

## AN IMPORTANT COLLECTION OF NEW STUDIES ON THE SHĪʿA

An Essay Review of *Fortresses of the Intellect: Ismaili and Other Islamic Studies in Honour of Farhad Daftary*, edited by Omar Alí-de-Unzaga, (London & New York: I. B. Tauris in association with The Institute of Ismaili Studies, 2011), xvii + 600 pp, ISBN: 978-1-84885-626-4; €17.50 (hb)

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This huge volume of nearly six-hundred pages, published by I. B. Tauris in collaboration with The Institute of Ismaili Studies (New York & London, 2011) and edited by Omar Alí-de-Unzaga, comprises two essays about the honoree (a biography and a bibliography) and twenty studies that are published in his honor. The volume is subtitled “Ismaili and other Islamic Studies.” Though the papers do all have an Islamic, usually Shīʿī, connection, they nonetheless range very widely over different subject matters (philosophy, religious sects, poetry, history, and more), languages (Arabic, Persian, and Turkish texts), time periods (early medieval period through the eighteenth century), lengths (from six to sixty pages), and approaches. Such thematic and literary diversity goes against the grain of current sensibilities, which are unforgiving of any deviation from “thematic unity.” I, for one, very much welcome a volume of this sort, where the only standards are relevance to the many fields of study of interest to the honoree and, of course, the quality of the scholarship. Indeed, it would be a great advantage to scholars, especially those who take upon themselves to publish volumes of essays, to be relieved of the need to demonstrate “thematic unity,” and to be allowed to concentrate instead on quality alone, as the editor has done for this book.

The opening essay is a “biographical sketch” of the honoree written by the editor, Omar Alí-de-Unzaga. Covering more than thirty pages, it is considerably longer than similar essays that I have seen in other Festschrift’s. The close examination of Daftary’s interesting and

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productive life is very rewarding, casting light on intellectual, cultural, and political events of the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, as they impacted on Daftary in Iran and in various European countries in which he has lived.

The first study is a very well-written piece by M. A. Amir-Moezzi, "Persian, the Other Sacred Language of Islam," which surveys the controversial use, and eventual sacralization of, Persian in Islamic religious life, especially in prayer as well as in the translation of and commentary on the Qur'ān. It is followed by Hamid Algar's "Sunni Claims to Imam Ja'far al-Šādiq." Algar covers this interesting phenomenon over a millennium, from the earliest claims that Ja'far accepted the Sunnī notion of the four rāshīdūn, down to the latest attempts, in Egypt and Iran mainly, at rapprochement (*taqrīb*) between the two major schools of Islamic law, Sunnī and Shī'ī.

In the third contribution, Paul Walker and Wilferd Madelung continue their very fruitful collaboration in the publication of Shī'ite philosophical texts. Their project this time is "The *Kitāb al-rusūm wa-l-izdiwāj wa-l-tartīb* attributed to 'Abdān (d. 286/899)," 'Abdān being the earliest pre-Fāṭimid Ismā'īlī author, and a productive one at that. However, the *Kitāb al-Rusūm* is one of only two writings of his that are known to be extant. 'Abdān betrays no trace of the Neoplatonic philosophy that later dominated Ismā'īlī theology. Instead, he draws upon seemingly Pythagorean traditions. One fundamental belief is that all things other than God exist in pairs of opposites. This doctrine precisely is taught by the *Midrash Temura*, an ancient Hebrew text that this reviewer has written about recently; there must be some source common to both writings. Towards the end of the *Kitāb al-Rusūm*, heptads, another favorite Pythagorean theme, are discussed as well. Though he clearly has wide-ranging, if not very deep, acquaintance with the scientific scholarship of his day, 'Abdān rejects any rational proof for the existence of God, which he believed must be learned instead by *ta'lim*, instruction, and *iktisāb*, acquisition; he is then an early *ta'limī*, one of the groups later severely criticized by al-Ghazālī. The edition and translation are preceded by a magnificent introduction that covers, crisply and concisely, the main developments in philosophical theology and the Ismā'īlī responses to them, from 'Abdān to al-Ṭūsī.

