when they are healthy, they ascend towards the spheres and live in them and take pleasure with them and in them. But it is possible, when they are ill, for them to fall down from them [the spheres] and live in the [human] lineage [جَنْث] [p. 297] and be linked

connected with the peacock (ṭā'ūs or ṭāwūs, from the Greek ταῦς) and some of its symbolism. F. Viré, 'Ṭāwūs', *EI2*, p. 396, records that 'according to some beliefs, it [the peacock] is said to have been the cause of the entry of the Devil into Paradise and of the expulsion of Adam, with the injunction that he was never to return there for the whole duration of the terrestrial world'. A Muslim legend reported via the *Qīṣaṣ al-anbiyā'* literature has it indeed that Iblis, who wished to enter Paradise, then guarded by the angel Ridwān, managed to slip past him by convincing the haughty peacock to carry him under its feathers into the Garden; see Knappert, *Islamic Legends*, pp. 36–37. On Malik Ta'ūs, the King Peacock (or Angel Peacock) believed to have redeemed itself from its fall and then become a central figure in the Kurdish Yazidi religious literature, see Kreyenbrock, 'Yazidī', pp. 313–316, especially p. 313. The Ikhwān identify here the 'Sea of Ṭāūs' with the 'sphere of ether' (which is mid-way between the spheres of the four elements and the planetary spheres), and mention the souls that are there to endure suffering until they find the way of 'descent into a matter'. In other words, the expression is meant to designate the 'interval' between heaven and hell in which the souls are believed to remain between two successive cycles of metempsychosis. See also Ibn al-Nadīm, *Fihrist*, tr. Dodge p. 746: 'They [the apostles] have promised enduring contentment for the obedient, but for the person who is disobedient, they have promised torment and punishment to the extent which he deserves. Eventually, however, this [punishment] will be ended. It is related that one of their leaders said, "God punishes for nine thousand cycles, after which there will be a change to the compassion of God"'. On Shahrastānī's report on metempsychosis and reincarnation cycles, see also the Introduction, p. 49.

with it, and [it is possible that] they take pleasure and suffer from them [human bodies] and in them. And these souls are the human and incarnated souls [إنسانية بشرية].

And they allege that it is also possible for them to know towards what outcome the human being is led to after his demise, if he departs from this world while being in the condition he wishes. And this is because, for each view and [each] religion, the thought of the one believing is realized in the direction of one of the categories of character traits, [5] and one is moved towards one of the varieties of actions. Like the doctrine which intensifies the savagery of its people and their primitive way of life, or the doctrine which multiplies dispute and controversy, or the doctrine in which the murder of persons and the seizing of goods are multiplied, or the doctrine in which sacrifices of animals and the consumption of meat, or other doctrines that are wholly absorbed by some of these actions, are exaggerated [يُفرط].¹²⁷ For these actions, if they are predominant amongst human beings, [they] clothe them with character traits by which their habits are steered, [habits] that are permanent in them and by which they are known.

And they allege also that each category of character traits, even if it is [found] in humans, is more powerful and more apparent in one species [10] amongst the species of animals, such as, bravery with the lion, pride with the wolf, slyness with the fox, greed with the swine, silliness with the donkey, humility with the camel, hastiness with the gecko, stickling with the creepy-crawlies, lasciviousness with the bear, appetency with the monkey, under-handedness with the snake, kleptomania with the magpie, rapturousness with the falcon, fearfulness with the hare,

127 It is interesting to find this judgement on 'exaggerated' doctrines under the Ikhwān's pen, who are generally known for their tolerance and open-mindedness. In this respect one may recall here the famous passage from Epistle 48 ('On the Call to God'), by which they declare: 'Know this, my Brother: we are not opposed to any science, we do not to cling fanatically to any doctrine, and we do not keep ourselves away from any of the books that the sages and the philosophers have written or composed on the various sciences and the subtle meanings which they have extracted by their intellects and observations. As for the support, assistance, and foundation of our cause, they are the books of the prophets, God bless them all, the revelation which they have set forth, as well as the information, inspiration, and revelation passed to them by the angels'; see *Rasā'il*, vol. 4, p. 167.

exhausture with the gazelle, lust with the billy-goat, haughtiness with the peacock [طاووس],¹²⁸ perfidy with the raven, oblivion with the mouse, monopolization with the ant, mutual excitability as with the dog, or aggression with the cock.¹²⁹

[The situation] is similar to this for the inseparable attributes of the character traits: a number of species of animals share them in common, [15] differing in abundance or paucity, and each having a definite measure, according to the species. And man, when he is just dead, having within him a certain limit of this character trait whose measure [he has] within him, is transported towards that [p. 298] species which preserves it.¹³⁰

128 To link the peacock with haughtiness may seem to be fairly obvious, but in the context of the present epistle this association is perhaps best interpreted when put in line with the above mention of the 'Sea of Tāūs' ('Sea of the Peacock') and the legend it refers to regarding erring souls; see note 126 above.

129 In Epistle 26 ('On the Man as Microcosmos'; see *Rasā'il*, vol. 2, pp. 473–475), the Brethren provide another list of animals in connection with qualities or traits of character, but while the two lists agree with each other on certain associations (as in the case of the lion, the wolf, the camel, and the peacock), they are at variance for many others, and each one deals with animal species that are not taken into account in the other statement. More on this in Marquet, *Philosophie*, p. 190.

130 In other words, depending on his dominant character trait at the time of his death, man is reincarnated into the species in which the same trait is also dominant. There is possibly no better illustration of this doctrine than Plato's myth of Er at the very end of the *Republic*. In spite of its celebrity, it seems worthwhile here quoting from the following section: 'So saying, the prophet flung the lots out among them all, and each took up the lot that fell by his side[....] And whoever took up a lot saw plainly what number he had drawn. And after this again the prophet placed the patterns of lives before them on the ground, far more numerous than the assembly. They were of every variety, for there were lives of all kinds of animals and all sorts of human lives[....] But there was no determination of the quality of soul, because the choice of a different life inevitably determined a different character[....] For he [Er] said that it was a sight worth seeing to observe how the several souls selected their lives. He said it was a strange, pitiful, and ridiculous spectacle, as the choice was determined for the most part by the habits of their former lives. He saw the soul that had been Orpheus', he said, selecting the life of a swan, because from hatred of the tribe of women, owing to his death at their hands, it was unwilling to be conceived and born of a woman'; *Republic* X.617e–620a, tr. Shorey. The text next provides other examples of the same kind: Thamyras, another singer, selects the life of a nightingale; Ajax chooses the life of a lion; the buffoon Thersites takes the life of an ape, and so on. It is of course impossible to determine whether this myth may have influenced the Brethren directly, but the fact that the authors quote

And it seems that this approach is the opposite of the method of the physiognomist [صاحب الفراسة], since, through that method, one is led to infer the character traits from external appearances.¹³¹ And in every [perishable] body [جثة] in which they occur and [in every] clay that materializes them, felicity is mixed up with torment, and ailment with pleasure, with the result that this [perishable body] is a deception for them, and a bond for the whole period during which it [the perishable body] is linked to what it can in accordance with [20] its genus, until it receives what can get in full from these [traits] and [until] it takes the whole of what is within these [traits], and *Your Lord is not ever unjust to His servants*.¹³²

And all this [that] I¹³³ have just mentioned and what I have reported about it [comes] from their foundation and the premises of their [the believers in magic] sciences, as a validation of their doctrine with respect to magic and talismans. And if I have left aside more than what I have mentioned, and left out more than what I have reported, avoiding the development and looking for the abridgment, it is because I have left aside the mention of what, in this respect, follows for them the current of what has been mentioned in the Book of Properties [خواص],¹³⁴ such as

from another book of the *Republic* in the same epistle may be regarded as an argument in that direction.

- 131 Physiognomy ('ilm al-firāsa), which could indeed be defined as the science to determine a hidden character trait by analysing external characteristics, was considered by Islamic authors to be a form of divination. On this, see Savage-Smith, 'Introduction', pp. lx–lxiv. The Pseudo-Aristotelian *Sirr al-asrār*, whose Latin posterity under the name of *Secretum Secretorum* was enormous, includes a chapter on physiognomy. On the *Rasā'il Ikhwān al-Ṣafā'* as one of the sources of the Arabic model, see for instance Grignaschi, 'Origine', p. 15 (and also the chart, p. 87). Let us also remember that Epistle 9 of the *Rasā'il* is entirely devoted to 'the explanation of character traits, the causes of their difference, their types of diseases, and anecdotes drawn from the refined manners of the prophets and the cream of the morals of the sages'.
- 132 Qur'an 41:46. Note the variant from the Qur'anic Vulgate: *Allāh* instead of *Rabbu ka*.
- 133 Another passage with use of the first person singular. On this, see note 27 above.
- 134 By *khawāṣṣ* ('properties'), we are meant to understand in the present context the occult properties of the substances. The science of occult properties played a role of prime importance in alchemy, and a considerable number of variants of the 'Book of Properties' is known to have circulated in the Islamic Middle Ages; see Sezgin, *GAS*, IV, pp. 377–378. See also M. Ullmann, 'Khaṣṣa', *EI2*, pp. 1097–1098. Amongst these works, the most famous was the *Kitāb al-Khawāṣṣ*

the action of the magnet and other things (fol. 526a) amongst properties. And this I have left aside because of its evidence. On the contrary, I will mention another collection [of things], in order for you to take interest, in this respect, my brother, in all their objectives, and in order for you to conceive of their conditions in their quests.

C. The Eighty-Seven Temples

Indeed, they also allege that, when these premises have been established for them and they have become on intimate terms with them, and [when] their examination of these has been long, [then] they have made derivations from them and have built upon them, stating [قالوا]:

If what has been just mentioned is established, and [if] the stars and the souls take possession of the bodies in virtue of this of science and capability, and if there are those [stars and souls] which are propitious to us and which take possession of us, [5] then necessity compels us to get closer to them and to implore them, so as to repair what is corrupt in us, and in order to ease what impacts us, and to oppose what diverts [us] from what is right with respect to our thoughts and views, in order that two things be attained by us: [1] goodness of life in this world; and [2] the mastering of freedom in the afterlife.¹³⁵

So, whenever they wish to get closer to some star or soul, they perform the rituals which it occurs to them are appropriate to its nature. And then, they ask for what they need and what is inside

al-kabir compiled by Jābir ibn Ḥayyān himself (see Kraus, *Jābir*, vol. I, pp. 148–152 for a detailed description), and it is indeed possible that the Brethren are here referring to that work, as has been suggested by Baffioni (*Frammenti*, p. 365). The mention of the magnet — the only indication in the present passage as to the contents of that book — is, of course, not sufficient to allow us to decide. For a comparison of the Jābirian corpus and that of the *Rasā'il Ikhwān al-Ṣafā'* and the possibility of borrowings between the two, see, Marquet, 'Relations', pp. 39–51. In his 'Sabéens I', p. 40, Marquet suggested an identification of the book with the *Kitāb fī khawāṣṣ al-nabāt wa'l-ahjār al-ma'diniyya* compiled by a certain Dūshām according to the *Nabatean Agriculture*. This seems to be a gratuitous assertion.

135 The whole passage is put in the direct speech by the Brethren. We should thus infer that they are quoting here from another source which they do not mention.

[the star or the soul], under its power, stating that, whenever they perform some category of natural actions and get closer to the stars, in observance of them [the stars], yet without turning their attention to anything related to [p. 299] astrology, then [10] the influence of this will be weak, as regards the satisfaction of the need, due to their selection of this star by volition [إرادة] alone.

