

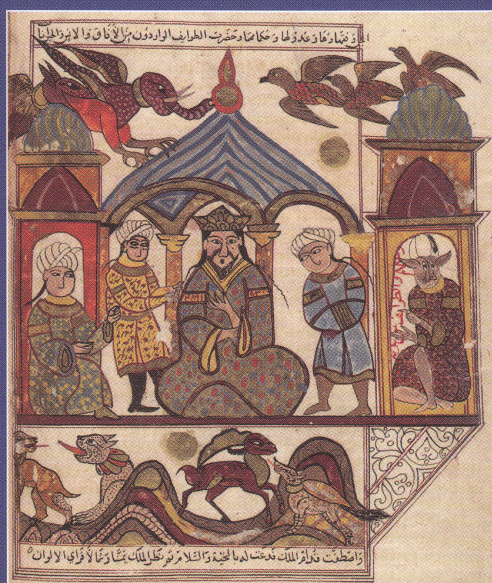
EPISTLES OF THE BRETHREN OF PURITY

Yahya Michot

*Misled and Misleading... Yet Central in their Influence:
Ibn Taymiyya's Views on the Ikhwān al-Ṣafā'*

P. 139-179, in :

The Ikhwān al-Ṣafā' and their *Rasā'il* An Introduction



Edited by
Nader El-Bizri

Foreword by
Farhad Daftary

Important Warning

The proofs of this article were sent to me whilst I was busy moving from Oxford back to Brussels, and then to America. *Al-ḍarūra*, as Avicenna would have said, made it impossible for me to correct them on time. Unfortunately, there are therefore a lot of mistakes left in the version published by OUP.

The editor of the book greatly improved the language of the text that I had originally submitted and I am very grateful to him. Several editorial changes were however introduced that distorted my thought, sometimes gravely, as well as the views of Ibn Taymiyya, in the translations (see for example pp. 168, 174).

For the present e-version, I have corrected these errors and alterations by digitally reworking the graphic appearance of scans of the printed edition, without changing the latter's general aspect (except for pp. 168–169, 174–175) nor the page numbering. I have however been unable to reintroduce the four critical apparatus footnotes taken away by the editor. They are marked with ** in the translated passages and given here :

- p. 154, —: min **F**
- p. 155, dīna-hu: dīn **F**
- p. 174, wa-hādhā yusammā 'iffat^{an} +: wa-l-tafrīṭ **R**
- p. 175, al-ismā'iliyya **F**: — **K** were followers

(**F** = *MF*, **K** = *MRK*, **R** = *Radd*)

May I ask the indulgence of the readers for the shortcomings of the article published in Oxford and suggest that they refer, instead, to this thoroughly revised e-text. The latter is the only one which really represents what I had originally meant to write.

Yahya Michot
Hartford, November 2008



EPISTLES OF THE BRETHERN OF PURITY

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An Introduction

Edited by
Nader El-Bizri

Foreword by
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SIX

Misled and Misleading . . . Yet Central in their Influence: Ibn Taymiyya's Views on the Ikhwān al-Ṣafā'

Yahya Jean Michot

New editions and studies confirm that the famous Mamlūk *mufti* and theologian Taqī al-Dīn Aḥmad ibn Taymiyya (d. in Damascus, 728/1328) had a more complex relationship to philosophy than one might conclude from his often-quoted *Refutation of the Logicians* (*al-Radd 'alā al-mantiqiyyīn*).¹ He knew of the early and late *falāsifa*, as well as of several other Muslim intellectuals, for example, the Ismaili Abū Ya'qūb al-Sijistānī (d. ca. 390/1000).² Moreover, he explored, commented on, or expressed views about texts as diverse as Ibn Sīnā's (also known as Avicenna) *Risāla adḥawiyya*,³ the abridgement (*talkhīṣ*) of Aristotle's *Metaphysics* by Thābit ibn Qurra, or the *Commentary*

1 See, for example, Yahya J. Michot, 'Vanités intellectuelles . . . L'impasse des rationalismes selon le *Rejet de la contradiction* d'Ibn Taymiyya', *Oriente Moderno*, 19, 80 (2000), pp. 597–617 (hereafter cited as 'Vanités').

2 See Yahya J. Michot, 'A Mamlūk Theologian's Commentary on Avicenna's *Risāla adḥawiyya*: Being a Translation of a Part of the *Dar' al-ta'āruḍ* of Ibn Taymiyya', *Journal of Islamic Studies*, 14, 2–3 (2003), pp. 149–203, 309–363; see esp. pp. 199–203 (hereafter cited as 'Mamlūk').

3 See Michot, 'Mamlūk'.

[*sharḥ*] on the *Ishārāt* written by al-Naṣīr al-Ṭūsī, in 644/1246, for the Ismaili Muḥtasham Shihāb al-Dīn.⁴

The two earliest bibliographers of Ibn Taymiyya, Ibn ‘Abd al-Hādī (d. 744/1343)⁵ and Abū ‘Abd Allāh Muḥammad Ibn Rushayyiq (d. 749/1348),⁶ do not mention any title that he would have devoted to the Ikhwān al-Ṣafā’. He nevertheless refers to them and their *Epistles* in several passages of his *fatwas* and of his main works. As a precise chronology of these writings is impossible to establish, no effort will be made here to trace an eventual evolution of Ibn Taymiyya’s thought. Moreover, the survey of these writings proposed here cannot, of course, claim to be exhaustive. Based on more than forty texts in which the name of the Ikhwān explicitly appears, it should, however, make possible a better understanding of the theologian’s opinion on the illustrious Brethren of Purity.⁷

In Taymiyyan texts, the place mentioned most frequently in relation to the Ikhwān is Cairo; the names of personalities are Ja‘far al-Ṣādiq, Ibn Sīnā, and Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī; and the ideological trends or movements within Islam are the philosophers (*faylasūf*), or philosophizers (*mutafalsif*), then the Qarmaṭīs and ‘esotericists’ (*bāṭinī*), then the Ismailis and ‘heretics’ (*mulḥid*).

Ibn Taymiyya refers at least ten times to the construction of Cairo in connection with the dating of the composition of the *Rasā’il*:⁸ ‘The

4 See Yahya J. Michot, ‘Vizir “hérétique” mais philosophe d’entre les plus éminents: al-Ṭūsī vu par Ibn Taymiyya’, *Farhang*, 15–16, nos. 44–45 (2003), pp. 195–227 (hereafter cited as ‘Hérétique’).

5 See Abū ‘Abd Allāh ibn ‘Abd al-Hādī (d. 744/1343), *al-‘Uqūd al-durriyya min manāqib Shaykh al-Islām Aḥmad bin Taymiyya*, ed. Muḥammad Ḥamid al-Fiḳī (Cairo: Maṭba‘at Hijāzī, 1357/1938), pp. 26–67 (hereafter cited as ‘*Uqūd*’).

6 Ibn Rushayyiq’s bibliography of Ibn Taymiyya is usually wrongly attributed to Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya (d. 751/1350). On this problem, see M. ‘U. Shams and ‘A. ibn M. al-‘Imrān, *al-Jāmi‘ li-sīrat shaykh al-Islām Ibn Taymiyya khilāl sab‘at qurūn, Āthār shaykh al-Islām Ibn Taymiyya wa-mā laḥiqa-hā min a‘māl*, 8 (Mecca: Dār ‘Ālam al-Fawā’id li’l-Nashr wa’l-Tawzī‘, AH 1422), pp. 56–61 (hereafter cited as *Jāmi‘*). See also Ibn Rushayyiq’s bibliography, which is edited in *ibid.*, pp. 282–311.

7 More texts concerning the Ikhwān are thus taken into consideration here than are indexed in R. Y. al-Shāmī, ‘*Ibn Taymiyya: Maṣādiru-hu wa-manhaju-hu fī tahlīli-hā*’, *Journal of the Institute of Arabic Manuscripts*, 38, 1 (1994), p. 211 (hereafter cited as ‘Ibn Taymiyya’).

8 See the following texts by Ibn Taymiyya: *Bughyat al-murtād fī al-radd ‘alā’l-*

scholars know that they were only composed after the third century, at the time of the construction of Cairo',⁹ which 'was built around 360[/970], as [reported] in the *Ta'rīkh al-jāmi' al-Azhar* [History of the al-Azhar Mosque]'.¹⁰ To justify his affirmation, Ibn Taymiyya does not offer a clue linking the *Rasā'il* specifically to the foundation of Cairo but, rather, to certain events contemporaneous with the latter, which, he says, the Ikhwān allude to.