Patricia Crone ("Abū Tammām on the Mubayyiḍa") critically examines the description of the Mubayyiḍa sect in the heresiography of

Abū Tammām (the publication of which is another collaboration between Madelung and Walker). She opines that the possession of this text, written by an Ismā‘īlī missionary active in the first half of the ninth century, allows us to discard other, later accounts of the sect. However, Abū Tammām’s essay is shown to be composed of three different sections; only the middle section is Abū Tammām’s first-hand report. The first and third are drawn from different, indeed contradictory, sources. Crone is characteristically straightforward, clear, and confident in her analysis. I tend more to favor the conservative approach. For example, Crone says that the inclusion of Abū Muslim in the list of divine incarnations is probably a mistake. One reason for thinking so is that with the addition of Abū Muslim, there would be eight divine incarnations, not seven, as one might expect. However, is it so certain that the sect embraced heptads, that a written report can be tampered with? Does not the number eight (if arithmology is relevant here) also have merits of its own in some religious traditions?

In “The Ikhwān al-Ṣafā’: Between al-Kindī and al-Fārābī,” Abbas Hamdani returns to a subject that he has written much about, the dating of the *Rasā’il Ikhwān al-Ṣafā’*. As the title indicates, Hamdani places their time of composition between the times of al-Kindī and al-Fārābī, that is, roughly, sometime between 850 and 950. Hamdani here spells out his methodology, or, rather, his claim: that all of the ideas found in the *Rasā’il* can be placed within the “time layer” defined by the two great philosophers mentioned in the title of his paper. In this essay, he limits himself to illustrating his claim with some issues of philosophical theology. I have no fixed opinion about the dating of the *Rasā’il*, but I am slightly uneasy with Hamdani’s methodology. It seems to me that the narrative of a simple, linear development of ideas that can be marked by the “times” of outstanding philosophers is an oversimplification. Ideas that become central to the discourse of a certain culture at a particular time can often be found to have been in circulation earlier, and also to have lived on beyond that “time.”

Some of the particulars of Hamdani’s arguments can also be questioned. For example, he claims that the Ikhwān tried to disguise their identity by making seemingly contradictory statements. Therefore, in “their concept of numerology,” heptads are important, but they oppose the “superstitious” use of the number seven. The distinction is unclear; a few examples might have clarified it. A few pages later,

Hamdani states that the emanation doctrine of the Ikhwān, which serves (inter alia) to put some distance between God and the evil experienced on Earth, is “typically the Ismā‘īlī theme of beginning and return.” I think that the two are quite different. Emanation does serve to distance the deity from the material world, but emanation closes in on itself in a circle in which humanity, standing at the end of the chain of emanation, is also the closest to the source or origin. Hamdani provides a very rich bibliography; he does, however, tend to cite scholarship of preceding generations (which is fine), but not all important recent research. In particular, he does not engage the widely cited and authoritative work of Joel L. Kraemer on Abū Ḥayyān (see, in particular, his *Humanism in the Renaissance of Islam*), an important source whose the reliability of which Hamdani consistently rejects.