Likewise, whenever they perform [actions] and follow the method of astral elections [إختيارات],¹³⁶ so as to solicit the fulfilment of the need, without observance of the natural actions, [then] the influence for the satisfaction [of the need] will be weak as well. Conversely, in most cases, it hardly comes to fulfilment due to the selection of stars in this respect by nature alone, as one may often see and hear in the case of someone undertaking this and striving for it, owing to his ignorance and the absence of purpose, and [his] desiring it yet without direction — people who are naïve and from the populace of shallow knowledge in those things, who ignore the foundations of this art and its sciences! They desire from this what is impossible and vain for any people of [15] this art — I mean, the art of talismans and magic.

And they [those skilled in magic] allege that, if they combine the two things [volition and nature] with one another and follow the two paths in the quest for their needs, the nature of the star and its volition will join together for them. And this is the surest [method] in terms of causality [سبب], and the most beautiful in terms of the quest and the attainment of the objective [غرض].

And they allege that this action, if it originates from a diseased secret thought and from a feeble intention, will follow the way of folly and passion, and the profit from it will disintegrate. And maybe it will provoke its opposite, and [there will be] damage in it and by it.

136 In addition to other traditional branches of the astrological art such as genethliology (which deals with nativities) or mundane astrology (which is concerned with world affairs and events in general), one should also mention a practice that is known as catarchic astrology, dealing with 'elections' (*ikhtiyārāt*) and by which one seeks to determine the most appropriate time to start (hence, the origin of the name 'catarchic', from the Greek *κατάρχειν*, 'to begin'). See Saliba, 'Role', pp. 341–370, here pp. 353–355, for a presentation of the various branches of astrology.

They have considered the cities which are allotted to a certain star, in agreement with the experiences that had befallen them, as it is found and mentioned in the books of astrology. And they have distinguished them and observed [20] which [cities] are under its [i.e., that star's] authority when it is in its exaltation [إشرف],¹³⁷ which are under its authority when it is in its domicile [إيت],¹³⁸ and which are under its authority when it is in its decan [وجه].¹³⁹ And when it was favourable for them to keep with those conditions and to scrutinize what befell them [the cities], they waited for this star to come into in some of these dignities,¹⁴⁰ and they began the construction of a temple for

137 For 'exaltation', see note 25 above.

138 Each planet exerts its specific authority on two signs (in the case of Mercury, Venus, Mars, Jupiter and Saturn) — or else on one sign only (in the case of the two luminaries, the Sun and the Moon). Not to be confused with zodiacal houses (on which, see note 45 above), these signs are said to be the 'domiciles/rulerships' (*bayt* [al-kawākib], pl. *buyūt*; Greek, *olko*; Latin, *domus*), either diurnal or nocturnal, of the corresponding planets, according to the following system: Moon in Cancer (its nocturnal domicile; no diurnal domicile for the Moon); Mercury in Virgo (diurnal) and Gemini (nocturnal); Venus in Libra (diurnal) and in Taurus (nocturnal); Sun in Leo (its diurnal domicile; no nocturnal domicile for the Sun); Mars in Scorpio (diurnal) and in Aries (nocturnal); Jupiter in Sagittarius (diurnal) and in Pisces (nocturnal); Saturn in Capricorn (diurnal) and in Aquarius (nocturnal). See Bouché-Leclercq, *L'Astrologie grecque*, pp. 182–192. The Brethren define the system of domiciles in Epistle 3 ('On Astronomy'); see *Rasā'il*, vol. 1, p. 120. See also my *Révolutions*, p. 88, for references to Greek and Arabic authors.

139 In addition to dividing the zodiac into twelve signs of 30 degrees each, ancient astrologers also used to divide it into 36 'decans' (*wajh*, pl. *wujūh*; Greek, *dekavoi*; Latin, *decanus*, or *facies*) of 10 degrees each and each allegedly meant to correspond to the peculiar power of an old Egyptian deity. See Bouché-Leclercq, *L'Astrologie grecque*, pp. 215–234. This 'religious' alternative to the classical system of signs became widely popular, especially in Hermetic literature, Hermes Trismegistus himself being ascribed with the authorship of a treatise 'On the Thirty-Six Decans'; see the Latin edition by Simonetta Feraboli and Sylvain Matton, *Hermetis Trismegisti De Triginta Sex Decanis*, Corpus Christianorum, Continuatio Mediaevalis, 144 (Turnhout: Brepols, 1994). The Brethren define the system of thirty-six 'lords of decans' (*arbāb al-wujūh*) in Epistle 3 ('On Astronomy'); see *Rasā'il*, vol. 1, pp. 123–124.

140 'Dignity' (*hazz*, pl. *huḏūḏ*; Greek, *ἀρεταί*; Latin, *pars*, or *dignitas*), is a concept often referred to by the Ikhwān when dealing with astrological issues. In ancient and mediaeval astrology, the 'dignities' indicate the strength of a planet's influence. The five traditional dignities are (1) domicile (and detriment); (2) exaltation (and fall); (3) triplicity; (4) term; and (5) decan. See my *Révolutions*, p. 88, for classical

that star in the city for which this dignity had been determined. And they represented that temple with the image [صورة]¹⁴¹ by which it [the planet] was configured when it was in one of its dignities, together with images (fol. 526b) from amongst the predominant stars, and the images [صور] that are in the same degree [درجته]. And they placed them in that temple.

And they have prescribed a norm of rituals and have fixed them in a constitution which they have left with the custodians. And they have annexed to it the mention of the issues which it is appropriate to ask for when it is in one of its dignities, in that it is within and under its allotment.¹⁴² And they have established that day of every year as the feast of that star in that temple.

And whenever some need occurred to a man [p. 300] of their people, he sought to be satisfied for that, [5] and asked which temple it was attributed to. And as soon as he knew, he made a vow to that temple corresponding to it. He went out with it [the need] to it [the temple] on the day of its feast. He performed the actions recommended for it and the one who had made the vow obtained [the satisfaction of] it.

references on this subject. It is important not to confuse this notion with that of 'part/lot' (*sahm*), which the Brethren define in their epistle on astronomy and which plays a crucial role, as we have seen, in the original version of the story of the man claiming prophecy, in agreement with Greek mythology.

141 Cf. note 120 above. In the same way as the twelve zodiacal signs, the seven planets, in their quality of deities, are also susceptible to be 'represented' under the form of specific 'images' corresponding to each one of them. Islamic astrology inherited from Classical Antiquity the principal characteristics enabling one to construe the 'representation' or the 'image' (*ṣūra*) of each of the planetary gods. Thus, Saturn is usually portrayed as an old man, Mars as a warrior, Venus as a young woman, and so on. These associations, with the multiplication of attributes for each planetary god, resulted in Islam in an extremely rich iconography; see Caiozzo, *Images*, pp. 165–198. Pseudo-Majrīṭī's *Ghāyat al-ḥakīm* includes various chapters — as for instance, the second part of Book II, Chapter 10 — that deal with the description of those planetary images, but this is another issue for which coherence is not to be expected.

142 This is a reference to interrogative astrology, that is, the *masā'il* ('interrogations') about a wide variety of issues of life — theft, sudden loss of power or objects, and the like — which the astrologer seeks to predict; on this, see Saliba, 'Role', pp. 341–370, here p. 354.

[Here is] an example of the distinction between needs.¹⁴³ If, for instance, the Sun, being in Aries (which is its exaltation), is positioned on the degree of the ascendant,¹⁴⁴ then the needs for which it is possible to perform magic will be only the issues that are concerned with the allotment of the fifth zodiacal sign: offspring, pleasure, joy; and this is because of the sign of Leo, which is the fifth from its ascendant. If it [the Sun], being in the sign of Leo, is positioned on the degree of the ascendant, [then] the needs for which it is possible to perform magic will be only the issues [of those] whose souls are linked to [10] religions, divine men, judges and the like, and travels, because of the sign of Aries (which is its exaltation); and it is the ninth from the ascendant.

And if the Moon, being in Taurus (which is its exaltation), is positioned on the ascendant, [then] only the needs which are in the allotment of the third [sign] will be fitting: brothers, sisters, relatives, and close travels, because of the sign of Cancer, which is the third from the ascendant. If it [the Moon], being in Cancer, is positioned to the ascendant, the fitting issues and the needs satisfied by them will be only [those] which are in the allotment of the eleventh [sign; here, Taurus]: hope and felicity. And likewise for the rest of the allotments of the stars.

And they assigned to the planets certain temples, taking into account [15] what the number of their dignities required. The Sun was amongst them — at the time of its exaltations, it is the lord [فَالرَّبِّ]; and the Moon, at the time of its exaltations, the prophets of the laws [أَنْبِيَاءُ النُّوَامِيسِ] and the prescriptions [السَّنَنِ];¹⁴⁵ and similarly for the rest of the planets.

And 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

143 The examples given here are concerned with the relationships between the dignities of domiciles and exaltations. Thus, for the Sun, these are Leo and Aries respectively; for the Moon, Cancer and Taurus.

144 For 'ascendant', see note 45 above.

145 Traditionally, the Sun is associated with leadership, kings, rulers, lords; the Moon, with intuition and prophecy. Regarding the two luminaries in particular, one finds in Epistle 3 ('On Astronomy'; see *Rasā'il*, vol. 1, p. 141) the assertion that the Moon is concerned with the affairs of this world and its inhabitants, whereas the Sun is concerned with the affairs of the other world.

of their influences. Amongst them is the Dog of the Giant [كلب الجبار]¹⁴⁶ that is Sirius Crossing [وهو السَّعْرَى العَبُور]¹⁴⁷ amongst them, al-Ūrūn,¹⁴⁸ that is Capricorn;¹⁴⁹ amongst them, Harūs,¹⁵⁰ and that is Sagittarius;¹⁵¹

- 146 The 'Dog of the Giant' (*kalb al-jabbār*) is one of the most common Arabic appellations for the constellation Canis Maioris (the Greater Dog). The reference to 'the Giant' is for the adjacent constellation of Orion, the giant hunter of Greek ancient mythology whose dog was placed on the heavenly sphere next to him. See Aratus, *Phaenomena* 323–327.
- 147 *Al-shi'rā al-'abūr* (literally, 'Sirius, that has crossed [the Milky Way]'), a variant of which being *al-shi'rā al-yamāniyya* (literally, 'Sirius, the southern'), refers to a Canis Maioris, that is, the brightest star of the heavens. Under the name 'Sothis', it was particularly revered in ancient Egypt, since it was considered as the traditional herald of the annual flood of the Nile. Indeed, it marked the beginning of a 1,461-year cycle, known as the 'Year of the Dog', or the 'Egyptian Great Year', corresponding to the lapse of time required for the heliacal rising of Sothis-Sirius to coincide again with the 1st Thoth, that is, the first of the 365 days of the Egyptian calendar. See Censorinus, *De Die Natali* 18.10. For amalgamations of this period with the conjunctive Great Year of the ancients and with the measure of the phoenix's life-span, see my *Annus platonius*. For a discussion on the origin of the terms *al-shi'rā* and *al-'abūr*, see Paul Kunitzsch, *Arabische Sternnamen in Europa* (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1959), pp. 117–119; see also his *Untersuchungen zur Sternnomenklatur der Araber* (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1961), p. 111.
- 148 Beirut and *nūn* have *al-Ūrūn*, and *lām* provides something like *al-azīn*. I cannot see any plausible explanation for this name.
- 149 *Al-jadī* ('The Goat') is the traditional designation of the constellation (and zodiacal sign) of Capricorn, or else of its main star, a Capricornis; see Kunitzsch, *Sternnomenklatur*, p. 22. But it also may design the polar star, a Ursae Minoris (also known as Polaris); see Kunitzsch, *Sternnomenklatur*, p. 62. On the basis of the parallel with Sagittarius in the next phrase, I would opt for Capricorn here.
- 150 I have been unable to identify this name, for which the manuscript tradition makes problems. *Lām* provides *ahrūs*; Beirut has something like *harūs* or *harwūs*, while *nūn* is unreadable. Marquet, 'Sabéens I', p. 44, is at a loss: 'Hrws: le héros? Horus? Ou autre chose?'. Baffioni, *Frammenti*, p. 368, does not provide new elements. I think the identification with Horus should be ruled out, since the name of the ancient Egyptian deity is normally transcribed with the letter *ha* in Arabic. Although unprovable, the connection with *rāmī* (Sagittarius) may perhaps suggest a corruption in the manuscript tradition for *urqūb* ('the Heel-Tendon') which is the usual name for β Sagittarii.
- 151 Two names were used by the Arabs to designate the constellation (and zodiacal sign) of Sagittarius, namely, *qaws* — which seems to have been the primitive form — and *rāmī*, as found in our text. See Kunitzsch, *Sternnomenklatur*, p. 22.