The person who composed them indeed mentions in them an event that happened in Islam: the conquest of the coasts of Syria by the Nazarenes, and similar events that happened after the third century.¹¹

They also mention, in them, something that happened to the Muslims: the conquest of the coasts of Syria by the Nazarenes. Now, this only happened after the third century.¹²

This 'entry of the Nazarenes into the countries of Islam'¹³ 'at the beginning of the fourth century'¹⁴ does of course not refer to the Crusades, which did not start until 488/1095, but to the military successes of the

mutafalsifa wa'l-Qarāmiṭa wa'l-Bāṭiniyya, ahl al-ilhād min al-qā'ilin bi'l-hulūl wa'l-itihād, ed. Mūsā ibn Sulaymān al-Duwaysh ([Medina?]: Maktabat al-'Ulūm wa'l-Ḥikam, 1408/1988), p. 329 (hereafter cited as *Bughya*); *Dar' ta'arūḍ al-'aql wa'l-naql aw muwāfaqat ṣaḥiḥ al-manqūl li-ṣariḥ al-ma'qūl*, ed. Muḥammad Rashād Sālim, 11 vols. (Riyadh: Dār al-Kunūz al-Adabiyya, [1399/1979]), vol. 5, pp. 10, 26–27 (hereafter cited as *Dar'*) — this reference is translated by Michot in 'Mamlūk', part 1, p. 189; *Majmū' al-fatāwā*, ed. 'Abd al-Raḥmān ibn Muḥammad ibn Qāsim, 37 vols. (Rabat: Maktabat al-Ma'ārif, 1401/1981), vol. 11, p. 581 (hereafter cited as *MF*); *ibid.*, vol. 27, p. 174; *ibid.*, vol. 35, p. 134; *ibid.*, vol. 35, p. 183; *Majmū'at fatāwā*, 5 vols. (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 1403/1983), vol. 1, p. 333 (hereafter cited as *MaF*); *ibid.*, vol. 4, p. 234; *Minhāj al-sunna al-nabawiyya fī naqḍ kalām al-shī'a al-qadariyya*, ed. Muḥammad Rashād Sālim, 9 vols. (Cairo: Maktabat Ibn Taymiyya, 1409/1989), vol. 2, p. 466 (hereafter cited as *Minhāj*); *ibid.*, vol. 4, pp. 54–55. See also Yahya J. Michot, 'Ibn Taymiyya on Astrology: Annotated Translation of Three Fatwas', *Journal of Islamic Studies*, 11, 2 (2000), pp. 176–177 (hereafter cited as 'Astrology').

⁹ Ibn Taymiyya, *MF*, vol. 35, p. 134; also in Ibn Taymiyya, *MaF*, vol. 4, p. 234.

¹⁰ Ibn Taymiyya, *MF*, vol. 35, p. 134; also in Ibn Taymiyya, *MaF*, vol. 4, p. 234.

¹¹ Ibn Taymiyya, *MF*, vol. 35, p. 134; also in Ibn Taymiyya, *MaF*, vol. 4, p. 234.

¹² Ibn Taymiyya, *Minhāj*, vol. 2, p. 466.

¹³ Ibn Taymiyya, *Dar'*, vol. 5, p. 27, trans. in Michot, 'Mamlūk', part 1, p. 189.

¹⁴ Ibn Taymiyya, *Minhāj*, vol. 4, p. 55.

Byzantine Nicephorus Phocas and John Tzimisce over the Ḥamdānids of Aleppo after 350/961, just a few years before Cairo was built by the Fāṭimids in 358/969.

The theologian's insistence on this dating of the *Rasā'il* is motivated by his will to provide a final refutation of their attribution to the Shi'i Imam Ja'far al-Ṣādiq who died 'more than two hundred years before the construction of Cairo',¹⁵ or 'some two hundred years before the composition of these epistles'.¹⁶ As he puts it: 'Every individual who wanted to sell his lies well attributed them to Ja'far.'¹⁷

Lies were told about Ja'far such as were not told about anybody [else] because, in regard to knowledge and the religion, there was something in him by which God had distinguished him. He, his father — Abū Ja'far — and his grandfather — 'Alī ibn al-Ḥusayn — were among the most prominent of the Imams, in regard to knowledge and religion. And, after Ja'far, among the People of the [Prophetic] House, there was nobody [who could be esteemed] equal to him. Many of the adepts of heresy and innovations thus started to attribute to him what they [themselves] were saying. The authors of the epistles of the Ikhwān al-Ṣafā' even attribute them to him.¹⁸

Ibn Taymiyya elaborates this argument, claiming that to him were also attributed, for example, 'words on the stars and on the quivering of the limbs, falsified commentaries [on the Qur'an], and various vain things from which God exculpates him'.¹⁹

A group of people even hold the opinion that the epistles of the Ikhwān al-Ṣafā' come from him. This is a well-known lie. Ja'far passed away in the year 148[/765] whereas these epistles were composed some two hundred years afterwards.²⁰

They attribute that to him in order to present that as a legacy

15 Ibn Taymiyya, *MF*, vol. 35, p. 134; also in Ibn Taymiyya, *MaF*, vol. 4, p. 234.

16 Ibn Taymiyya, *Bughya*, p. 330.

17 Ibn Taymiyya, *Minhāj*, vol. 4, p. 54.

18 Ibn Taymiyya, *MF*, vol. 11, p. 581.

19 Ibn Taymiyya, *Dar'*, vol. 5, p. 26, trans. in Michot, 'Mamlūk', part 1, p. 189.

20 Ibn Taymiyya, *Minhāj*, vol. 4, p. 54.

coming from the People of the [Prophetic] House. This is among the ugliest and most blatant of lies.²¹

Ibn Taymiyya further states: 'Every intelligent person who understands the [*Rasā'il*] and knows Islam, knows that they contradict the religion of Islam.'²² According to him, a simple examination of the content of the *Rasā'il* would therefore suffice to refute its attribution to such an eminent religious scholar as Ja'far al-Ṣādiq. Ibn Taymiyya is, however, keen to present more factual, not just doctrinal, evidence; hence the historical criticism that characterises his approach to the matter. As for the true identity of the Ikhwān, the Ḥanbalī theologian is aware of Abū Ḥayyān al-Tawḥīdī's famous testimony, and mentions it twice. One passage is quite general, but the second is more explicit:

In the book *al-Imtā' wa'l-mu'ānasa*, Abū Ḥayyān al-Tawḥīdī makes mention, of the conversations of Abū al-Faraj ibn Ṭirāz with some of the authors of the [*Rasā'il*] and his discussion with them, as well as of the words of Abū Sulaymān the logician about them, etc., of matters thanks to which the situation somehow becomes clear.²³

Those who composed the [*Rasā'il*] are known, like Zayd ibn Rifā'a, Abū Sulaymān ibn Ma'shar al-Bistī (known as al-Maqdisī), Abū al-Ḥasan 'Alī ibn Hārūn al-Zanjānī, Abū Aḥmad al-Nahrajūrī,²⁴ and al-'Awfī. Abū al-Futūḥ al-Mu'āfi ibn Zakariyā' al-Jarīrī, the author of the book *al-Jalīs wa'l-anīs*, had a discussion with them. Abū Ḥayyān al-Tawḥīdī referred to that in the book *al-Imtā' wa'l-mu'ānasa*.²⁵

Ibn Taymiyya's linking of the composition of the *Rasā'il* to the construction of Cairo must also be understood in the context of his views on the ideological allegiance of the authors. Incidentally, and quite

21 Ibn Taymiyya, *Bughya*, p. 329.

22 Ibn Taymiyya, *Minhāj*, vol. 2, p. 465.

23 Ibn Taymiyya, *Bughya*, pp. 329–330.

24 Cf. 'al-Mihrajānī', in Abū Ḥayyān al-Tawḥīdī, *Kitāb al-Imtā' wa'l-mu'ānasa*, 2nd edition, ed. Aḥmad Amīn and Aḥmad al-Zayn, 2 vols. (Beirut: Manshūrāt Dār Maktabat al-Ḥayāt, 1965), vol. 2, p. 5 (hereafter cited as *Imtā'*).