In the article that follows, another established scholar of the Ikhwān returns to a topic she has broached in earlier studies. Carmela Baffioni’s “*Ibdāʿ, Divine Imperative and Prophecy in the Rasāʾil Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʿ*,” attempts to show, by means of a comparison of closely related passages found in different rasāʾil, that the authors of the *Rasāʾil* adumbrate ideas that later became central to Ismā‘īlī thought. The differences between the passages, as well as the differences between the *Rasāʾil* and al-Sijistānī and al-Kirmānī, attest to a debate within Ismā‘īlī or “para-Ismā‘īlī” circles, a debate as yet unsettled at the end of the tenth century. The thesis is certainly tenable, and perhaps even promising. However, I confess to a difficulty in following all of Baffioni’s arguments. Moreover, some of her translations and formulations appear infelicitous to this reviewer. Here are a few examples: at the bottom of p. 214, Baffioni renders *baʿd lam yakun* as “from nothing.” This is imprecise; the phrase cited means “after it was not,” or “after it did not exist.” When Arabic writers wish to emphasize “from nothing,” ex nihilo, they will say *min lā shayʿ*. A few lines later, near the top of p. 215, Baffioni writes: “According to the Ikhwān, God is coexistent with His creation, as is clarified by comparison with the number one ...” I am not sure that “coexistent” is the proper term here. In note 9 (last line on p. 223), it would be better to say “not to create would have been contrary to God’s knowledge [that the world would be created]” rather than “contrary to science.”

One more correction seems in order, but it is a correction to the edition used by Baffioni, rather than to her translation. On p. 219, she

quotes from *Jāmiʿat al-jāmiʿa*, ed. ʿĀrif Tāmir, pp. 202-203, and the final sentence reads: “Many people who did not possess knowledge of the spiritual entities have thought that the existing (beings) belong to God only (*laysat illā li-llāh*) ... and [so] the body (*al-jism*) and that whose place is earth ...” This makes little sense to me as a philosophical statement, and it certainly does not fit the context. However, if we correct *li-llāh* to *Allāh* – that is, if we assume that the editor or printer has left out the initial *alif* – then the statement makes perfect sense and is a fitting conclusion to the argument. It then says, “Many people who did not possess knowledge of the spiritual entities have thought that the existing beings are nothing but God – be He exalted and glorified – and the body (*al-jism*) and that whose place is earth ...” In other words, these people deny the existence of spiritual entities, for whose existence the author has been pleading in the preceding discussion, maintaining that nothing exists other than God and the material world.

The aspects highlighted by István Hajnal in “Some Aspects of the External Relations of the Qarāmiṭa in Baḥrayn” are mostly commercial. Punning upon an unfortunate idea from our own time, Hajnal characterizes the guiding policy of the Qarāmiṭians as “peace for privileges” – mostly commercial privileges, access to ports and markets, duties on shipping, and protection money from hajj caravans. To be sure, the Qarāmiṭians had considerable military power, largely due to their Arab allies, and there were outbursts (“intermezzo” as Hajnal calls them) of messianic fervor, but for the most part, commercial considerations were paramount. The very same thinking lay behind the Qarāmiṭians’ siding with the ʿAbbāsids against the Fāṭimids, but, then without the backing of the Bedouin, they suffered defeat. Hamid Haji’s “A Distinguished Slav Eunuch of the Early Fāṭimid Period: al-Ustādh Jawdhar,” is a straightforward biography, based in large measure on the *sīra* written by the eunuch’s private secretary. Haji highlights the intimate friendship and loyal service of Jawdhar to the Fāṭimid rulers in North Africa.

Ismail K. Poonawala follows with the first of two articles in the volume that focus on al-Qāḍī al-Nuʿmān, “Al-Qāḍī al-Nuʿmān and his Refutation of Ibn Qutayba.” Poonawala begins by arguing that, contrary to what one finds in some of the literature, it was not the Qāḍī but his father who became an Imāmī, and that the Qāḍī received a formal Shīʿī education. He follows with a discussion of Ibn Qutayba,

seeking to establish, in particular, that Ibn Qutayba was active in the restoration of the Sunnism set in place by al-Mutawakkil. His great literary talents served a definite religious and political agenda. Finally, Poonawala reviews some of the legal questions that are taken up in the Qāḍī's *radd*, the only one of several works of this genre ascribed to the Qāḍī that survives. Poonawala certainly knows the material extremely well from the inside, and his erudition is impressive, but his partisanship disturbs this reader somewhat. For example, Poonawala, in a move apparently designed to help the Qāḍī, impugns Ibn Qutayba's honesty. Even if one source (al-Ḥākim al-Naysābūrī) does accuse Ibn Qutayba of lying, adducing materials of this sort gives the article a polemical tone.