amongst them, Suhā,¹⁵² which is the little star which is part of the Great Bear.¹⁵³

And [deriving] from the fixed stars, as if these were the souls denuded, they also made other temples, and they managed them in the same way as with the stars, [20] along the years and the needs. Amongst them is Pluto [الفلوطي],¹⁵⁴ who is the king in charge of hell and the abyss; [p. 301] amongst others, Poseidon [الفوسدن],¹⁵⁵ who is the king in charge of the sea; amongst others, Fūhās [الفوحاس],¹⁵⁶ who is the king in charge of the winds; amongst others, Kīmas [كيمس],¹⁵⁷ who

152 *Suhā* (literally, 'The Forgotten') is a common Arabic name — another is *al-khawr*, from which derives the modern name 'Alcor' — for 80 Ursae Maioris, one of the faint but important stars making up the constellation of the Greater Bear. See Kunitzsch, *Sternnamen*, pp. 125–127 and p. 208; and also his *Anwā' Tradition*, pp. 80–81. On the *anwā'* system of the early Arabs and its identification with the system of 28 lunar 'mansions' (*manāzil*), see the still valuable Carlo Alfonso Nallino, *Raccolta*, V, pp. 171–194. For the lunar mansions in Islamic iconography, see Caiozzo, *Images*, pp. 331–345. The Brethren list the mansions with their names in Epistle 3 ('On Astronomy'); see *Rasā'il*, vol. 1, p. 133.

153 In Arabic astronomy, *banāt al-na'sh* — an expression whose origin remains unclear — was the name commonly used to design the three stars forming the beam of the Great Bear, respectively ε, ζ, and η Ursae Maioris, the four other stars forming the Bear itself being just named *al-na'sh*. See Kunitzsch, *Sternnamen*, pp. 149–150. The Greater Bear as a whole was generally termed *al-dubb al-akbar* so as to distinguish it from the Lesser Bear (*al-dubb al-asghar*). It is most probably due to the influence of this appellation that we find here the expression '*banāt al-na'sh*' (or *banāt na'sh*) *al-kubrā'*, also widely attested in the Arabic literature of *anwā'*; see Kunitzsch, *Anwā' Tradition*, pp. 29 and 85.

154 *Lām* reads *al-'ulūfā* (or *al-'ulūfī*). Beirut and *nūn* provide *al-Fulūfī*, which was taken over by Marquet ('Sabéens I', p. 44) as corresponding to Pluto, god of hell — a proposition endorsed by Baffioni, *Frammenti*, pp. 368–369. The context makes this correspondence very plausible indeed.

155 Beirut provides a wholly unintelligible *lafūdūr*, which Marquet propounded to emend with *al-Fūsidun*, thus corresponding to Poseidon, the ancient god of the sea. This emendation is fully corroborated by our two manuscripts.

156 The two manuscripts and Beirut offer widely varying readings here: *al-Fūhās* for *lām*, *al-Wūhās* for *nūn* and something like *Lilmūjās* for Beirut. Marquet ('Sabéens I', p. 44) suggests without conviction to see a corruption for *al-Būriyās*, corresponding to the wind god Boreas. The context invites us to view Aeolus, the chief god of the winds in ancient Greek mythology, as the best candidate here, but the manuscripts' variants hardly fit with such an identification. In the present edition, we have opted for the reading of *lām*.

157 This is another case of great disparity between Beirut (*Līmas*), *lām* (*al-Has*) and *nūn* (*Kīmas*). Marquet ('Sabéens I', p. 44) leaves the case unsolved. In the absence of any conclusive evidence, I would opt for *Kīmas*, in view of the mention of a

is the king in charge of the marvels arising from the jinn; amongst others, Aphrodite [أفروطس],¹⁵⁸ 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.¹⁵⁹

D. The Temple of Jirjās

Then, in the same manner, they also made a temple, at a time when all the planets were in their dignities,¹⁶⁰ and they divided it into two parts. They assigned one of them to men, and the other to women. And in each (fol. 527a) of its two parts, there is a big hall [بيت] which does not

king known as Kimas the Hermesian, allegedly a prolific author on alphabets and the secrets of nature according to Pseudo-Ibn Wahshiyya; see *Ancient Alphabets and Hieroglyphic Characters Explained* (London, 1806), p. 13: 'The alphabet of king Kimas the Hermesian. He wrote two hundred books on astronomy, on the secret of physic, and on the qualities of plants and minerals'.

158 Lām reads *baqrūfīn*, and Beirut something like *al-fartūs*, which Marquet ('Sabéens I', p. 44) would identify with the Greek Proteus. But *nūn* leads us, it would seem, towards a much more plausible explanation: *Afrūfīs* is for the Greek Aphrodite, born indeed from the sea foam according to ancient mythology. The context plainly corroborates this identification, although for strange reasons, the ancient goddess of love has now turned to a male divinity!

159 The figure of eighty-seven, which both manuscripts and Beirut agree on, is also corroborated by the fact that the authors refer, later on, to the names of the 'eighty-seven angels, male and female' recited by the priest. I cannot see any decisive explanation for this figure, but would nevertheless suggest a possible connection with the list of astrological lots as provided by Bīrūnī on Abū Ma'shar's authority. The list (see note 48, above) includes, as may be remembered, seven lots related to the planets, eighty lots to the houses, and then ten that are related to neither a planet nor a house. In the present description of the Šābi'an temples, the Ikhwān provide examples of calculation that are explicitly concerned with planetary houses. I would assume that the figure of eighty-seven temples (or angels) may have been chosen in relation with the first eighty-seven lots of Abū Ma'shar's table (thus, excluding the last ten lots), although this figure does not match with the indications given by the Brethren themselves as to the number of temples dedicated to the fixed stars or to deities not attached to a corporeal body.

160 The temple of Jirjās, to which the rest of the account is dedicated almost entirely, is clearly a case apart, in that it was built when the planets were all in their dignities. It must also be considered the eighty-eighth temple, since the passage referred to in the previous note makes it clear that the priest recites 'the names of the angels, male and female — and there are eighty-seven of them — and the name of the Jirjās, chief of the Iblis'. On the identification of this temple of Jirjās with the one referred to in the sub-section on the feast of Kādhā, see the Introduction, p. 56.

have an opening in its walls, nor a gap in its door, so much that, when its door is closed, there remains absolutely no light in there. And they made its door on the southern side and its forefront on the northern side.¹⁶¹ They attired [كسوا] the twelve zodiacal signs with their names.¹⁶² And they manufactured an image for the seven planets, each one of them worked out with the appropriate material, such as the Sun with gold [ذهب], the Moon with silver [فضة], Saturn with iron [حديد], Jupiter with quicksilver [زئبق], Mars with copper [نحاس], Venus with tin [قلعي], and Mercury with lead [أسرب].¹⁶³

- 161 The orientation of sacred buildings to the north is a common feature of many civilizations. In the specific context of Harrân, it is much dealt with by Ibn al-Nadim, who in various places of his report mentions a 'mystery to the north' to the jinn, the devils, and the deities. In one place, the 'mystery to the north' is even presented as a ritual performed 'to the chief of the jinn — later also referred to as "the God of the North" — who is the greatest divinity'; see *Fihrist*, tr. Dodge, p. 760. On this mystery and its possible Mesopotamian antecedents, see Green, *City*, pp. 192–204.
- 162 It is not quite clear what the authors mean by this expression. It seems likely that the use of *kasaw* would imply that the names of the signs were engraved or embroidered somewhere, but it is also possible to understand that the zodiacal signs were given their appearance according to their names. The text is not explicit enough to decide.
- 163 These associations are strange. The traditional associations between planets and metals, rooted in Proclus' *Commentary on the Timaeus*, developed in Late Antiquity and transmitted over the centuries without much change up to the Renaissance, are as follows: the Moon with silver; Mercury, quicksilver (in substitution for electrum as found in earlier lists); Venus, copper; Mars, iron; the Sun, gold; Jupiter, tin; Saturn, lead; see Halleux, *métaux*, pp. 151–156 for a thorough discussion and list of antique references. See also, Caiozzo, 'Lune verte', pp. 270–302. But the present list offers quite an interesting parallel with Pseudo-Majrīfī's *Ghāyat al-ḥakīm* (Book II, Chapter 10 and Book III, Chapter 7), whose manuscript tradition connects Saturn with iron and Mars with copper; see H. Ritter, *Pseudo-Majrīfī. Das Ziel des Weisen*, Studien der Bibliothek Warburg, 12 (Leipzig–Berlin, 1933), p. 106. This curiosity was noticed by Plessner in the English summary of the *Ghāya* published as part of the introduction to the German translation of the Arabic; see Plessner in H. Ritter and M. Plessner (ed. and tr.), 'Picatrix'. *Das Ziel des Weisen von Pseudo-Majrīfī*, Studies of the Warburg Institute, 27 (London, 1962), p. lxx: 'Chapter 10 [of Book II] deals with talismans made by engraving certain figures on the stones and metals which belong to the planets. It falls into three parts, of which the first is the enumeration of the minerals belonging to the various planets. The Arabic manuscripts of *The Aim of the Sage*, unlike those of the translations, show striking deviations from the usual classification. It is therefore possible that the correspondences of the translations with the norm may be due to a reworking of the text. In any

And they formed each one of them according to the [5] image [صورة] it has in the sign of its exaltation, as is established in the books of astrology. And in front of them, there is a mat where [there are] seven discs [أقراص] of chalk displayed in the manner of targets, whose faces are turned to the statues [تماثيل].¹⁶⁴ And on each one of these [discs] there is a censer [مجمرة], new, made of red clay, each one of these being [made] in the name of one of the seven planets. The closest one to the idols [أصنام] is for the Moon and includes one circle. The farthest is for Saturn and includes seven circles. And, for each one of them, the circles are in proportion with the rank of its star.¹⁶⁵

event, it is remarkable that some of the deviations (e. g., iron instead of lead for Saturn, copper instead of iron for Mars) are also found in Book III, Chapter 7, the chapter on Šābian prayers to the planets'. Regrettably enough, the translation of the text itself by Ritter and Plessner is marred by unfortunate emendations no doubt intended to 'correct' the reading of manuscripts in those places in order to make them fit with the traditional series of correspondences; see Ritter and Plessner, *Picatrix*, p. 113. To find that the *Ghāya* parallels the Brethren's report in those two instances is, needless to say, a confirmation of the influence exerted by the Ikhwān upon this famous treatise.