25 Ibn Taymiyya, *Minhāj*, vol. 2, p. 466. See Tawḥīdī, *Imtā'*, vol. 2, pp. 3–5.

inconsequently, he writes twice that the *Rasā'il* was composed 'under the dynasty of the Būyids'.²⁶ More generally and, in fact, even in one of the two passages mentioning the Būyids, it is to the 'Ubaydids, 'the descendants of 'Ubayd Allāh ibn Maymūn al-Qaddāh',²⁷ that he connects them.

These epistles were composed under the dynasty of the Būyids, during the fourth [/tenth] century, at the beginning of the dynasty of the 'Ubaydids who built Cairo.²⁸

The theologian speaks of 'Ubaydids rather than of Fāṭimids, because he would not accept that the latter belonged to the Family of the Prophet or, even, that they were faithful to him.

The Sons of 'Ubayd — whom they call 'al-Qaddāh' — who used to say that they were Fāṭimids, built Cairo, and remained kings [there], claimed that they were 'Alids ['*Alawī*]. [They reigned for] about two hundred years, and achieved supremacy over half of the empire [*mamlaka*] of Islam. They even achieved supremacy, at certain points, over Baghdad . . . The people of knowledge all know that the ['Ubaydids] were not of the children of Fāṭima. Rather, they were from among the descendants of the Magi — it has also been said that they were the descendents of a Jew. They were among the people who are the most distant from the Messenger of God, God bless him and grant him peace, as far as his Sunna and his religion are concerned.²⁹

Ibn Taymiyya nevertheless speaks explicitly of the 'Ubaydids as 'Ismailis' also. He notes that the *Rasā'il* was 'composed at the time of the appearance of the doctrine of the Ismaili 'Ubaydids who built Cairo',³⁰ 'when the dynasty of the Ismaili esotericists who built the Cairo of

26 Ibn Taymiyya, *Bughya*, p. 329; Ibn Taymiyya, *MF*, vol. 35, p. 183, trans. in Michot, 'Astrology', p. 177; and also in Ibn Taymiyya, *MaF*, vol. 1, p. 333.

27 Ibn Taymiyya, *MF*, vol. 35, p. 134; also in Ibn Taymiyya, *MaF*, vol. 4, p. 234.

28 Ibn Taymiyya, *MF*, vol. 35, p. 183, trans. in Michot, 'Astrology', p. 177; also in Ibn Taymiyya, *MaF*, vol. 1, p. 333.

29 Ibn Taymiyya, *MF*, vol. 27, p. 174.

30 Ibid., vol. 11, p. 581.

al-Mu'izz, in the year 350-something, appeared'.³¹ Moreover, the content of the *Rasā'il* was itself understood by him as being of an Ismaili nature:

These [epistles] were composed during the fourth century, when the 'Ubaydid dynasty appeared in Egypt and [when] they built Cairo. They were composed according to the doctrine of those Ismailis, as is demonstrated by their content.³²

By connecting the epistles to Egypt and labelling them 'Ismaili', did Ibn Taymiyya mean to say that they are not Qarmaṭī works? Not at all, since he also writes that 'this book is the foundation [*aṣl*] of the doctrine of the Qarmaṭī philosophers'.³³ Elsewhere, he also argues that:

It is for these Qarmaṭīs that the *Rasā'il* of the Ikhwān al-Ṣafā' was composed — i.e., those who are called the Ismailis due to the fact that they relate themselves to Ismā'il ibn Ja'far.³⁴

The theologian does not in fact see any real doctrinal difference between the Ismailis and the Qarmaṭīs.

[These people] have nicknames that are well known among the Muslims. Sometimes they are called the 'heretics' [*mulḥid*], sometimes they are called the 'Qarmaṭīs', and sometimes they are called the 'esotericists' [*bāṭinī*]; sometimes they are called the 'Ismailis', and sometimes they are called the 'Nuṣayrīs';³⁵

31 Ibn Taymiyya, *Minhāj*, vol. 4, pp. 54–55.

32 Ibid., *Minhāj*, vol. 2, p. 466.

33 Ibn Taymiyya, *Bughya*, p. 329.

34 Ibn Taymiyya, *Sharḥ al-'aqīda al-Isfahāniyya*, ed. Ḥ. M. Makhlūf (Cairo: Dār al-Kutub al-Islāmiyya, 1386/1966), p. 170 (hereafter cited as *Isfahāniyya*).

35 It is worth noting that the Nuṣayrīs in fact represent a Shi'i tradition other than that of the Ismailis, deriving their name from Muḥammad ibn Nuṣayr al-Fihri al-Numayrī, a disciple of the tenth or eleventh Twelver Imam, and which still exists today (the 'Alawīs of Syria); see Abū al-Faṭḥ al-Shahrastānī, *Livre des religions et des sectes*, ed. and trans. Daniel Gimaret and Guy Monnot, vol. 1 (Leuven and Paris: Peeters and UNESCO, 1986), p. 542, note 225 (hereafter cited as *Religions*). Ibn Taymiyya expounds and refutes their doctrines in the *fatwa* from which this text is taken; see Stanislas Guyard, 'Le *fatwa* d' Ibn Taymiyyah

sometimes they are called the 'Khurramiyya'³⁶ and sometimes they are called the 'Muḥammira'.³⁷ There are some of these names that are common to them whereas others are peculiar to some of their kinds; just as 'Islam' and 'faith' are common to the Muslims although some of them have a name which is peculiar to them by reason of their lineage, or their rite [*madhhab*], or their country, etc.³⁸

For the Ḥanbalī theologian, the Ismailis are thus a type of Qarmaṭīs among others — the Khurramiyya, for example. As for the Qarmaṭīs, he maintains that they are themselves part of the wider ideological ensemble of the esotericists. Esotericism is indeed present within Shi'ism as within Sufism or *kalām* theology. The likes of the Shi'i esotericists, i.e., the Qarmaṭīs, are, in Sufism, 'the unionists — the adepts of the oneness of existence — such as Ibn Sab'īn, Ibn 'Arabī, and their like'³⁹ and, 'among the straying *kalām* theologians',⁴⁰ 'the deniers of the [divine] attributes . . . like the Mu'tazilis and others'.⁴¹ Speaking once of 'groups of esotericists', Ibn Taymiyya thus adds, more explicitly, 'Shi'i esotericists like the authors of the *Rasā'il Ikhwān al-Ṣafā'* and Sufi esotericists like Ibn Sab'īn, Ibn 'Arabī, and others'.⁴² And because he considers this shared esotericism a shared heresy, he can also liken 'the heretics . . . among the followers of the Sons of

sur les Nosairis', *Journal Asiatique*, 6, 18 (1871), pp. 158–198 (hereafter cited as 'Fetwa').

36 *Khurramiyya*, or *Khurramdīniyya* (from the Persian *khurram-dīn*, 'joyous', or 'pleasant', 'religion'), originally denoted the religious movement of Mazdak in general and, later on, of various Iranian, anti-Arab, and frequently rebellious sects, that were influenced by certain Mazdak and Manichaean beliefs as well as by some Shi'i 'extremist' doctrines. See Wilferd Madelung, 'Al-Khurramiyya', *EI2*, vol. 5, p. 63–65.

37 *Muḥammira* seems originally to have been another name for the religious movement of Mazdak in general. Later on, the word came to be used for various rebellious factions in Iran. See *ibid.*

38 *Nuṣayriyya*, in Ibn Taymiyya, *MF*, vol. 35, p. 152 (also in Ibn Taymiyya, *MaF*, vol. 4, p. 212). French trans. in Guyard, 'Fetwa', p. 189; also in Michot, 'Hérétique', p. 205.

39 Ibn Taymiyya, *Iṣfahāniyya*, p. 52.

40 Ibn Taymiyya, *MF*, vol. 4, p. 346.

41 Ibn Taymiyya, *Iṣfahāniyya*, p. 52.

42 *Kitāb al-Radd 'alā al-mantiqiyyin*, ed. M. Ḥ. M. Ḥ. Ismā'īl (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-Ilmiyya, 1423/2003), p. 433 (hereafter cited as *Radd*).