The second article is a piece of meticulous scholarship by Daniel de Smet, "The *Risāla al-Mudhbība* Attributed to al-Qāḍī al-Nu'mān: Important Evidence for the Adoption of Neoplatonism by Fatimid Ismailism at the Time of al-Mu'izz?" *Al-Risāla al-mudhbība* has been published four times – this fact itself is a discovery of de Smet – and it is a classic example of the problematics involved in working with a text whose manuscripts are largely inaccessible, and which has been printed in several unreliable additions. De Smet's summation is worth quoting (p. 315): "... Ismaili works in general, and those transmitted by the Syrian Nizārīs in particular, have undergone substantial modification over the centuries ... Modern editions of them are often less reliable than the manuscripts themselves: the inadvertent actions of editors, their lack of philological rigor, numerous misreadings, and typographical errors all have contributed to the dissemination of phantom texts on which scholars, lacking access to the manuscripts, have built their learned theories." After sorting out the various versions, de Smet concludes that the *Risāla* is likely the work of someone in the entourage of al-Mu'izz (r. 341-365/953-975). Written as a collection of rambling questions and answers, it is difficult to extract from it a coherent doctrine. Nonetheless, there are a number of interesting, and puzzling, references that suggest that some Neoplatonic notions may have entered Ismā'īlī thought before the contribution of the "Persian school" and the synthesis of Ḥamīd al-Dīn al-Kirmānī (d. ca. 411/1021).

Next are two articles on philosophical poetry in Persian. The first, by Alice C. Hunsberger, "Cosmos into Verse," opens with a brief survey of philosophical poetry in general, and then provides a closer

study of two examples. The first example is a poem, supplied with a commentary by the poet himself, Abū l-‘Abbās al-Lawkarī, a disciple of a disciple of Ibn Sīnā. The second is by Nāṣir-i Khusraw, one of the more important Ismā‘īlī writers; here, Hunsberger provides a translation of selected verses as well. Hermann Landolt, with his usual attention to detail, contributes “Early Evidence for the Reception of Nāṣir-i Khusraw’s Poetry in Sufism: ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt’s Letter on the Ta‘līmīs.” Though some of the *mathnawīs* attributed to Nāṣir-i Khusraw may have “perhaps more to do with the Sufi reception of Nāṣir-i Khusraw than with the man himself,” there is evidence “that he was at some point in his life touched by Sufism.” Verses from Nāṣir-i Khusraw were later cited by ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt, particularly in the seventy-fifth of his letters (referring to the edition of Munzai), a bold document in which ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt distanced himself from both the Nizārīs and the Sunnī Seljūq authorities (and likely paid for this with his life). Finally, Landolt offers a translation of *Qaṣīda* no. 106 by Nāṣir-i Khusraw.

The translation reveals, not surprisingly, a rich and occasionally surprising storehouse of ideas. Two examples must suffice. In verse 21, the person selected to be the paragon of wisdom is none other than Qusṭā bin Lūqā. That tenth-century Christian polymath is well known to historians of Arabic science and philosophy, but I would not have expected to see him serve as a cultural icon for an eleventh-century Persian Ismā‘īlī. (Was his name selected for reasons of rhyme or meter? I have not seen the original, and anyway, I know nothing about Persian poetry.) Another issue perhaps worth exploring in more depth is the role of the rotating millstone (*falak* or celestial orb?), grinding “cereal” for our, that is, humanity’s, sake (verses 10–15). But the *falāsifa* ask, do the heavens rotate for our sake? Maimonides gives this question serious consideration in his *Guide of the Perplexed*, III, 13, and comes up, so it seems, with a negative answer – a negative answer that holds as true for religious thought as it does for Aristotle. (The notes to Munk’s French translation are still the best guide to this difficult chapter.)