- 164 Each planet is represented by a three-dimensional sculpture (*timthāl*), an assertion which confirms the previous statement about the material used in each case. These statues will be referred to as idols (*aṣnām*) in the same paragraph. This is highly reminiscent of Iamblichan theurgy/Egyptian magic; see E. R. Dodds, *The Greeks and the Irrational* (University of California Press, 1951), pp. 291–295, esp. p. 292: 'Each god has his "sympathetic" representative in the animal, the vegetable, and the mineral world, which is, or contains, a *σύμβολον* of its divine cause and is thus *en rapport* with the latter. These *σύμβολα* were concealed inside the statue, so that they were known only to the *τελεστής* (Procl. in *Tim.* I.273.11). The *σφραγίδες* (engraved gems) and *ἐγγράμματα* (written formulae) correspond to the *χαρακτήρες καὶ ὀνόματα ζωτικά* of Procl. in *Tim.* III.6.13. The *χαρακτήρες* (which include such things as the seven vowels symbolic of the seven planetary gods) might be either written down (*θέσις*) or uttered (*ἐκφώνησις*). The correct manner of uttering them was a professional secret orally transmitted.'

- 165 Thus, the sum-total is of $1+2+3+4+5+6+7 = 28$ circles. The number 28 is one of the only four numbers known by the ancients to be 'perfect' according to the Pythagorean definition, since they are equal to the sum of their factors ($28 = 1 + 2 + 4 + 7 + 14$). The other three perfect numbers under 10,000 are 6; 496; and 8,128. Imbued with arithmology as they were, the Ikhwān could not have omitted to stress the perfection of this number, and indeed they did, as for instance in Epistle 3: 'On Astronomy'; see *Rasā'il*, vol. 1, pp. 140–141. On 28 as pertaining to the Moon (as with twenty-eight lunar mansions), see Burckhardt, *Mystical Astrology*, p. 30: 'As to the number 28 of the houses of the Moon, this is obtained by the Pythagorean sum of numbers from 1 to 7, which

And on each one of them, there is a censer [مجمرة] with distinct incense. The one for the Sun is of aloeswood [عود]; the one for the Moon is of frankincense [كندر]; the one for Saturn is of storax [مبعة]; the one for Jupiter is of ambergris [عنبر]; the one for [p. 302] Mars is of sandarac [سندروس]; the one for Venus is of saffron [زعفران]; and the one for [10] Mercury is of mastic [مصطكى].¹⁶⁶

On the left side of [the statues of] the stars, there are a jug [إبريق] of drink, three long rods [قضبان] of tamarisk [طرفاء]¹⁶⁷ wood that have been cut off from their tree before the cry of the cock, a knife [سكين] of iron whose handle is of iron, and a ring of iron whose stone is fine,

signifies that the lunar rhythm develops or exposes, in a successive mode, all the possibilities contained in the archetypes and transmitted, by the hierarchy of the intermediaries, to the sphere which immediately surrounds the terrestrial centre'; see also pp. 35 and 38 for the relation between the lunar mansions and the letters of the Arabic alphabet.

166 If we were to judge from the passage on the prayers to the planets (= Book III, Chapter 7) in Pseudo-Majrīṭī's *Ghāya*, we would assume that these incenses were all quite common in the Šābi'an religious ceremonies, although not each is specifically connected with a planet as in the present report; see H. Ritter, *Ghāya*, pp. 195–228 (for the Arabic); and H. Ritter and M. Plessner, *Picatrix*, pp. 206–241. In the appendix to his 'Prayers', pp. 116–117, Pingree provides the translation of a short section on planetary suffumigants from a work by the twelfth-century author Fakhr al-Dīn Muḥammad ibn 'Umar al-Rāzī (d. 1209). According to this text (amongst many other kinds of incenses mentioned for each planet), aloeswood ('ūd) is associated with Jupiter, the Sun, and Venus; frankincense (*kundur*) with Mars; storax (*may'a*) with Jupiter and the Sun; ambergris ('anbar) with Jupiter; sandarac (*sandarūs*) with Jupiter; saffron (*za'farān*) with Saturn, Jupiter, the Sun, and Venus; and mastic (*maṣṭakā*) with none of the planets. The *Ghāya* itself provides various lists of correspondences, but they are extremely contradictory with one another.

167 'Tamarisk' or *tamarix* (*ṭarfā*) — also 'saltcedar' —, a plant known for its capacity to grow in arid environments, is mentioned in Qur'an 34:16 as a weed replacing the fruity gardens that had existed earlier with the people of Saba' (not to be confused with the Šābi'ans of our text). In Genesis 21:33 Abraham is said to have planted a tamarisk tree in order to honour God. Ibn al-Nadīm reports as part of a Šābi'an feast taking place on the 30th of Kānūn al-Awwal that 'the priest sits on [the top step of] an elevated pulpit with nine steps. He takes a tamarisk rod in his hand and then, as the procession passes by him, he strikes each one of them [the worshippers] with the stick three, five, or seven times'; *Fihrist*, tr. Dodge, pp. 762–763. Note that the tamarisk seed (*habb al-ṭarfā*) is used as a suffumigant in the text by 'Umar al-Rāzī mentioned in the previous note, being associated by its author with Mercury. The same text reports that braziers of tamarisk are also used for suffumigation to the Sun and Mars.

the size of a [finger-]nail, on which is engraved [منقوش] the image of Jirjās [جرجاس],¹⁶⁸ chief [رئيس] of the Iblīs [إبليس].¹⁶⁹

E. The Initiation Ritual

And in it [the temple] the young men and the young maidens enter into their religion [إلى دينهم].¹⁷⁰ And in it are sacrificed cocks [ديكة].¹⁷¹ And in it there is the recitation of the two secrets [سرين], whose case will be mentioned further down. And the chief of the priests comes and enters the hall in the part of the men. He sits down by that mat [i.e., with the discs] and faces the foodstuff,¹⁷² before the setting of the Sun. He locks the door. The lamps are lit up and the darkness subsides. He is inclined, stretching out the left leg, and raising [himself] on the right [leg]. And he lays down his thumb [15], index finger, and middle

168 Manuscripts do not allow one to determine the reading of this name with certainty. Several possibilities exist: 'Jarjās'/'Jurjās'/'Jirjās', but also 'Harhās' (a name appearing in a genealogy in 2 Kings 22:14) as well as other vocalizations of that name. Marquet ('Sabéens I', p. 45) opted for 'Jurjās', which he wished to identify with the Greek Gorgon. I have finally retained 'Jirjās', in order to preserve the close similarity with 'Jirjis', the usual translation of the Greek name Γεωργιος and also the name as given by the Brethren for Γύγης in their account of Plato's myth. On Marquet's identification and my own conjecture about this name, see also the Introduction above, pp. 55–59.

169 On the Qur'anic figure of 'Iblīs', a proper name of the devil deriving from the Greek διάβολος, see Wensinck [and Gardet], 'Iblīs', pp. 668–669.

170 By 'religion' (*dīn*), we are thus meant to understand the Šābi'an religion, which the priest explicitly invites the young man to embrace 'by hearing the secrets of our angels' further down in the same section. The phrase coming next in the present section would seem to indicate that the hearing of the secrets marks the entrance into the religion.

171 The sacrificing of animals is a common feature of most Arabic descriptions of the Šābi'an rituals. Ibn al-Nadīm states that 'most of the sacrificial victims are cocks' (Flügel, p. 319; Dodge, p. 748), and indeed, cocks are sacrificed on the occasion of nearly every feast according to his own account. As already hinted at in the Introduction above, pp. 59–60, the symbolism of the cock is so rich and its popularity so widespread that it seems a vain task to try to determine the origin of its use as part of the Harranian mysteries. The interest of the Brethren's account in this respect lies in the explicit reference they make further down, as part of the same 'Šābi'an' description, to Socrates' famous last words as reported by Plato in the *Phaedo*. This shows again how unembarrassed they felt with their own much-simplified conception of the transmission of philosophy.

172 This foodstuff (*ma'ida*) has not been mentioned previously. It appears further down in the text and is possibly to be identified with a table of sacrificial offerings.

finger of his left hand on the ground, and raises up those corresponding on his right hand.¹⁷³

From that moment to the moment before the cry of the cock, he starts giving a speech, whose content is this:

O Jirjās amongst the Jirjās, Iblis amongst the Iblis, great amongst the devils and august amongst all jinn, I ask you and beg you and surrender myself into your hands, knowing that only your contentment will free me and my amiable behaviour to you will save me. For you have followed in me the flux of senses,¹⁷⁴ dwelling in the dwelling of the soul, freely disposing of whatever is under the rays of the Sun.

By you our humours are aroused, our limbs are turned, our external appearance is deformed, our thoughts are troubled, and our feet are shaken. We have decided to introduce [20] one of our young men, in the morning of this night of ours, to our call [دعوة]¹⁷⁵ and to let him hear the secret [سر] of our angels. Be present with us and bear witness for us and about us; avert away from us your evil and your calamities; chase away from our scene those amongst your companions that are endowed with trickery and perfidy. I am approaching you and I sacrifice [أذبح] before you your enemy [who is] black [أزرق], wealthy, abominable.¹⁷⁶ Long has he shown to you his enmity because of his nature and, likewise, because of his strain. He has ascended [تسّم] [up to the point of] building [بناء] the

173 I am not able to explain the symbolism of this posture, but some of its elements make one naturally think of the whirling dervishes of the Mevlevi brotherhood, with their right-hand palm turned towards the heavens and their left hand pointing at the ground, in a gesture of welcoming God's grace from above and, via the heart, bestowing it to the rest of the world here below.

174 Wehr, s.v. 'jarā' renders the expression 'Min-hu al-shai'u majrā al-dam' with 'it had become second nature to him', but I have opted for translating the Arabic more literally.

175 The word *da'wa* ('call') is mentioned in Qur'an 30:34 (in reference to the call or invitation made to the dead to stand up and leave their tombs on the Day of Judgement) and in Qur'an 14:46 (in reference to the call made by God and the prophets to follow the true religion). It is, of course, a word of paramount resonance in the context of Ismaili Shi'ism, where it is usually meant to convey in addition the notion of the well-organized propaganda by the missionaries of the movement. Under the pen of our Brethren (whose affinity with Ismailism, on the one hand, and sympathy towards the Šābi'ans, on the other hand, can hardly be dismissed), the use of such a vocabulary is certainly not innocent.

176 On the symbolism of the cock, used here by the priest as a talisman, see the Introduction above, pp. 59–60. For the translation 'black', see Dozy, *Supplément*.

numerous army [جزار];¹⁷⁷ [p. 303] he has climbed to the branches of the trees. He has shrieked to the surfaces of the trees. He has set in motion the flapping [تصفيق] of testimony and alarm. Your heart got alarmed in fright at him. Your tongue has stuttered in fear of him. You have turned your back at his approach, (fol. 527b) fleeing away from him, and you have shied away from him, terrified by him. I will proceed like this as a well-established rule and as a well-known canon, for every young man I will make hear my secret. And I stir him for you in proportion to a thing by which my authority [أمرى] is promoted.

This [goes on] until the cock flaps its wings, and [then] he stops talking and starts [doing] what is beneficial for man, be it sleep or something else. Then, when the morning has shone, he comes forth while, of those men who are present, only the people of his call are gathered together, and, of the young people, those wishing for their introduction to the call and the audition of the secret are brought [together]. They stop at the door of the hall of the secret. One of them has been undressed. Two priests grab him by his arm. They make him enter, fastened [مشدود] with [5] a white bandage [عصابة],¹⁷⁸ and he walks backward. He proceeds towards that hall, towards the chief [رئيس] of the priests, and with him there is a man who is his guarantor. The door is locked. The lamps are burning and the censers smoke.

The chief of the priests says to him, 'Would you like to enter into our religion [دين] and to hear the secret of our angels?' He says, 'Yes.'

The priest says to him, 'Beware! If you take leave of our religion and unveil to somebody my secret, God will lower this head of yours, which is under my grip from amongst my companions, and He will let your diadem [إكليل] fall behind you!'¹⁷⁹ And he says, 'Yes'.