‘Ubayd, like the authors of the *Rasā'il Ikhwān al-Ṣafā'* and others’,⁴³ to ‘the Sufi heretics walking out of the way of the earlier shaykhs who belonged to the people of the Book and the Tradition, like Ibn ‘Arabī, Ibn Sab‘īn, Ibn Ṭufayl (the author of *Ḥayy ibn Yaqzān*), and many other creatures’.⁴⁴

It is with Ibn Sīnā (Avicenna), rather than these late unionist Sufis with whom he sometimes puts them, that Ibn Taymiyya most often likes to connect the Ikhwān. His main reason for doing so is the famous passage of his autobiography in which the Shaykh al-Ra’īs recalls:

My father was one of those who responded to the propaganda of the Egyptians and was reckoned among the Ismā‘īliyya. From them, he, as well as my brother, heard the account of the soul and the intellect in the special manner in which they speak about it and know it. Sometimes they used to discuss this among themselves.⁴⁵

Just like others before him, the Ḥanbalī theologian forgets about the rest of this testimony — ‘I was listening to them and understanding what they were saying, but my soul would not accept it’⁴⁶ — and considers that these conversations led Ibn Sīnā to become, not only an Ismaili philosopher, but a faithful of the Egyptian ‘Ubaydids.

Ibn Sīnā said: ‘My father and my brother were among the adepts of their missionary propaganda [*da‘wa*], and this is why I occupied myself with philosophy.’⁴⁷

Ibn Sīnā mentioned that his father was among the adepts of their missionary propaganda [*da‘wa*], among the adepts of the missionary calling of the Egyptians among them, who at

⁴³ Ibn Taymiyya, *MF*, vol. 17, p. 333.

⁴⁴ Ibn Taymiyya, *Dar’*, vol. 1, p. 11. French trans. in *Ibn Taymiyya: Lettre à Abū l-Fidā*, ed. and trans. Yahya J. Michot (Louvain-la-Neuve: Université Catholique de Louvain, 1994), pp. 24–25 (hereafter cited as *Lettre*).

⁴⁵ *The Life of Ibn Sina: A Critical Edition and Annotated Translation*, ed. and trans. William E. Gohlman (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1974), p. 19 (hereafter cited as *Life*).

⁴⁶ Gohlman, *Life*, p. 19.

⁴⁷ Ibn Taymiyya, *Isfahāniyya*, p. 170.

that time had gained possession of Egypt and conquered it. 'It is for this reason', Ibn Sīnā says, 'that I occupied myself with philosophy.'⁴⁸

Ibn Sīnā and the members of his house were indeed among the followers of al-Ḥākim the Qarmatī, the 'Ubaydid who was [ruling] in Egypt.⁴⁹

The members of Ibn Sīnā's house were among the followers of these Qarmatīs, among those who had answered to al-Ḥākim, who was [then reigning] in Egypt. 'It is for that reason', Ibn Sīnā says, that 'I embarked on philosophy.'⁵⁰

Ibn Taymiyya does not affirm that Ibn Sīnā read the *Rasā'il*, but works out a narrative which, by linking them, the Persian thinker, Cairo, al-Ḥākim, and the Ismaili 'Ubaydids, leads to a picture that makes sense within the structure of his ideology if not in historical terms: that of a time during which 'the situation of the Muslims... was seriously troubled',⁵¹ not just because of external enemies but because of the growing threat against Islam represented, among Muslims themselves, by that idea whose interests esotericism served so well: philosophy. Modern historians of Islamic classical thought are sometimes reluctant to consider the Ikhwān as *falāsifa*. As for Ibn Taymiyya, there is no doubt at all in his mind:

Intrinsically, their ideology [*amr*] is the doctrine of the philosophers, and it is according to this ideology that these epistles

48 Ibn Taymiyya, *Bayān talbīs al-jahmiyya fī ta'sīs bida'i-him al-kalāmiyya aw naqd ta'sīs al-jahmiyya*, ed. Muḥammad ibn 'Abd al-Raḥmān ibn Qāsim, 2 vols. ([Cairo?]: Mu'assasat Qurṭuba, 1392[/1972]), vol. 1, p. 374 (hereafter cited as *Bayān*).

49 Ibn Taymiyya, *MF*, vol. 13, p. 249.

50 Ibn Taymiyya, *Dar'*, vol. 5, p. 10; Ibn Taymiyya, *MF*, vol. 11, p. 571; *ibid.*, vol. 27, p. 175; *ibid.*, vol. 35, p. 135; Ibn Taymiyya, *MaF*, vol. 4, p. 235. See also Ibn Taymiyya, *Majmū'at al-rasā'il al-Kubrā*, 2 vols. (Cairo: al-Maṭba'at al-Āmirat al-Sharqiyya, 1323[/1905]), vol. 2, pp. 288–289 (hereafter cited as *MRK*). See also *Musique et danse selon Ibn Taymiyya: Le Livre du samā' et de la danse* (Kitāb al-Samā' wa'l-raqs) *compilé par le Shaykh Muḥammad al-Manbijī*, Études musulmanes, 33, ed. and trans. Yahya J. Michot (Paris: J. Vrin, 1991), pp. 78–79 (hereafter cited as *Musique*).

51 Ibn Taymiyya, *Dar'*, vol. 5, p. 10.

were composed. A group of well-known philosophizers composed them.⁵²

He therefore has no difficulty in speaking of 'the authors of the *Rasā'il Ikhwān al-Ṣafā'* and *similar philosophizers*' [italics added].⁵³ Now:

The people who are the closest [to the 'Ubaydids] are the philosophers, albeit they did not also adopt the rule [*qā'ida*] of a particular philosopher. This is why groups of the philosophizers related themselves to them. Ibn Sīnā and the members of his house were indeed among their followers. Ibn al-Haytham and similar people were among their followers. Mubashshir ibn Fātik and his like were among their followers.⁵⁴

So, also, 'the authors of the *Rasā'il Ikhwān al-Ṣafā'* composed their epistles in a way similar to theirs'.⁵⁵

But what type of philosophy did the Ikhwān, whose epistles, as already mentioned, Ibn Taymiyya says 'were composed according to the doctrine of those Ismailis',⁵⁶ have in common with Ibn Sīnā, Mubashshir ibn Fātik, Abū 'Alī ibn al-Haytham and other 'followers of al-Ḥākim'?⁵⁷ Quoting al-Ghazālī's *al-Munqidh*, the theologian at one point speaks of:

Insipid crumbs of Pythagoras' philosophy. The latter was one of the earliest of the Ancients and his doctrine was the first of the doctrines of the philosophers. Aristotle refuted him or, more [precisely], corrected what he was saying and despised it. It is what is talked about in the book of the *Rasā'il Ikhwān al-Ṣafā'* and it is really the refuse of philosophy.⁵⁸

52 Ibn Taymiyya, *Minhāj*, vol. 4, p. 55.

53 Ibn Taymiyya, *MF*, vol. 18, p. 336.

54 Ibid., vol. 27, p. 175.

55 Ibid.

56 Ibn Taymiyya, *Minhāj*, vol. 2, p. 466. See p. 145, n. 32.

57 Ibn Taymiyya, *MF*, vol. 13, p. 249.

58 Ibn Taymiyya, *Iṣfahāniyya*, p. 111. See al-Ghazālī, *Al-Munqidh min al-ḍalāl (Erreur et délivrance)*, ed. and [French] trans. Farid Jabre (Beirut: Librairie Orientale, 1969), p. 33 (hereafter cited as *Munqidh*). The version quoted by Ibn Taymiyya often differs from the text prepared by Jabre.

More regularly, however, it is to Aristotle and 'Greek Peripatetic philosophy'⁵⁹ that Ibn Taymiyya traces the Ikhwān's philosophical views, although not exclusively, as he also notes that the epistles 'were composed according to their doctrine which they assembled from what was said by the Greek philosophers, the Persian Magi, and, among the people of the Qibla, the Shi'is'.⁶⁰ Or, that they were partly influenced by 'the things said by the later Ṣābi'ans, that is, the innovated philosophy'.⁶¹

Sometimes, they rest what they say on the doctrines of the naturalist or divinalist philosophers, and sometimes they rest it on what is said by the Magi who worship the light. And to this they join [Shi'i] 'rejectionism' [*rafd*].⁶²

Ibn Taymiyya is somehow clearer about what he thinks concerning these Magi, Ṣābi'ans or 'Ṣābi'an philosophizers relating themselves to Islam'⁶³ in a passage concerning the famous translation movement under the 'Abbāsids:

At the end of the second century [200/815], before it and after it, the books of the Greeks and other *Rhomaioi* were imported from the countries of the Nazarenes, translated into Arabic, and so the doctrine of the Ṣābi'an substitutors [*mubaddil*], such as Aristotle and his kin, spread.⁶⁴ The Khurramiyya appeared at that time, that is, the first esotericist Qarmaṭīs who, inwardly, were adopting some elements of the religion of the Ṣābi'an substitutors and some of the religion of the Magi. For example, they took from the former what they said about the intellect and the soul and they took from the latter what they said about light and darkness; they dressed that up with

59 Ibn Taymiyya, *Bughya*, p. 179.

60 Ibn Taymiyya, *MF*, vol. 11, p. 581.

61 Ibid., *MF*, vol. 12, p. 23.

62 *Nuṣayriyya*, in Ibn Taymiyya, *MF*, vol. 35, p. 153 (also in Ibn Taymiyya, *MaF*, vol. 4, p. 212); French trans. in Guyard, 'Fetwa', p. 190.