Delia Cortese (“A Dream Come True: Empowerment Through Dreams Reflecting Fatimid-Sulayhid Relations”) analyzes two “dreams” of ‘Alī al-Ṣulayḥī, the founder of the Yemeni dynasty that bears his name; I put the word in quotation marks because what is of interest to Cortese is not the actual dream (we may never know if or what al-Ṣulayḥī really dreamt) but the literary expression given to it.

Two different versions of the dream narrative are preserved in the manuscript, and they both clearly indicate that al-Şulayhī and his offspring enjoy the blessing of the Fāṭimid caliph. Cortese sees the dream narratives as “clearly legitimizing in purpose and ideological in nature.” (p. 391) Specifically, it is said to be a late Ṭayyibī reconstruction, when the Ṭayyibī’s were hard pressed to defend their legitimacy. As they were the successors of the Şulayhids, the divine choice of the latter as revealed in the “dream” would serve that purpose well.

In his “From the ‘Moses of Reason’ to the ‘Khiḍr of the Resurrection’: The Oxymoronic Transcendent in Shahrastānī’s *Majlis-i maktūb ... dar Khwārazm*,” Leonard Lewisohn finds distinct Ismā‘īlī terminology in al-Shahrastānī’s allegory of Moses and Khiḍr. That fact must be established in order to “definitely resolve” (p. 405) the outstanding question of the presence of Ismā‘īlī beliefs in al-Shahrastānī’s thought, or the lack thereof. However, in order to account for all of the details in al-Shahrastānī’s “portrayal of Khiḍr’s strange apophatic theology,” one must appeal to the Persian Sufi tradition; Lewisohn adduces the sources and draws the connections. Finally, Lewisohn moves on to the poetry of Shelly and the insights of Carl Jung and Henri Corbin. Shelly, in particular, is relevant, not only for treating the same themes of ineffable, esoteric knowledge accessible only to the immortals who function beyond space and time (with Ahasureus the Wandering Jew taking the place of Khiḍr), but also because of Shelly’s personal study of Greek, Jewish, and Persian literature that treats of these themes.

Lewisohn has written a stimulating and wide-ranging essay, to which I can offer only a few minor but, hopefully helpful, comments. The first concerns one of the “oxymora” that al-Shahrastānī utilizes in order to illustrate what Lewisohn calls “the Realm of the Oxymoronic Transcendent,” an angel, half of which is fire and half is ice. Lewisohn adds that the particular coincidentia oppositorum of fire and water is commonplace in mystical literature, especially that of Spanish Catholicism. In fact, it has much wider, and much more ancient applications. In ancient Jewish exegesis of Exodus 9:23, cited already by Rashi in the eleventh century, the hail that rained down on Egypt in the seventh plague was said to be a mixture of fire and water, that made peace with each other in order to carry out the divine command. From a mystical perspective, we may refer to the vision recorded in chapter fourteen of I Enoch, where the hero sees a house

made of hailstones and snow and surrounded with fire; then, upon entering it, he senses it to be hot as fire and cold as snow.

Looking now from a philosophical point of view, I am struck by the connection between temporality and causality. According to the schemes described by Lewisohn, the realm of Moses is under time, and so also is the realm of “causes of consequences.” By contrast, the realm of *Khiḍr* is above time; there is no past, present, and future, and so, therefore, also no causality. To be sure, causality has generally been connected to temporality; if event *a* is usually or always followed in time by event *b*, event *a* will often be called the cause of event *b*. However, did not Islamic thinkers entertain other views? Did not Ibn Sīnā, for example, emphasize the logical connection rather than the temporal that defines the cause? Was not God the cause of the cosmos even for those who felt that the two were co-eternal? So, then, did the philosophically *au courant* al-Sharastānī deploy a more popular notion of causality for the sake of his allegory?