177 The passage is not very clear; the text may be corrupt here.

178 The word *'isāba* means a bandage, eventually a headband, but the text does not specify how this is to be understood. To translate it as 'blindfold' would in my view be an over-interpretation, although of course the context would make it a possibility.

179 It is most likely that this expression is to be understood in its figurative meaning. Amidst the great variety of spiritual beings that the Šābi'ans identify with deities, one should not lose sight of the fact that their doctrine remains a strict monotheism in the eyes of the Brethren.

And he [the priest] says to him, 'But if you keep up my religion and keep my secret, your head will be high amongst your companions and your diadem will be firm.'

Then he says to his [the initiate's] guarantor [كفيل], 'Will you guarantee that he will keep up my religion and keep my secret?' He says, 'Yes'.

The priest reclines him, on that carpet [بساط] [10] which is facing the foodstuff, on his left-hand side, and recites [p. 304] above his head the names of the angels, male and female¹⁸⁰ — and there are eighty-seven of them¹⁸¹ — and the name of the Jirjās [الجرجاس],¹⁸² chief of the Iblis.

Then after that, he says, 'Beatitude upon you, for [now] you become a member of those having listened to these secrets. And if you are not pure, God will purify you.'

Then he grasps this knife, which I have described,¹⁸³ in order to sacrifice him with it. But the guarantor, about whom we have talked, comes forward, and the guarantor says, 'Do not do [that]! I guarantee him. But take this cock as a ransom for him and an offering in his place.'

And he [the priest] tells him, 'Hand over to him your ring as a pledge for him, that he will observe the rule and the rites, that he will keep up the call, and that he will conceal the secrets.' And he [the guarantor] hands over to him his ring and the cock.

And the priest says, 'Consequently I accept a body in substitution for a body and a soul in substitution for a soul, as well as a gesture in the presence of the Sun which vivifies the souls, and [in the presence of] of Jirjās, [15] chief of the Iblis.'

Then he leaves the cock on the neck of the youth and sacrifices him, saying, 'O Jirjās, King of the Iblis, accept this victim, and leave this youth to his parents and to the angels.'

Then he heats that ring of iron on the lamp and brands it onto the surface of the thumb of the right hand, and holds fast to it ninety-nine

180 According to Ibn al-Nadīm, the Harrānians 'state that the seven heavenly bodies, that is, the deities, are males and females who marry and have passions for one another, and also have bad and good luck'; *Fihrist*, tr. Dodge, p. 765.

181 For this figure as corresponding to the numbers of temples referred to above, see note, p. 159.

182 Note the definite article here.

183 One should remark, once again, on the use of the first person singular.

[times].¹⁸⁴ And he brands onto his breast and onto his forehead with one of those rods of tamarisk, branding covertly [خَفِيًّا] in order for it not to appear.

Then he dresses him with new clothes and boots made with the leather of the victims of the angels. He fastens his waist with a turban [عِمَامَة],¹⁸⁵ and gives him a pinch of salt,¹⁸⁶ which he [the priest] traces in the form of a triangle. And he does the same with his other companions.

F. The Secrets

As for the crowd [جمهور] of people, they are outside the hall of the secret, in the temple and in the environs, performing their ablutions, satisfying their vows, and burning [20] their offerings: various categories of animals for the angels, and cocks for Jirjās, chief of the Iblīs, as Plato mentioned this in his book called the *Phaedo* — namely, that Socrates the sage [حَكِيم], his mentor [مُعَلِّم], said, at the time of his death, ‘Burn [ذَحِّجْ] a cock for me in the temple. It is a vow of mine.’¹⁸⁷ And this injunction was his last commitment in the world here below.

184 ‘Ninety-nine’ (*tis’a wa-tis’in*), according to Beirut and *lām*, whereas *nūn* has ‘nine and nine’ (*tis’a wa-tis’a*). The speculation on the ninety-nine names of God in Islam is but the most obvious example of the symbolism assigned to that number. On Būnī’s mention of ‘99 esoteric names beyond the 99 exoteric names of God’, see Lory, ‘Magie des lettres’, pp. 97–111, here p. 107. We have supplied the word ‘times’ in our translation to render it more intelligible, but another possibility would be that ninety-nine refers to the time it takes to count to ninety-nine or, in a decisively more Islamic perspective, the time it takes to recite the ninety-nine names of God.

185 As opposed to *isāba* (see note 178 above), *imāma* unambiguously conveys the meaning ‘turban’ in the sense of headwear. From the rest of the phrase, we have to understand that the young man’s waist is bound with an undone turban.

186 Salt has been used for its alleged apotropaic value in many cultures. According to 2 Kings 2:20–22 (tr. Green): ‘(20) He [Elisha] said, Bring a new dish to me, and put salt there and they brought it to him; (21) and he went out to the source of the waters and threw salt there, and said, So says Jehovah, I have given healing to these waters; there shall not be death and sterility there any more. (22) And the waters were healed to this day, according to the word of Elisha that he spoke’. Salt is frequently associated with exorcism practices, where its use is believed to protect one against the devil or the evil eye.

187 Cf. Plato, *Phaedo*, 118a: ‘[The chill had now reached the region about the groin, and uncovering his face, which had been covered,] he said — and these were his last words — ‘Crito, we owe a cock to Asclepius. Pay it and do not neglect it.’ The usual interpretation of this passage is that the dying Socrates is wishing to

They eat the meats of the rest of their victims where they wish and how they wish, except for the meats of the cocks, which are pledged to the secret. These, only the elder amongst the priests eat, in the hall of the secret.

Then, when [p. 305] the chief of the priests is available for busying himself with the young men, he starts letting them hear the secret. Verily, they have two categories of speeches, each of them longer than (fol. 528a) the suras of the Qur'an;¹⁸⁸ the first they call the secret of the men, and the other they call the secret of the women. And the secret of the men, no one hears it but the men; and the secret of the women, no one hears it but the women. And the two secrets, taken together, are equal as regards the number of terms and letters. And the terms of both, taken together, if scattered and then ordered in an order where, for both, every word of one is between two terms of the other, there arises from them both several combinations.¹⁸⁹ And the total of these combinations is four combinations, each one of which includes the canons [قوانين] and the demonstrations [براهين] of one science amongst the four [following], namely:

pay a tribute to Asclepius, the god of medicine, for his help in recovering from the 'sickness' of life. As already mentioned, this reference to Socrates' last phrase in the context of a Šābi'an ceremony is telling of the level of syncretism reached by the Ikhwān, and must be set on a par with their affirmation that Pythagoras was a monotheist sage from Harrān. But it quite agrees with their own assertion, at the beginning of the chapter, about the four doctrines having emerged from this Šābi'anism. As for the idea that life is a sickness which death cures, it may be interestingly compared with the Brethren's own opinion as expressed in Epistle 28 ('On the Limits of Human Knowledge'), which ends on the very assertion that 'the death of the body is the birth of the soul, just as delivery is the birth of the foetus'; see *Rasā'il*, vol. 3, p. 32.19–20; and my *Brotherhood*, pp. 25–26.

188 Should we conjecture that the secrets are longer than the longest suras of the Qur'an or else longer than the Qur'an as a whole? The text here is not sufficiently clear here.

189 *Simiyā'* (from the Greek σμεία) and *'ilm al-hurūf* ('the science of letters') are the appellations traditionally given in Islam for a wide range of techniques dealing with letter-number interpretations; see MacDonald-[Fahd], '*Simiyā'*', pp. 612–613. The combinations of words as referred to by the Ikhwān in this passage do not seem to be dealt with as such by the specialists of those sciences such as al-Būnī, whose *Shams al-ma'ārif wa-l-aṭā'if al-'awārif* remains the most illustrious example of the genre.

(1) Medicine [طِبّ], by which bodies are cured, and by which illnesses and ailments are expelled, and by which it is made possible to take advantage of the dwelling in a house.

(2) The science of alchemy [علم الكيمياء], by which misery is expelled [5] and by which damages are removed.

(3) The science of astrology [علم النجوم وأحكامها], by which one is notified about what will happen before it happens.

(4) The science of talismans [علم الطلسمات], by which the citizens follow the nature of the kings, and kings the nature of the angels.

What forbids the unveiling of these sciences and the providing of them to the mass of the common people [الجمهور من العامة], [is] that by which the elite [الخاصة] is filled with fear, since, with what they show in terms of weakness of concern and shortage in science, and [in terms of] the power of evilness, of the iniquity of traits of character, and of ugliness of habits, the common people abandon themselves to whatever their desires may be, and satisfy them wherever they may be found, and in this matter they do not consider taking recourse to a religion with power and the knowledge of its obligations and prohibitions. Hence, because of this, the praise-worthy system is corrupt, and one exceeds the acknowledged boundary, as [would be the case] if, for instance, the vulgar [man] would participate in the knowledge of alchemy, for instance, wasting [10] what he wastes for what is not licit, not for what the law [شرعية] allows him! Or, similarly, as [would be the case] if they would know what is not admissible from medicine, in terms of the poisons and properties that are in the powers of medications, whether it be from minerals or anything else!

[Therefore,] it is fitting that this science be safeguarded from whoever does not deserve it, that it be forbidden to whoever is not qualified for its utilization. Indeed, when the vulgar [man], whose mention [p. 306] and description have just been made, would know from magic and talismans what it is not admissible for someone like him to know and to use, then the case in this [matter] would be like the case that Plato, the philosopher, has reported in his book the *Republic*.

Our report about this has been made in the foremost part of this epistle of ours, being the case of the shepherd who killed the king and sat in the kingdom in his place, without being qualified for it nor deserving it.

G. The Kādhā Feast

Amongst those revered [مُعَظَّمِينَ] by them was Qūlūs [15] [قولوس],¹⁹⁰ and they have deemed of eminence Abū Rim [أبو ريم]¹⁹¹ and Rabbat al-Till [رَبَّاتُ التِّل] who received Tammūz [تَمُوزًا]. She [Rabbat al-Till] declared sacred the prohibition of goats and appointed only the pure [amongst them] for the sacrifice, [and she declared sacred] that a pregnant woman should not approach nor eat from their meat.¹⁹³ And they have revered Arū [أرو] and the idol of the water [صنم الماء],¹⁹⁴ who fell down amongst the deities in the days of Astarwaṭrūnīqūs [أَسْطَرُوطْرُونِيْقُوس]¹⁹⁵ and who