63 Ibn Taymiyya, *MF*, vol. 4, p. 314.

64 A few lines earlier, Ibn Taymiyya speaks of those who 'substitute [*baddala*] and change the primordial state of the creatures [*fiṭra*] of God and His way [*shir'a*]'.

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[various Islamic] idioms, tampered with it and presented it to the Muslims. Consequently, there were in Islam [all] the Qarmaṭīs that there were, and they leaned much towards the way of the Ṣābi'an substitutors! It is also in their time that the *Rasā'il Ikhwān al-Ṣafā'* was composed.⁶⁵

As briefly alluded to in this excerpt, what Ibn Taymiyya found particularly dangerous for the faith in the *Rasā'il* and similar philosophies was defined by him as their deceitful and cunning ways:

Those who revere the [philosophers] want an agreement between what they say and what the prophets came with.⁶⁶

Someone who travels along the [philosophers'] way wants to have a coherence between what they say and what the Messengers came with. By sophistry and 'Qarmaṭising' he thus embarks on [various] kinds of absurdities which no intelligent being can be satisfied with, as was done by the authors of the *Rasā'il Ikhwān al-Ṣafā'* and their like. It is from here that the Qarmaṭīs, the esotericists, and those who became their associates in some of those [ideas] went astray.⁶⁷

Supposedly, 'the [esotericists] want to make a synthesis between what the Messengers have told [us] about and what those [philosophers] say, as the authors of the *Rasā'il Ikhwān al-Ṣafā'* did'.⁶⁸ Or, as he elaborates:

[The philosophers] claimed that they make a synthesis between the divine Law and Greek philosophy. This is for example claimed by the authors of the *Rasā'il Ikhwān al-Ṣafā'* and their like among these heretics.⁶⁹

Ibn Sīnā is classed by Ibn Taymiyya as one of these, as is Ibn Rushd (Averroes):

⁶⁵ Ibn Taymiyya, *Bayān*, vol. 1, p. 374.

⁶⁶ Ibn Taymiyya, *Radd*, p. 366.

⁶⁷ Ibn Taymiyya, *MF*, vol. 9, pp. 36–37.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, *MF*, vol. 35, pp. 133–134; also in Ibn Taymiyya, *MaF*, vol. 4, p. 234.

⁶⁹ Ibn Taymiyya, *Dar'*, vol. 6, p. 242.

[Ibn Sīnā made] a synthesis between the Law and philosophy — and likewise did the Ismaili esotericists proceed in their book called the *Rasā'il Ikhwān al-Ṣafā'*. After him, Ibn Rushd also did so.⁷⁰

Ibn Sīnā, Ibn Rushd ('the grandson'),⁷¹ and their like started to bring the fundamentals of those [Aristotelian philosophers] and the way of the prophets closer together, and to state publicly that their fundamentals did not conflict with the prophetic Laws.⁷²

In the [*Rasā'il*, the Ikhwān] claim, they made a synthesis between the things said by the later Ṣābi'ans — that is, the innovated philosophy — and what the Messengers brought from God. They thus come up with things which they claim to be intelligible, although there is no proof for many of them. Sometimes, they also mention that it is something traditionally transmitted [*manqūl*], although it contains grave lies and alterations.⁷³

Consequently, Ibn Taymiyya wondered how could one speak of synthesis when Aristotle is in fact preferred to the Qur'an, and the result of it all was, he felt, rather than an agreement between religion and reason, a mixture of distorted tradition and erring rationalism? As he wrote, if something is not taught in the Qur'an

— this Book which [is such that], under the surface of the sky, there is no book nobler than it — and if the knowledge of this is not learned from the Messenger who is the most eminent creature of God, Exalted is He, in everything — knowing, teaching, etc. —, will this then be mentioned in what is said by Aristotle and his kin, by the authors of the *Rasā'il Ikhwān al-Ṣafā'* and their like, who establish that by means of syllogisms containing mere claims, [based on] no soundly

70 Ibn Taymiyya, *Bughya*, p. 199.

71 Ibn Taymiyya is using this expression in order to distinguish Ibn Rushd the philosopher from his grandfather Ibn Rushd the jurist.

72 Ibn Taymiyya, *Kitāb al-Ṣafadiyya*, ed. M. R. Sālim, 2 vols. (Mansoura and Riyadh: Dār al-Hady al-Nabawī and Dār al-Faḍīla, 1421/2000), vol. 1, p. 237 (hereafter cited as *Ṣafadiyya*).

73 Ibn Taymiyya, *MF*, vol. 12, p. 23.

transmitted tradition nor clear rationality, and which rather resemble the empty syllogisms which are devoid of effect and which, when submitted to verification, reduce to phantasms that have no reality in the outside [world]?⁷⁴

Ibn Taymiyya was not, of course, the first to attack the Ikhwān's syncretism. Three centuries before him, Abū Sulaymān al-Sijistānī had already criticised their attempt to synthesise the truths of philosophy and the ways of faith.⁷⁵ As he refers to *al-Imtā' wa'l-mu'ānasa*,⁷⁶ the theologian most probably knew of al-Tawḥīdī's report on this, but, in the texts here analysed, it is not referred to. He quotes another condemnation of the *Rasā'il*, that of Abū 'Abd Allāh al-Māzarī (d. 536/1141),⁷⁷ which he must have particularly appreciated as it implicitly indicates a continuity between the Ikhwān and Ibn Sīnā.

The [one] who composed the *Epistles* was a man, a philosopher, who plunged into the sciences of the Law [*shar'*], formed some mixture between the two sciences [i.e., Law and philosophy] and embellished philosophy in the hearts of the adepts of the Law by means of [Qur'anic] verses and *ḥadīth* that he quoted to them. Then, in this later period, there was a philosopher known as Ibn Sīnā who filled the world with writings concerning the sciences of philosophy, quoted the Law as his authority, and adorned himself with the ornaments of the Muslims. His strength in the science of philosophy led him subtly to make every effort in order to reduce the foundations of the creeds to the science of philosophy and he achieved, regarding this, things that were not achieved by the other philosophers.⁷⁸

The theologian's point against the Ikhwān somehow differs from that of

⁷⁴ Ibn Taymiyya, *Bughya*, p. 222.

⁷⁵ Tawḥīdī, *Imtā'*, vol. 2, pp. 6–14; 'Abd al-Raḥmān Badawī, *Quelques figures et thèmes de la philosophie islamique* (Paris: G. P. Maisonneuve et Larose, 1979), pp. 104–111 (hereafter cited as *Figures*).

⁷⁶ See p. 143.

⁷⁷ On the Sicilian al-Māzarī, see M. Asin Palacios, 'Un faqīh siciliano, contradictor de Al Ghazzālī (Abū 'Abd Allāh de Māzara),' in *Centenario della Nascita di Michele Amari*, vol. 2 (Palermo: 1910), pp. 216–244 (hereafter as 'Faqīh').

⁷⁸ Ibn Taymiyya, *Isfahāniyya*, p. 133.

al-Sijistānī and al-Māzarī. In Ibn Taymiyya's opinion, first, the *Rasā'il*'s so-called 'synthesis between the Law and philosophy'⁷⁹ does not just conflict with religion, it is irrational; second, their philosophy does not contradict Islam exclusively, but also Judaism and Christianity.