There are still some important manuscripts in private hands, and in remote villages. A discovery by S. Jalal Badakhchani of a collection poems while traveling in *Khurāsān* back in 1964 led to the research project, the results of which are summarized in his essay, “Poems of the Resurrection: Ḥasan-i Maḥmūd-i Kātib and his *Dīwān-i Qā’imiyāt*.” Ḥasan was a close associate of Naṣīr al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī, and his poems on the “resurrection,” meaning essentially a spiritual transformation to be effected by the *Qā’im*, “remain the most extensive and contemporary interpretation to survive up to our time.” The following piece, C. Edmund Bosworth’s “Further Notes on Turkish Names in Abū’l-Faḍl Bayhaqī’s *Tārīkh-i Mas‘ūdi*,” re-investigates a topic studied by the author previously; this time he can avail himself of additional *Hilfsmittel*. Not being a turcologist, I cannot say anything about the content of the study, other than to note Bosworth’s generously acknowledgment of the aid of the recently published Onomasticon of László Rásonyi as well as his consultations with Professor Peter B. Golden on just about every name studied in the paper. Iraj Asfar, in a very brief note of five pages, reports on another manuscript in private hands, titled “A Book List from a Seventh/Thirteenth Century Manuscript Found in *Bāmyān*.”

Carole Hillenbrand’s piece (“What’s in a Name? Tughtegin – ‘the Minister of the Antichrist?’”) is also quite short, but she manages to underscore a number of interesting points concerning the killing, and

scalping, of Gervase, the Crusader ruler of Tiberias, by Tughtegin, the Turkish commander in Damascus. The most detailed, and probably most reliable, account is given by the Christian chronicler Albert of Aachen. Muslim writers avoid the gory details, not simply out of embarrassment, but also because the local Muslim populations were themselves frightened by their Turkish rulers. Moreover, the display of the scalp as a totem (that is what is “in the name” of Tughtegin), as well as the use of the skull as a drinking cup, both indicate that inner Asian customs and rituals persisted longer than is usually thought to have been the case.

In an essay that pays more attention to the theory and history of historical writing than most of the other offerings in this volume, Andrew J. Newman (“Safavids and ‘Subalterns’: The Reclaiming of Voices”) searches for the unheard voices in the latter half of the Şafavid period. His main sources are reports of agitation that was economically motivated and most especially, of popular Sufi movements among the ‘subaltern,’ that is, simply speaking, the masses. He acknowledges that the reports come mostly from hostile sources, in particular, court-sponsored anti-Sufi literature. Nonetheless, he does show that these lower-class elements (Newman does not use this term, but I see no reason to shy away from it), were, as he phrased it elsewhere, “forsaking the ... authority claimed by orthodox elements to seek solace and meaning in a more direct, immanent, and intimate relationship with the divine.”

The final essay, by Robert Gleave (“Compromise and Conciliation in the Akhbārī-Uşūlī Dispute: Yūsuf al-Baḥrānī’s Assessment of ‘Abd Allāh al-Samāhījī”) deals, as the title indicates, with the efforts of al-Baḥrānī (d. 1186/1772) to mitigate the dispute between the Akhbārī’s and the Uşūlī’s. The latter are also referred to as *muḥtabid*’s, as their acceptance of the legal tool of *ijtibād* constitutes the key difference between the two schools. Al-Samāhījī (d. 1135/1772) compiled a list of forty or so differences; al-Baḥrānī felt that al-Samāhījī’s work fueled internecine conflict among Shī’ites and provided as well ammunition to Sunnī polemics as well. Gleave presents an explanatory commentary, followed by a translation from one of al-Baḥrānī’s books, “The Najafī Pearls.”

Daftary’s immense contribution to scholarship is well known and widely acknowledged. This collection of interesting and new scholarship is a fitting tribute to the man and his accomplishments.