- 190 Marquet, 'Sabéens I', p. 51, suggests to emend *qūlūs* with *qurnūs* (for Cronos), but this is highly conjectural.
- 191 The manuscripts and Beirut have here *al-rūm* (or *wa'l-rūm*), which does not make sense. On the basis of the comparison with the *Fihrist*, I would propose here to emend with the name 'Abū Rim' (or Aram); see Chwolsohn, *Ssabier*, vol. 2, pp. 287–288, who suggests several possibilities for identification of this name, none of them very conclusive.
- 192 Chwolsohn, *Ssabier*, vol. 2, p. 297–299, suggests a possible identification of Rabbat al-Till, to whom goats are sacrificed, with the Greek Hera Aegophagos or the Roman Juno Caprotina. Dodge, *Fihrist*, p. 767, notes, 'Here the goddess is probably Ishtar and the goats have some connection with fertility'.
- 193 Cf. Ibn al-Nadīm, *Fihrist*, (tr. Dodge, p. 765–767): 'Among the deities of the Harnāniyūn: [...] Rabbat al-Thill [sic], who received Tammūz[....] Now it was Rabbat al-Thill who arranged to guard the sacred goats which none of them are [sic] permitted to sell, but which [instead] they offer as sacrificial victims. No pregnant woman can approach them or come near to them'.
- 194 'Arū(s) wa-ṣanam al-mā' has been emended here, on the basis of the *Fihrist* (see Dodge, p. 766, for 'Arū, the Lord', and p. 767, for 'ṣanam al-mā'). See Chwolsohn, *Ssabier*, vol. 2, pp. 288–289, for the identification of Arū (possibly Urū) to a solar deity of Harrān.
- 195 Variants are: *Astartūs* (in *nūn*), something like *Astraṭūnīqūs* (as in Beirut) or *Astrūtr.qūs* (as in *lām*). The *Fihrist* (Tagaddod, p. 389) has: '*Aṣṭah wa-ṭrīnqūs*' (or '*Aṣṭah wa-ṭirayniqūs*'). Marquet, 'Sabéens I', p. 51, opts conjecturally for Astronicus (*Āstrūnīqūs*) as being a 'personnage cosmogonique forgé par les astrologues harrāniens'. Dodge (indebted to Lewy, 'Points of Comparisons'), *Fihrist*, p. 767, explains: 'The Tyrannic star is in Greek ἀστὴρ τυραννικός which was transliterated into Arabic as *Aṣṭah Waṭiranīqūs*. This refers to the Pleiades, which disappears between the 15th and 20th of March, shortly after its conjunction

went away in the direction of the land of India. They went in quest of him, caught him, and asked him to come back to them, but he told them: 'I shall enter the land of Harrān no more, but shall come to Kādhā [كادها] — and this is the meaning of 'Kādhā':¹⁹⁶ it is a place to the east of Harrān — and I shall pay attention to your city and your doctrine.'¹⁹⁷ And, up to this day, they go out on the twentieth day of Nisān of every year, so as to expect the advent [ورود] of this idol [صنم]. And they call that feast [عيد] the feast of Kādhā.¹⁹⁸ And their waiting for the advent of that

with the Moon, which also goes out of sight at that time. The "days of the Tyrannic star" refers to the time between the conjunction of the Pleiades with the Moon and their passing out of sight. The feast was on the 20th of April, when the people begged the Moon to return. Although the disappearance is in the west, the return is from the east. This feast was evidently similar to other festivals in which an idol was brought to some temple on a barge'. This explanation is in my view to be rejected: first, nowhere in Greek literature is the word *rupavvikóc* ever associated with the word *ἀστὴρ*; secondly, no similar appellation has ever been given to the Pleiades, the group of stars in Taurus, simply referred to as 'Pleiades' in Greek and Latin. In Arabic, the stars of the Pleiades were usually designated by the early form *al-thurayyā*, after which the third lunar mansion was also named; see Kunitzsch, *Sternnomenklatur*, pp. 114–115. Our manuscripts (as well as those for the *Fihrist*) are too corrupt to suggest a plausible identification of this name (or these names, in the case that there were two of them).

196 For this etymology of the name 'Kādhā' as being a 'popular rationalization', see Dodge, *Fihrist*, p. 767, who finds in the Babylonian feast Akitu the genuine origin of the appellation.

197 Cf. Ibn al-Nadīm, *Fihrist*, tr. Dodge, p. 767: 'Among their deities there is the Idol of the Water (*ṣanam al mā'*), which fell among the gods during the days of the Tyrannic Star [sic], going forth as they suppose, fleeing and seeking the land of India. They set out in quest of it, asking and imploring it to return without delay. But it said to me, "I shall not again enter the city of Harrān. I will, however, come to here (*hāhunā*)," the meaning of *hāhunā* being in Syriac *kādhā* (to here), near to Harrān, to the east. "I will renew my acquaintance with your city and your leading men."' Note that the last words of our phrase correspond to a reconstruction on the basis of the comparison between Beirut, the two manuscripts, and the *Fihrist*: '*wa-ata'ahhadu* [*Fihrist*] *madīnata-kum* [*Fihrist* + Beirut] *wa-madhaba-kum* [*lām* and *nūn*]'.

198 Cf. Ibn al-Nadīm, *Fihrist*, tr. Dodge, p. 767: 'Thus it refused them, and until our own time they go out every twentieth day of the month of Nisān (April), men and women together, expecting the arrival of the Idol of the Water and its coming to them. So the place is called Kādhā. A few pages before, Ibn al-Nadīm provides another account of the procession to Kādhā; see *Fihrist*, tr. Dodge, p. 757: 'On the twentieth day they go out to Dayr Kādī, which is a sanctuary near one of the gates of Harrān known as Bāb Funduq al-Zayt. They slaughter three *zabrukh*, a *zabrukh* being a bull. One is for the god Cronus, who is al-Zuḥāl (Saturn); one

idol is like the waiting of the Jews [20] for the Messiah [مسيح].¹⁹⁹ And they preserve the left wing of the cock that has been sacrificed in the hall of the men and they attach it to the bellies of the pregnant women and to the necks of the young men, in the manner of an amulet [حز].²⁰⁰ Amongst their collective ceremonies, there is also their excess in eating and drinking and the augmentation of their spendings on the first day of Nisān, which is their New Year's day [رأس السنة].²⁰¹

H. Concluding Note

Here are the stories and indications that we have got to know and heard with respect to the rectification of the views on the sciences of the stars, and on what extends it: the sciences of magic and the sciences of talismans. As for the argumentation about each case, section after section and signification after signification, (fol. 528b) the exposition of the demonstration of the validity about this is freely available in the books of the ancients [قدماء] and the philosophers [فلاسفة] [which are] filled up with them. And that is more than what we [can] enumerate in one chapter alone or one epistle alone.

is for Arīs, who is al-Mirrīkh (Mars), the Blind One; and one is for the Moon, which is Sīn. They also slay nine lambs: seven for the seven deities, one for the god of the jinn, and one for the Lord of the Hours. They also burn [offerings of] many lambs and cocks.'

199 This phrase, which is the only one of this paragraph not to be echoed in the *Fihrist*, seems to be an addition from the Ikhwān themselves. It confirms the exceptional importance of this feast in the year.

200 Cf. Ibn al-Nadīm, *Fihrist*, tr. Dodge, p. 767: 'Some of their customs. They preserve the left wing of the chickens which are used for the mystery of the shrine of the gods. The men pare off the flesh with great care and hang it [the wing bone] on the necks of the boys and the collars of the women, as well as the waists of pregnant women, believing this to be a great safeguard and protection'. This is evidence for this passage being directly related to the whole description of rituals above, as we have noted in the Introduction above, p. 56.

201 This assertion finds some confirmation in Ibn al-Nadīm and al-Birūnī, who both assert that the beginning of the year coincides with the first day of Nisān. That this is a day of eating and drinking and excess in spendings is not confirmed, however, although Ibn al-Nadīm does mention such practices for other days of the Šābi'an calendar, as for instance on the 15th of Nisān or the 2nd of Ayyār (see *Fihrist*, tr. Dodge, p. 757). For a comparison of the feast calendars in Ibn al-Nadīm and al-Birūnī, see Green, *City*, pp. 145–157.

Chapter 7

Spells, Incantations, and the Evil Eye

Introduction

[p. 307] As for the power of spells [ارقى], of incantations [عزائم], of intuition [وهم], and of incitement [زجر] and their likes, together with their influences, this is [plain] from the testimony of the effects: [effects from] remedies [الأدوية] and drugs [العقاقير] on the bodies and the souls that are leaving the bodies, [and plain from] the categories of influences. And what also testifies to it [is] what has been heard of it about the influences of some medications, drugs, and stones on some others, such as:

- the magnetic stone [حجر المغناطيس]²⁰² and its attraction for iron;
- the attraction [5] of the scammony [سقنوبيا]²⁰³ for the [colour] yellow;
- the attraction of the stone of Armenia [الحجر الأرمني]²⁰⁴ for the [colour] black;
- the stone of alum [حجر الشب]²⁰⁵ and its utility for the pains of the stomach when it is placed on it from outside;
- the utility of the tail of the wolf [ذيل الذئب]²⁰⁶ for colic;
- the utility of the threads with which one strangles the adder, when they are put, from outside, on the neck of who suffers from angina;
- the utility of the peony [عود الصليب]²⁰⁷ for the ailment called Umm al-Šibyān [أم الصبيان]²⁰⁸;

202 On the 'magnetic stone' (*hajar al-mighnāṭis*; Greek, μαγνῆτις λίθος; Latin, *magnes lapis*), see Goltz, *Studien*, p. 174.

203 On the 'scammony' (*saqamūniyā*), a bindweed from the family of the *Convolvulaceae*, see Issa, *Noms de plantes*, p. 56.

204 In the Western Middle Ages, the *lapis armenius* was a stone used for medical purposes. It has often been confused with lapis lazuli, due to its dark blue colour, but already Buffon devotes a chapter to it alone in his *Histoire naturelle des minéraux* (pp. 158–162). See Goltz, *Studien*, p. 147.

205 On the 'the alum stone' (*hajar al-shabb*), see Goltz, *Studien*, p. 233–234.

206 The 'tail of the wolf' (*dhayl al-dha'b*) is the name of a plant, from the family of the *Scrophulariaceae*. The Latin name is *Verbascum antari*; see Issa, *Noms de plantes*, p. 187.

207 On the peony (*ūd al-ṣalīb*), see Issa, *Noms de plantes*, p. 132.

208 'Umm al-Šibyān' (literally, 'the Mother of Children') is the name of a female demon or jinn whose action is especially feared at the moment of a baby's birth. It appears in various Islamic traditions and legends, and is even mentioned in

- the damage of the sea-hare [أرناب البحري]²⁰⁹ to the lung, since it ulcerates it;
- and the sulphurs of arsenic [زرنائخ]²¹⁰ which ulcerate the bladder;
- and litharge [مرداسنج]²¹¹ [which], if it is put into vinegar, will alter its sourness in a way [that makes] sweetness; and if it is put into quicklime [نورة]²¹², it will blacken the body;
- and the magnetic stone which attracts iron: if it is rubbed with garlic, it annihilates this effect; but if it is washed with vinegar, that power reverts and its effect returns.²¹³

[10] And likewise, there are many more whose explanation and numbering would be long, and much of this has been mentioned in the Books of Properties.²¹⁴ And all those amongst the people who have applied themselves to experimenting, have experimented with the whole of that, or [at least] most of it, [and they have] observed these matters,

a hadith reported by al-Bayhaqī (eleventh century) which reads: 'Whoever has a newborn baby, let him perform the Adhān in his right ear and the Iqāma in the left ear; the Umm Šibyān Jinn will not harm it'. Fodor, 'Types', pp. 118–134, here p. 119, notes: 'The best example of a written spell in conjunction with representations of evil spirits is the *al-sab' 'uhūd al-sulaymāniyya* (the Seven Solomonic Contracts), also named *du'ā' Umm al-Šibyān* (the Invocation of the Mother of Children), which enjoys the widest circulation in the Arab world as a printed amulet.' See also Knappert, *Legends*, pp. 149–151.

- 209 For the 'sea-hare' (*arnab al-bahri*) or *Aplysia depilans*, a poisonous mollusc already mentioned by Pseudo-Dioscorides, see Ullmann, *Natur- und Geheimwissenschaften*, p. 12. See also Viré, 'Arnab', pp. 84–87, here, p. 86.
- 210 *Zarnikh* is arsenic. In Antiquity and the Middle Ages, this was the common name for a sulphur of arsenic. Two different substances were given this name: orpiment or 'yellow arsenic' (*zarnikh asfar*, corresponding to the modern As_2S_3) and realgar or 'red arsenic' (*zarnikh ahmar*, corresponding to As_2S_4). See Goltz, *Studien*, pp. 239–242.
- 211 Litharge (or lithargyrum) is a preparation of lead obtained by fusion. The Arabic name, *murdāsānj*, is of Persian origin. See Goltz, *Studien*, pp. 245–246.
- 212 On *nūra*, one of various Arabic names for 'quicklime', see Ullmann, *Natur- und Geheimwissenschaften*, pp. 261–262.
- 213 The same observation was already made by Pliny the Elder; see Halleux, *Métaux*, p. 151.
- 214 As has already been seen (see note 134 above), a considerable number of books more or less concerned with alchemy were known as 'Books of Properties'. Whereas the *Ikhwān* had earlier referred to one of them, the present reference does not point towards any one work in particular.

particularly with those inorganic bodies [جمادات] and how the apparent influences of some of them influence the others.