Will anyone, among those who know the religion of the Muslims, or [that] of the Jews, or [that] of the Nazarenes, deny that what the authors of the *Rasā'il Ikhwān al-Ṣafā'* say conflicts with the three religions [*milla*]? . . . As for opposing the Messengers concerning what they informed [us] about and commanded, accusing much of what they came with of being lies, and substituting [new things] for the Laws of all the Messengers, there are in these [epistles] things that do not remain hidden to whoever knows [even] one of the religions! Those people are in fact walking out of the three religions.⁸⁰

The matter with them is really that they believe neither in any of** the prophets and the Messengers (neither Noah, nor Abraham, nor Moses, nor Jesus, nor Muḥammad, the blessings of God and His peace be upon all of them), nor in any of the Books of God sent down [to us] (neither the Torah, nor the Gospel, nor the Qur'an).⁸¹

Someone holding the opinion that what the Messengers say corresponds to [what is said by] these Greeks, thus proves his ignorance of what the Messengers came with and of what these [Greeks] say. Such an [opinion] is only found in what is said by the heretics among the adepts of the [various] religions [*milla*] — the heretics of the Jews, the Nazarenes, the Muslims and others — like the authors of the *Rasā'il Ikhwān al-Ṣafā'* and their like among the heretics relating themselves to Shi'ism or to Sufism, like Ibn 'Arabī, Ibn Sab'īn, and those similar to them.⁸²

79 Ibn Taymiyya, *Bughya*, p. 199.

80 Ibn Taymiyya, *MF*, vol. 35, p. 134; also in Ibn Taymiyya, *MaF*, vol. 4, p. 234.

81 *Nuṣayriyya*, in Ibn Taymiyya, *MF*, vol. 35, p. 152; also in *MaF*, vol. 4, p. 212. French trans. in Guyard, 'Fetwa', p. 190.

82 Ibn Taymiyya, *al-Jawāb al-ṣaḥīḥ li-man baddala dīn al-Masīḥ*, ed. 'Alī ibn Ḥasan ibn Nāṣir, 'Abd al-'Azīz ibn Ibrāhīm al-'Askar and Ḥamdān ibn Muḥammad al-Ḥamdān, 7 vols. (Riyadh : Dār al-'Āṣima li'l-Nashr wa'l-Tawzī', 1419/1999), vol. 5, p. 37 (hereafter cited as *Jawāb*).

In sum, for Ibn Taymiyya, the Ikhwān 'strayed and led astray'.⁸³ More specifically:

They confess neither that the world has a Creator who created it, nor that He has a religion which He commanded [to be adopted], nor that He has an abode, other than this abode, in which He retributes people for their actions.⁸⁴

Without saying it explicitly, the theologian extends to the Ikhwān a judgement taken from al-Ghazālī, which he uses repeatedly against the Ismaili 'Ubaydids of Cairo.

The Sons of 'Ubayd . . . were just as Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī said they were: outwardly, their doctrine was [Shi'i] rejectionism [*rafḍ*] whereas, inwardly, it was sheer unbelief [*al-kufr al-mahḍ*]. . . . Inwardly, their religion is assembled from the religion of the Magi and the Ṣābi'ans. And what they practise outwardly of the religion of the Muslims is the religion of the [Shi'i] rejectionists [*rāfiḍ*]. The best of those among them who adhere to the religion are the [Shi'i] rejectionists [*rāfiḍ*]—yet they are the ignorant and the commoners among them—and every one of them thinks that he is a Muslim and believes that his religion* is truly Islam. As for their elite—their kings and their scholars—, they know that they are walking out of the religion of all the communities [*milla*]: the religion of the Muslims, the Jews, and the Nazarenes.⁸⁵

It is in those times that these epistles were composed, because of the appearance of this doctrine which, outwardly, is [Shi'i] rejectionism [*rafḍ*] whereas, inwardly, it is sheer unbelief. They were making out as if they were following the Law and [said] that it has an inward [meaning] which conflicts with its outward one.⁸⁶

83 Ibn Taymiyya, *Kitāb al-Istighātha fī al-radd 'alā al-Bakrī*, ed. 'Abd Allāh ibn Dujayn al-Suhaylī, 2 vols. (Riyadh: Dār al-Waṭan, 1417/1997), vol. 2, p. 479 (hereafter cited as *Istighātha*).

84 *Nuṣayriyya*, in Ibn Taymiyya, *MF*, vol. 35, p. 152; also in Ibn Taymiyya, *MaF*, vol. 4, p. 212. French trans. in Guyard, 'Fetwa', p. 190.

85 Ibn Taymiyya, *MF*, vol. 27, p. 174.

86 Ibn Taymiyya, *Minhāj*, vol. 4, p. 55. See also Ibn Taymiyya, *MF*, vol. 11, p. 581; *Nuṣayriyya*, in Ibn Taymiyya, *MF*, vol. 35, p. 152; also in Ibn Taymiyya, *MaF*,

The whole approach revealed by these texts is fairly general, and one wonders what Ibn Taymiyya effectively knew of the structure and actual content of the *Rasā'il*. Quoting al-Māzarī, he writes: 'There are fifty-one of these epistles, each of them being an independent epistle.'⁸⁷ Acknowledging elsewhere that not everything in the *Rasā'il* is to be condemned, he alludes to some of the disciplines they relate to.

Concerning mathematics, physics, some [parts] of logic, *divinalia*, and the sciences of ethics, politics, and domestic economy, there are in these [epistles] things that are not to be rejected [*lā yunkaru*].⁸⁸

He nevertheless suspects a devious intention in the Ikhwān's interest for these disciplines. They lead many astray by what their philosophy

contains of subjects of physics and mathematics that have no connection to the subject of prophethood and messengership, neither negatively, nor positively, but from which one benefits in terms of living well in this world — for example, the arts of agriculture and weaving, construction, tailoring, and others.⁸⁹

Nowhere does Ibn Taymiyya comment on specific pages from the *Rasā'il* as he does with works by Ibn Sīnā, al-Ghazālī, al-Ṭūsī, and several other authors. Generally, he does not even consider them in themselves but refers to them as an illustration of an ideological perspective, philosophical doctrines, and particular views, shared by a wider group of thinkers, which he is busy exposing and refuting. Syncretism, as already been shown, is the main ideological approach for which the theologian attacks the Ikhwān. As for philosophical doctrines, there seem to be two main ones he has problems with: (a) the

vol. 4, p. 212. French trans. in Guyard, 'Fetwa', p. 189. See also Ibn Taymiyya, *Ṣafadiyya*, vol. 1, p. 2.

⁸⁷ Ibn Taymiyya, *Isfahāniyya*, p. 133.

⁸⁸ Ibn Taymiyya, *MF*, vol. 35, p. 134; also in Ibn Taymiyya, *MaF*, vol. 4, p. 234.

⁸⁹ Ibn Taymiyya, *MF*, vol. 12, p. 23.

Ikhwān's prophetology and hermeneutics; (b) their philosophy of the intellect and the soul.

For Ibn Taymiyya, the Ikhwān's prophetology and hermeneutics are directly influenced by their syncretism. As philosophical truth is supposed to correspond to revealed truth, they say, the different type of language apparent in prophetic messages must be explained by the obligation that the Messengers have to address the commonalty, not just the intellectual elite. Hence, their symbolist approach to scriptures, which other thinkers shared also, and which the theologian analyses mainly through the prism of Ibn Sīnā's thought: the utilitarian hermeneutics set forth in the *Risāla adḥawīyya* of the Shaykh al-Ra'īs, which Ibn Taymiyya knew well, having written a commentary on it.⁹⁰ From this perspective, philosophers are able to recognise in the revealed books images, similitudes, and parables of what reason teaches them; prophets are also aware of this philosophical truth, but do not teach it as such because the vulgar would not be able to grasp it if they were given a transparent version of it. Moreover, a transparent teaching of the truth, i.e., philosophy, to the vulgar would stir up sectarian discussions and threaten public order. The Qur'an's abstention from doing so is thus in the greatest interest of human society.

There is no doubt about it, the Qarmaṭīs and their like among the philosophers say that the [Prophet] said publicly the opposite of what he knew inwardly, and that he addressed the commoners [*āmma*] with things by which he meant the opposite of what he was making them understand in their interest [*maṣlaḥa*], as it was not possible for him to reform them but in this way. This is what was claimed by Ibn Sīnā, the authors of the *Rasā'il Ikhwān al-Ṣafā'*, and their like among the philosophers and the esotericist [*bāṭinī*] Qarmaṭīs.⁹¹

Ibn Taymiyya sees in this prophetic policy a process of 'substitution' encouraging estimation and imagining.

⁹⁰ See the text translated in Michot, 'Mamlūk', parts 1 and 2.

⁹¹ Ibn Taymiyya, *MF*, vol. 13, p. 249.

The people [speaking] of estimation [*wahm*]⁹² and imagining are those who say that the prophets gave [us] information about God and the Last Day, the Garden and the Fire, and even about the angels, that does not conform to the matter in itself. They addressed people with things thanks to which they could imagine and estimate that God is an enormous body, that the bodies will be returned [to life], and that there will be for them a bliss and a chastisement perceptible through the senses, even if the matter, in itself, is not like that. It is indeed in the interest [*maṣlaḥa*] of the vulgar that they be addressed in such a way that they estimate and imagine that that is the case. Even if this is a lie, it is a lie in the interest of the vulgar, since inviting them [to follow the path of God] and [securing] their interest was not possible except in this way. On this principle Ibn Sīnā and his like based the rule [*qānūn*] they [follow when reading the revealed texts], as [is the case with] the rule he mentions in his *Epistle for the Feast of the Sacrifice* [*al-Risāla al-adḥawiyya*]. By these terms, those people say, the prophets meant their outward meanings. They wanted the vulgar to understand, from them, these outward meanings, even if these outward meanings, as far as the matter itself is concerned, are a lie, something vain, opposed to the truth. Their purpose was to make the vulgar understand by means of lies and vain things, in their [own better] interest [*maṣlaḥa*].⁹³

Intrinsically [*fī al-bāṭin*], they [the philosophizers] say that what the Messengers informed [us] about concerning God and the Last Day has no truth in itself and only constitutes images [*takhyīl*], similitudes [*tamthīl*], and parables [*amthāl*] that are given in order to make the commonalty understand things from which, they claim, in relation to that, they profit, even if it is contrary to reality as far as the thing itself is concerned. They may also consider that the characteristic of prophethood is to make imagine [things] [*takhyīl*].⁹⁴

This is, in sum, what the philosophizers and the esotericists say,

92 On the translation of '*wahm*' by 'estimation' and the role, close to 'imagination', of this internal sense, see Deborah L. Black, 'Estimation (*wahm*) in Avicenna: The Logical and Psychological Dimensions', *Dialogue*, 32 (1993), pp. 219–258 (hereafter cited as 'Estimation').

93 Ibn Taymiyya, *Dar'*, vol. 1, pp. 8–9; French trans. in Michot, *Lettre*, pp. 21–22.

94 Ibn Taymiyya, *Ṣafadiyya*, vol. 1, p. 237.

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such as the Ismaili heretics, the authors of the *Rasā'il Ikhwān al-Ṣafā'*, al-Fārābī and Ibn Sīnā, al-Suhrawardī (the one who was killed), Ibn Rushd (the grandson), and the Sufi heretics walking out of the way of the earlier shaykhs who belonged to the People of the Book and the Tradition, like Ibn 'Arabī, Ibn Sab'īn, Ibn Ṭufayl (the author of *Ḥayy ibn Yaqẓān*), and many other creatures.⁹⁵

For Ibn Taymiyya, three important distinctions must then be made at this stage of reflection. The first one deals with respect, or disrespect, to the intelligence of the Prophet:

[Some philosophers] say that the Prophet knew the truth but publicly said the opposite of it in the [people's best] interest, whereas some others say that he did not know the truth as the speculative philosophers and their like know it.⁹⁶

Thus, he concludes that the latter type 'give pre-eminence to the perfect philosopher over the Prophet' — this was the case with 'al-Fārābī, Mubashshir ibn Fātik, and others' — or 'to the perfect Friend [of God; *walī*], to whom this [spiritual] spectacle offers itself'⁹⁷ — this was the case with, for example, Ibn 'Arabī and Ibn Sab'īn. As for the philosophers saying that the Prophet knew the truth,

they say that the Prophet is more eminent than the philosopher because he knows what the philosopher knows, and something more. It is also possible for him to address the vulgar in a way that the philosopher is unable to use. Ibn Sīnā and his like are among these.⁹⁸

What about the Ikhwān? In a text already quoted, Ibn Taymiyya clearly indicates that he puts them in the latter group: 'The Qarmaṭīs and their like among the philosophers say that the [Prophet] publicly said the

95 Ibn Taymiyya, *Dar'*, vol. 1, pp. 10–11; French trans. in Michot, *Lettre*, pp. 24–25.

96 Ibn Taymiyya, *Dar'*, vol. 1, p. 9; French trans. in Michot, *Lettre*, pp. 22–23.

97 Ibn Taymiyya, *Dar'*, vol. 1, pp. 9–10; French trans. in Michot, *Lettre*, p. 23.

98 Ibn Taymiyya, *Dar'*, vol. 1, p. 10; French trans. in Michot, *Lettre*, p. 23.

opposite of *what he knew inwardly* [italics added].⁹⁹ Elsewhere, Ibn Taymiyya also writes:

The prophet, as seen by these philosophizers, is like a scholar practising *ijtihād*, whom one follows [*al-mujtahid al-matbū*], as seen by the *kalām* theologians. This is why those who associate the [philosophers] with the prophets, like the authors of the *Rasā'il Ikhwān al-Ṣafā'* and their like, say 'The prophets and the wise are agreed,' or they speak of 'the prophets and the philosophers'. Just as those studying the principles [of the religion] [*uṣūlī*] say 'The prophets, the jurists, and the *kalām* theologians are agreed . . . ' and 'This is what the jurists and the *kalām* theologians say.'¹⁰⁰

A second distinction concerns doctrinal and practical scriptural teachings. Is it only the literal meaning of the scriptural statements related to creed and beliefs, specially tailored to the vulgar, that the elite can dispense with, or can such an approach to the Prophet's message be extended to encompass ritual and practical prescriptions? According to Ibn Taymiyya, the esotericists and Qarmaṭīs took the latter position:

Anyone hearing the Qur'an, the abundantly certified [*mutawātir*] *ḥadīths* and the commentary of the Companions and the Followers on these, is bound to know that the Messenger, God bless him and grant him peace, informed [us] of the return of the bodies [in the hereafter] and [also] that to belittle that is like belittling the fact that he came with the five prayers, the fasting of the month of Ramaḍān, the pilgrimage to the Ancient House, etc. The esotericist Qarmaṭīs, who are among the philosophers, denied this and that, and claimed that these [things] are all symbols [*ramz*] of, and allusions [*ishāra*] to, esoteric sciences. So they say that 'praying is knowing our secrets', 'fasting is concealing our secrets', 'going on pilgrimage is visiting our sanctified shaykhs', and other similar things that are mentioned in the books composed in order to uncover

⁹⁹ Ibn Taymiyya, *MF*, vol. 13, p. 249. See p. 157.

¹⁰⁰ Ibn Taymiyya, *Radd*, p. 366.

their secrets and tear their veils.¹⁰¹ It is for these Qarmaṭīs that the *Rasā'il Ikhwān al-Ṣafā'* was composed.¹⁰²

In another text, the theologian seems to imply that 'these [esotericists and Qarmaṭīs] reject the outward meanings of [scriptural] matters relating to practice and knowledge altogether',¹⁰³ even for the masses. Nevertheless, he does not count the Ikhwān among these extreme rejectionists.

As for others than these, they do not reject the outward meaning of the abundantly certified prescriptions [*mutawātir*] relating to practice but consider them aimed at the commonalty of humans, not at their elite — just as they say something similar concerning [scriptural] matters relating to information. The axis of what they say is that, as far as knowledge and practice are concerned, the [prophetic] message assures the [best] interest [*maṣlaḥa*] of the commonalty; as for the elite, no. This is also the axis of what is said by the authors of the *Rasā'il Ikhwān al-Ṣafā'* and the rest of the most eminent of the philosophizers.¹⁰⁴

Ibn Taymiyya almost certainly considers Ibn Sīnā one of these 'most eminent of the philosophizers', and this is not fair towards him since the Shaykh al-Ra'īs does speak explicitly of the usefulness of religious practices for the philosophical elite as for the commonalty. Defending the veracity of the prophets, Ibn Sīnā also explains how, in the hereafter, people will live in the reality of their paradisiacal promises and infernal threats by way of imagination.¹⁰⁵ Ibn Taymiyya does not allude to

101 'The *qāḍī* Abū Bakr ibn al-Ṭayyib composed his book, which he titled *The Uncovering of the Secrets and the Tearing of the Veils* [*Kashf al-asrār wa hatk al-astār*], in order to uncover their condition; it was similarly the case for an amazing number of Muslim scholars, intended by God, like the *qāḍī* Abū Ya'lā and Abū 'Abd Allāh Muḥammad ibn 'Abd al-Karīm al-Shahrastānī.' (Ibn Taymiyya, *MF*, vol. 27, p. 174)

102 Ibn Taymiyya, *Iṣfahāniyya*, pp. 169–170.

103 Ibn Taymiyya, *MF*, vol. 4, pp. 99–100.

104 *Ibid.*, *MF*, vol. 4, p. 100.