The Influence of the Rational Soul upon the Bestial Soul

We have seen that the influences of the rational souls [النفس الناطقة] upon the animal soul [النفس الحيوانية] are part of the influences that tame and break this one.²¹⁵ And this is due to its power in virtue of what is mentioned and recorded in the books that have been composed by the philosophers about reforming the character traits [إصلاح الأخلاق],²¹⁶

215 The Ikhwān refer in various places of the *Rasā'il* to the Platonic theory of the soul, with its marked distinction between: (1) the appetitive soul (*al-nafs al-shahwāniyya*), which is the seat of desire and is located in the liver; (2) the irascible soul (*al-nafs al-ghadhabīyya*), which is the seat of courage and is located in the heart; (3) the rational soul (*al-nafs al-nāṭiqā*), which is the seat of rational thinking and is located in the head. The first two souls are also sometimes referred to as 'vegetative soul' and 'animal soul' respectively, since the appetitive soul is meant to correspond to the reign of plants and the irascible soul more specifically to the reign of animals. In the present sub-section and in the one which follows it, the Ikhwān speak of 'animal' (*hayawāniyya*) and even 'bestial' (*bahīmiyya*) as a way to qualify both the appetitive and the irascible souls, since animals — which are the object of this passage — are endowed with both, whereas plants only possess the appetitive soul. As for the rational soul, the Ikhwān naturally follow Plato's doctrine by saying that it is specific to the human being, and that its purpose is precisely to tame the other two souls in man.

216 The phrase 'reforming the traits of character' (*islāh al-akhlāq*), very often used in connection with the 'refinement of the soul' (*tahdhīb al-nafs*), is one of the expressions most beloved by the Ikhwān, as it even appears in the title of Epistle 24 ('On the Sense and the Sensible, with respect to the Refinement of the Soul and the Reforming of Characters'). A pivotal issue of ethics, the reforming of characters was also the subject (and the title) of a great variety of books dealing with morals in the Middle Ages, such as the *Tahdhīb al-akhlāq* by the Christian theologian and logician Yahya ibn 'Adi (d. 974) or the *Tahdhīb al-akhlāq* by the Muslim Neoplatonist Miskawayh (d. before 1030). On all this, and especially on ethics with the Brethren of Purity, see Fakhry, *Ethical Theories*; the chapter on the Ikhwān is found on pp. 93–99. In relation to astrology, we may recall the following associations expressed by the Brethren — mainly in Epistle 26 ('On Man as Microcosm') — and summarized by Fakhry, p. 97: 'To the seven planets which possess each a soul and a body, operating on individual souls or bodies respectively, correspond seven bodily powers in man: those of attraction, cohesion, digestion, discharge, nutrition, growth and representation, and seven spiritual powers: those of hearing, sight, taste, smell, and touch, plus the two powers of speech and reason. The last two correspond to the Moon and the Sun, for "as the Moon derives its light from the Sun, as it passes through its

and in the books of religion [دين],²¹⁷ and those in which [p. 307] the promise [وعد] and the threats [وعيد] are mentioned,²¹⁸ by which the wicked character traits and the ugly acts are broken, by means of the substitution of these by their opposite in terms of beautiful acts. For example, the one who [15] subjugates anger, which is amongst the powers of the irascible soul (which is named the animal soul), [does so] by way of temperance, which is amongst the powers of the rational soul; and [likewise] the one who subjugates hasty actions [does so] by way of patience, and the carnal appetite by way of abstinence. And likewise for the rest of the wicked character traits [that are replaced by] beautiful and laudable traits of character.

And we have seen the way the rational soul influences the appetitive soul [النفس الشهوانية], particularly when the rational soul looks for help against the carnal appetites from the animal soul (which is named the irascible soul [الغضبية]) by subjugating and taming it [the appetitive soul] by means of it, until it subdues it, overcomes it, and raises it to righteousness in the rest of its conditions, lest it deviate from probity in the rest of its conditions, and [lest it deviate] from what requires philosophical government and legal orders and prohibitions and religious rules, lest it call for deviating from that, lest it [20] transgress it [by going] towards what is not licit with respect to the law or towards what is not permissible in probity with the philosophers.

On the Taming of Different Animals, with Different Methods of Giving Incitements

Then, we have seen also the way the rational soul influences the two bestial souls [النفسين البهيمنتين] (namely, the irascible and the appetitive

twenty-eight phases," so does the speech derive from reason the variety of sounds, designated as the twenty-eight letters of the (Arabic) alphabet, as they pass through the throat'; with reference to *Rasā'il*, vol. 2, pp. 464–465.

217 A probable reference to the treatises of heresiography, a popular genre in Islamic literature of the Middle Ages, whose most eminent representation will be Shahrastānī's *Milāl* in the first half of the twelfth century.

218 Another reference to heresiographical treatises, in particular those dealing with the *wa'd* ('promise') and the *wa'id* ('threats'). On the 'promise and threats' as one of the five main theses of the Mu'tazilites, see Fakhry, *History*, pp. 43–66. On the mention of the Mu'tazilites in Epistle 22 ('On Animals'), see Baffioni, 'Secret Sects', p. 11; and Goodman and McGregor, *The Case of the Animals*, p. 302.

that are in animals [حيوان]²¹⁹ in what is inferred in terms of causes that have influence upon them — as the fact of giving incitements and what comes about from the fact of giving incitements in disciplining animals.

Likewise [there is] what the tamer does with the horse, in overcoming it so as to mount it, and so on; and what the elephant-tamer does with the elephant in taming it and overcoming it; and also [the way in] which the rational soul talks to the bestial soul in order to steer it and govern it.

Likewise [there is] what whistling does for the horse (fol. 529a) and the cow at their [time of] drinking water. And also what the chanting of the caravan leader does for camels, and the other [ways] by which they operate when they wish to urge them to walk: they make signs to them, which they familiarized them with up to the point that they [can] subdue them to [get] what they want from them.

And [likewise there is] what they do when [what] they want from them is that they stop and cease to walk: they cease and stop for them. And their souls accept these various signs according to the diversity of their natures. And the incitements²²⁰ for the horse, the mules, and the donkeys are different from the incitements for camels, cows, and sheep.

And every genus of those and every species of those is tamed by a sign different from the last. And that sign [5] influences them and this is specific to them. Those different signs influence the souls of animals, and the species of animals accept [the influences] from them with an acceptance plain and clear, according to the diversity of their natures.²²¹

219 By 'animals' (*hayawān*), the Brethren seem to refer here to all living beings as being endowed with bestial souls, namely, the irascible and the appetitive. This therefore also includes man, as the continuation of the text would suggest.

220 It is from such examples as those provided in this passage that one can best infer which meaning the authors give to the word *zajr*, appearing in the very first lines of the epistle. We have opted for 'incitements'; see note 2 above.

221 It may be interesting to recall the following lines from the 'Case of the Animals' in Epistle 22 ('On Animals'), whose plot is, as is well known, entirely based on the suffering endured by animals as a result of their taming by man: 'They [the Adamites] enslaved such cattle as cows, sheep, and camels, and beasts like horses, asses, and mules. They hobbled and bridled them and put them to work — riding, hauling, ploughing, and threshing. They wore these creatures out in service, with toil beyond their strength. Beasts that had roamed the woodlands and wilds unhindered, in search of pasture, water, and all their needs, were checked and trammelled. Other animals — the wild asses, gazelles, and beasts of prey, wildlife and birds that had been docile and lived in peace and quietude

And the rational soul subjugates them [the bestial souls] and attracts them towards what it wants of them, according to their diversity. Likewise, the diversity of the influences [p. 309] of drugs, by way of the properties that are in them, [operate] on the various organs, according to the diversity of their natures. This also is evidence that spells [الرقى] and amulets [عوذ] operate on souls and influence them according to the grade of their substances [جواهر] and their natures [طباع].²²²

Likewise, the sages [حكماء] have provided evidence of the properties that are in drugs and remedies according to their natures; and every nature and every peculiarity has been confirmed, why it is good and useful, and why it is harmful and noxious, and in relation to which limb [10] it is useful and in relation to which it is harmful.

Likewise, they have provided evidence on spells and amulets and charms [نشر], and it has been confirmed what is good for each thing in the animal and what is specific to them; for instance, the spell of the bee of the secret [رحلة الشَّر] ²²³ and the spells of snakes; and, for instance, what [kind] of influence the spell of the scorpion and the spell of the wasp and [the spell] of other animals have; ²²⁴ and, for instance, what

in their ancestral lands — fled the haunts of men for far-off wastes, forests, mountain peaks, and glens. But the Adamites set after them with all sorts of devices for hunting, trapping, and snaring, convinced that the animals were their runaway or rebellious slaves'; Goodman and McGregor, *The Case of the Animals*, pp. 99–100.

222 The Brethren's formulation in the present passage seems to be reminiscent of Jābir's own terminology. According to Jābir, 'substance' (*jawhar*, pl. *jawāhir*) is a concept so close to that of 'matter' (*mādda*) that they are often regarded as one and the same in his system; see Jābir ibn Ḥayyān, *Kitāb al-aḥjar* in S.N. Haq, *Names*, pp. 51–57. As for 'nature' (*ṭabī'a*, pl. *ṭabā'ī'*), it designates, here as with Jābir, one of the four elementary properties (heat, cold, dryness, and wetness). The Ikhwān seem to consider that the signs and incitements made to animals are, as it were, intrinsically linked to them, and not just conventions to which they respond as a result of a habit. From the reference to drugs in the same passage, one is meant to understand that the Brethren regard spells and incitements as ways to influence the soul almost physically.

223 The passage is severely corrupt. Beirut has '*qalam al-surūr*', which hardly makes sense. In view of the subsequent examples — all taken from animals whose sting or bite are feared —, we may reasonably conjecture that *nahla* ('bee') is the first element, but the second should remain largely conjectural, since the vocalization is almost nonexistent here in *lām* (the only manuscript at our disposal for this part of the text).

224 As noted above, all animals referred to in this list are feared for their bites or

[kind] of influence magic has on the souls of the Adamites [آدميون] and on their bodies. But this is something whose explanation would be long.

In the preceding part of this epistle of ours, we have reported the evidence, for a part of it, for the validity of the statement about this and for the validity of the science of talismans. What is in the part we have mentioned as proof of this being sound should suffice for whoever comes across [يقع] what we have said in it. As for these spells, charms, incantations, and the like, these are only subtle spiritual influences [15] from the rational soul that influences the bestial soul common to animals. Amongst these [influences], there is what moves them and rouses them, and there is what tames them. And amongst them [also], there is what operates in them as powerful influences, according to various effects. Maybe [the effect] is to kill them, and one says about that [that it is] an 'affliction by the evil eye' [إصابة العين].²²⁵ Maybe it makes them fade away. Maybe it overpowers them.

And we have often seen someone overpowering a man in less than a moment, when [he was] sitting in front of him. This is only a subtle effect that appears suddenly from one soul and which operates in another soul. [This is] like the sparks that appear suddenly from a fire and fall down on objects and burn them. Except that what appears suddenly from the soul is spiritual and subtle, since it comes out from the subtle soul and operates on [something] subtle like itself, whereas what comes out of fire is denser than it — in proportion to the density of fire²²⁶ — and operates [20] on dense objects; and this is the cause of this effect.

stings. The role they play on talismans may often be interpreted into two different ways: first, as a way to protect oneself from their influence; and secondly, as a way to use of their image so as to shy a demon or a jinn. On this ambivalence, see Fodor, 'Types'.

225 The 'evil eye' (*al-'ayn*), which one could define as 'the evil action of an envious glance' (Marçais, 'Ayn', p. 786) is a belief or a superstition which largely pre-dates Islam, and whose 'acceptance' in the Muslim world is usually grounded on Qur'an 113:5: 'And from the evil of an envier when he envies' ('*wa-min sharr ḥāsīdīn idhan ḥasada*'). As Emilie Savage-Smith notes, 'The role of the evil eye is much more evident in early Islamic practice than it appears to have been in earlier cultures[....] Quite certainly the representation of the human hand played an important role in protection against the evil eye throughout the pre-Islamic Middle East, and continues to do so in the Islamic lands'; 'Introduction', pp. xx-xxi.

226 Influences are thus said to be subtler than fire, the subtlest of the four elements.

Tradition regarding Affliction by the Evil Eye and the Restoration from it by Magic, by its Effects upon the Bestial Souls

If you contemplate and imagine the image of what is considered [p. 310] in thinking (and thinking is one of the senses of the rational soul, and it leads what it encompasses to the soul), and if the contemplation befalls thinking and thinking befalls the soul, [then] a rare phenomenon flows into the soul, which determines the considered soul and which overpowers it. And this exists and is plain with those struck by the evil eye [في الملقوعين].²²⁷ There are many people who reject this and do not believe in it and do not trust it. But this is a clear thing, which is observed and heard about continually.

It is reported that a tribe of Indian people, (fol. 529b) by way of their intuitions, see in others than themselves very strange things, that most people deny. And because of this, they [the deniers] reject magic — as we have reported about them in this epistle — and they reject spells and intuition. [This is] because things like this are from the subtle [things] that seem like the invisible. And yet they exist, especially with those struck by the evil eye; it is plain with them.

And the only ones to reject this reject it owing to the fact that they have already clung to fallacious allegations that the masters of bold trickeries, the liars, have established.²²⁸ And those [liars] have anchored them to what looks like this reality.

And we have already reported, in the forefront of this epistle,²²⁹ what signification should be given as to the fact that they regard as a lie what they hear about the mentioning of magic and the mentioning of the effect of talismans [5], when they hear from some of those pursuing it who are amongst the ignorant, absorbed in the pursuit of it, [but] who busy themselves with it without any understanding of it at all. They

227 The expression *'laqa'a-hu bi-'ayni-hi'* means 'to strike someone with the evil eye' or 'to cast the evil eye on someone'; see Kazimirski, *Dictionnaire*, vol. II, p. 1015 a 4; Ullmann, *Wörterbuch*, Band II, 2, pp. 1104–1105.

228 In other words, having credulously believed in things that turned out to be false, those people are now sceptical of everything.

229 See the passage from Chapter 1 in which the Brethren seek to ridicule the pseudo-savants. Indeed, what follows looks like the mere repetition of that preliminary invective, although perhaps the authors make it clearer here that the pseudo-savants are in the majority and that the genuine savants are but a chosen few.

do not know the foundations of it, just like a stupid man, altogether short of science and intellect, or a frivolous and ignorant woman, or a feeble-minded old woman. Those people lie and move their souls away from the people of this category. In doing so, their narrow-mindedness and their ignorance are plain! In doing so, they regard as futile most of those issues that those ignorant people and liars have corrupted, and they judge the whole of this as vanity. Now, those who are on the side of the liars are the most numerous and the most common. As for the foundation which comes from the sages, this is sound and [comes] from sound foundations, but there are very few of them.

And it has been reported about the Prophet of God, God bless him and grant him salvation, that he said, 'Magic is a reality and the evil eye [العين] is a reality.'²³⁰ And it has been reported about him, God bless him and grant him salvation, that he was bewitched by it [magic] and that magic was extracted from the well. But the hadith [10] about that is well known.²³¹ And it has also been reported about him, God bless him and grant him salvation, [p. 311] that he decreed that a man who was harmed heavily [by the evil eye] be given [water] to drink, and

230 In fact, only the second half of this statement recalls a well-known hadith, found in Bukhārī (ninth century) under the following form: 'Narrated Abū Hurayra: The Prophet said, "The effect of the evil eye is a fact". And he prohibited tattooing.' See Bukhārī, vol. VII, Book 71, Number 636. The Prophetic traditions on the evil eye are many, and often contradictory. See also this other hadith: 'Narrated 'Ā'isha: The Prophet ordered me or somebody else to use spells against the evil eye'; Bukhārī, vol. IV, Book 55, Number 590.

231 The bewitchment of the Prophet is indeed a well-known tradition, which is put into 'Ā'isha's mouth. According to the hadith, reported by Bukhārī, amongst various other authorities, Muhammad was bewitched by a man named Labīd ibn al-A'sam — presumably a Jewish magician, but reports do not all agree on this — who hid the Prophet's comb, with some of his hair stuck to it, in the well of Dharwān. This would have prompted the Prophet, whom God had cured in the meantime, to have the well filled in. A later traditionist, Baydawī (end of the thirteenth / beginning of fourteenth century) sought to connect this story with Qur'an 113:4, namely, 'And from the evil of the blowers in knots' ('*wa-min sharr al-naффāthāt fi'l-uqad*'); the Prophet's deliverance from those eleven magical knots would then have come from the revelation of the last two Suras, 113 and 114, whose sum includes eleven verses. On these traditions and references, see Hamès, *Coran*, pp. 27–32. On Suras 113 and 114 ('*al-mu'awwidhatān*'; literally, 'the two protective ones') as effectively regarded as endowed with talismanic power, see also Canaan, 'Decipherment', p. 129.

this is also a well-known hadith.²³² But [in fact] he just decreed that the man be cleansed, so that he would cease to be harmed by what escaped from it [the evil eye] and that this would put an end to what escaped from him. Because he, God bless him and grant him salvation, knew this in its specificity and its modality, and he knew of the path to this, and he gave proof of it.

And likewise also for what we observe in terms of yawning. We report [the following]: a man yawns during a lively session, and sometimes it is [then] all of the people in a particular session who yawn; and this is due to infection. And this is also an influence that influences the soul to [some] extent and which infects the soul that contemplates it, and this influences it. And these peculiarities that we have mentioned are an indication of the influence [15] of spells, charms, and incantations upon the bestial souls that are [to be found] in kinds of animals.

People view that the sorcerer has recourse to spells from the saliva, the breath, and the like, since saliva and breath are both of the bestial [البهيمة] substance, merely by virtue of a movement of the rational soul, and that they influence it in the way whistling, the trumpet, and the other signals that we have mentioned, influence it. Only the purified sages take interest in the realities and the subtleties that are in that, [the sages] who endorse inspiration from God, how powerful and lofty is He, in that they know the cause of each thing and in what way it exerts influence, and upon which substance of an animal it has effect.

Amongst these things there is what they [the sages] have demonstrated and which has passed down through the hands of the people, and they [the people] operated with that, as has been seen; for instance, what they [the sages] have demonstrated about the magnetic stone and about what is in it in terms of natural disposition to attract the iron. And likewise, if there was a[n unsubstantiated] report [of some kind],

232 A possible reminiscence from the following hadith, equally reported by Bukhārī: 'Narrated Isra'īl: 'Uthmān ibn 'Abd-Allah ibn Mawḥab said: "My people sent me with a bowl of water to Umm Salāma". Isra'īl approximated three fingers [indicating the small size of the container in which there was some hair of the Prophet]. 'Uthmān added: "If any person suffered from the evil eye or some other disease, he would send a vessel [containing water] to Umm Salāma. I looked into the container [that held the hair of the Prophet] and saw a few red hairs in it"; vol. VII, Book 72, Number 784.

most of the people would distrust it, and they would consider it a lie [كذبوه], just as they would distrust [20] other things of those which they have not witnessed or which they have not understood.

But the eyewitnessing [العيان] and the direct testimony [المشاهدة] regarding stony bodies and lifeless drugs, would it not be possible that they would be like this in respect to animals, with [all] that there is in them in terms of supremacy over the lifeless, in virtue of the bestial soul, mixed, prepared to receive the influence of the rational soul in itself, and in the same way as may be observed from their effects? But there is no way for us to attain from this more than what we have attained.

And the understanding of its modality, of its reasons, and of its causes is possible only through the endorsement from the sages who are specialized in the science of it. Amongst them, there are those who grant something without anything else, and there are those who grant much of this [understanding], as is reported about the [p. 312] Messiah [المسيح], God bless him and grant him salvation, (fol. 530a) that he did not pass by a stone nor a tree nor whatever [other] thing without addressing it and talking to it and informing it of what was appropriate for it.²³³ And that speech did not come from the lifeless, as a reply, but rather it was a sign, a way to make believe, and a point of view. And he, God bless him and grant him salvation, knew what there was in those things by inspiration from God, the Creator of them,

233 Lory, 'Magie', p. 154, mentions this passage about Jesus as coming from Christian apocryphal traditions, but without specifying which ones. In Pseudo-Thomas' *Gospel of Childhood*, an apocryphal work on Jesus' young years originally written in Syriac but later adapted and translated in various other idioms (including Arabic), we find a chapter in which Jesus is regarded as a sorcerer for being able to make several figures of clay animals walk and fly; see the 'Arabic Gospel of the Infancy', Chapter XXXVI, as summarized in James, *Apocryphal New Testament*, p. 82. For the full text of this Gospel, see Peeters, *Évangile de l'Enfance*. This story, along with other miracles attributed to Jesus by extra-canonical Christian traditions, finds an echo in Qur'an 3:49: 'And [make him] a messenger to the Children of Israel, [who will say], "Indeed I have come to you with a sign from your Lord in that I design for you from clay [that which is] like the form of a bird, then I breathe into it and it becomes a bird by permission of Allah. And I cure the blind and the leper, and I give life to the dead — by permission of Allah. And I inform you of what you eat and what you store in your houses. Indeed in that is a sign for you, if you are believers." The elements reported by the Brethren about Jesus' power probably derive from the same kind of traditions.

how powerful and lofty is He. For He makes inherit wisdom whomever He wishes from amongst His elected servants, God bless them all and grant His mercy and His benedictions.²³⁴

Chapter 8

Postscript

And now we have concluded, from the speech in this epistle, my brother, what we view as being sufficient and enough for you, with respect to audition and information, [5] and particularly if you have pondered what has preceded as regards our words in [the] fifty epistles that we have produced before this one. Those ones [previous epistles] are introductions to it and an aid to it for the acquisition of your science.

And for this reason, we should now like to break off the speech here, since we have attained our objective in completing this last epistle, which is the last within the *Epistles* whose science we have vouchsafed for you and carried out to completion. May God stand by you, and by ourselves, my brother, in what he is satisfied with from us, and may He give us success, and [may He give it to] you, to the degree that we have reached what we had aimed at and attained the utmost point of what we had wished, with respect to the perfection at which we aim. To Him the praise — from us and from all our noble brethren — forever and ever, without end and without interruption, for these are [10] His people and those who are deserving of Him, and He is our measure. What an excellent aid [is He] in what regards the Book [كتاب]!²³⁵

234 Adaptation from Qur'an 7:128.

235 This last mention of the Qur'an in this epistle may perhaps be explained by reference to the fact that the Holy Book is 'often carried in miniature as the best and strong protection'; Canaan, 'Decipherment', p. 129, who lists the parts of the Book that are thought to be the most protective.

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