105 See Yahya J. Michot, *La destinée de l'homme selon Avicenne. Le retour à Dieu (ma'ād) et l'imagination* (Leuven: Peeters, 1986) (hereafter cited as *Destinée*).

this imaginal eschatology when he attributes the same hermeneutics of socially beneficial prophetic lies to both the Ikhwān and the author of the *Risāla aḍḥawiyya*. In a particularly interesting passage devoted to it, however, he provides a clue as to why Ibn Sīnā had to develop such an eschatology; if there was no truth in the Prophet's teachings,

those among people who possess intelligence and acumen inevitably would have known about it. And if they had known about it, it would usually have been impossible for them to continue to connive to conceal it, just as it is impossible for them to continue to connive in order to lie. Indeed, just as it is usually impossible, for everyone, to continue to connive in order to lie, it is impossible for them to continue to connive in order to conceal something for the disclosure and mention of which there would be numerous interests and motives; especially in such a case as knowledge of these grave matters.¹⁰⁶

A third and final distinction relates to the exact purpose of the Prophet's education of the common people. An ambiguity indeed subsists regarding what the latter are effectively supposed to do with these symbols [*ramz*], allusions [*ishārāt*], images, and other metaphors of the philosophical truth which the philosophers are discovering in the revealed messages. Are the crowds expected to remain beneath the veil by sticking as much as possible to the apparent meaning of these messages or are they invited to pass through the veil, beyond this outward meaning, and thereby to access the realm of spiritual wisdom? Are prophets just sent to reform societies or, as far as possible, also to introduce them to the truth? In the texts examined, Ibn Taymiyya does not seem to be fully aware of the problem — possibly because he does not distinguish sufficiently between Ibn Sīnā's realistic and pragmatic hermeneutics and al-Fārābī's idealistic one.¹⁰⁷ In the various passages quoted above, he appears to have somewhat hastily equated

¹⁰⁶ Ibn Taymiyya, *MF*, vol. 13, p. 249.

¹⁰⁷ See Michot, *Destinée*, pp. 33–43; and Miriam M. Galston, 'Realism and Idealism in Avicenna's Political Philosophy', *The Review of Politics*, 41 (1979), pp. 561–577 (hereafter cited as 'Realism').

the Ikhwān's hermeneutics with that of Ibn Sīnā: 'By these terms, those people say, the prophets meant their outward meanings.'¹⁰⁸ There is, however, another text in which, in a way more akin to Fārābī, he considers that, for the Ikhwān, the function of the revealed parables is not to be an opaque screen but a translucent film.

As for the hypocrites in this community, who do not confess the well-known terms of the Qur'an and the Sunna, they detach the words from their contexts and say that these [descriptions of paradise and hell] are parables given so that we may understand the spiritual return [of the soul in the hereafter]. They are similar to the esotericist Qarmaṭīs whose sayings are composed from things said by the Magi and the Ṣābi'ans, and similar to the Ṣābi'an philosophizers relating themselves to Islam, as well as to a group of people who resemble them: secretaries [*kātib*], or physicians [*mutaṭabbib*], or *kalām* theologians, or Sufis, like the authors of the *Rasā'il Ikhwān al-Ṣafā'* and others, or hypocrites.¹⁰⁹

Particular aspects of the Ikhwān's philosophically concordist prophethology are also criticised by Ibn Taymiyya. This is the case with their conception of the epistemic and practical properties of prophethood, which the theologian says they share with various other thinkers, including al-Ghazālī, and in which Ibn Sīnā's ideas also clearly play some part. The revealing of the Qur'an is thus reduced, in his eyes, to an intellectual overflowing upon the soul of the Prophet, followed by specific operations of the imagination and common sense. The prophetic miracles are explained as psychic powers, the angels become intelligible forms and Mount Sinai, where Moses was spoken to, the active intellect. Moreover, such powers are of course accessible to humans other than God's Messengers, and effectively actualised to various degrees among philosophers and others.

[The philosophers] considered the properties of prophethood to be of two species: (1) The faculty of knowledge by which

¹⁰⁸ Ibn Taymiyya, *Dar'*, vol. 1, p. 9 (Michot, *Lettre*, p. 22). See p. 158.

¹⁰⁹ Ibn Taymiyya, *MF*, vol. 4, p. 314.

knowledge is obtained — either by means of the logical syllogism or by means of the detachment [*tajarrud*] that is like the detachment of the sleeper, so that it is joined to the soul of the celestial sphere. (2) The practical faculty, which consists in the soul having the power to dispose freely of the world's *hylè* in such a manner that prodigies arise from it. The first species comprises two things: the first is the knowledge of universal sciences by the logical syllogism, and the second is the knowledge of the particulars by this junction [*ittiṣāl*]. The imagination thereafter represents the intelligibles as forms corresponding to them and engraves them into the common sense. Man then sees forms and hears sounds inside of himself. These forms, according to [these philosophers], are the angels of God, and these sounds are the speech of God. This is why the heretics among the Sufis adopted their way, like Ibn 'Arabi, Ibn Sab'in, and others. They travelled along the road of the Shi'i heretics — like the authors of the *Rasā'il Ikhwān al-Ṣafā'* — and followed what they found of the words of the author of *The Books Kept Away From Those Who Are Not Worthy of Them* [*al-Kutub al-maḍnūn bi-hā 'alā ghayr ahli-hā*] and of other [writings] corresponding to that. One of them, therefore, got to the point where he thought that the door of prophethood was [still] open and could not possibly be shut, saying as Ibn Sab'in used to say, "The son of Āmina was presumptuous when he said: "No prophet after me". Or he thinks, because he gives a greater importance to the Law, that the door of prophethood is shut, and pretends that Friendship [*walāya*] is greater than prophethood and that the Seal of the Friends is more knowledgeable of God than the Seal of the Prophets.¹¹⁰

[The philosophizers] say that this Qur'an is the Speech of God and that what the Messengers came with is the Speech of God. What they mean, however, is that it flowed upon the soul of the Prophet, God bless him and grant him peace, from the active intellect. Sometimes they also said that the intellect is Gabriel, who is not lowly, that is, not mean with what is hidden [*al-ghayb*] as he is overflowing. They say that God spoke to Moses from the heaven of his intellect, and that the adepts of exercise and purity get to a point where they hear what Moses heard, just as Moses heard it. These sayings led astray many

110 Ibn Taymiyya, *Radd*, p. 410.

of the well-known [thinkers] such as Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī, [who] mentioned this idea in some of his books. They also composed the *Rasā'il Ikhwān al-Ṣafā'*, and other texts.¹¹¹

To say so, that is, to say that the miracles of the prophets, God bless them and grant them peace, are psychic powers, is vain. Or, even, it is unbelief. Anyone saying it will be called to repent and the truth will be expounded to him. If he persists in believing it after the Legal proof being made known to him, he is an unbeliever. If he persists in holding this [opinion] publicly after having been called to repent, he will be killed. This is among the things said by a group of the philosophizers, the esotericist [*bāṭinī*] Qarmaṭīs, the Ismailis, and those similar to them, such as Ibn Sīnā and his like, the authors of the *Rasā'il Ikhwān al-Ṣafā'*, and the 'Ubaydids who were in Egypt — the Ḥākimīs and those resembling them.¹¹²

[The philosophizers] consider the suggestion [*ihā'*] and inspiration [*ilhām*] that take place in the waking state and in sleep similar to the hearing of God's speech by Moses: they are equal, without any difference between them, apart from the fact that the words addressed to Moses were meant for him, whereas there are others who hear things that are addressed also to those other than them. Afterwards, when they truly express themselves, [however,] they go back to pure philosophy, [saying] that there is no difference at all between Moses and others. These philosophizers indulging in interpretations similarly consider 'taking off the two sandals' as an allusion to [one's] abandonment of the two worlds, the 'Mount' as an expression meaning the active intellect, and similar things [that are] among the interpretations of the Ṣābi'an philosophers and of those who take after them — the Qarmaṭīs, the esotericists, the authors of the *Rasā'il Ikhwān al-Ṣafā'*, and their like.¹¹³

These texts do not relate to prophethood exclusively but also involve specific opinions on the intellect and the soul. They thus invite one to move on to another central doctrine about which Ibn Taymiyya takes the Ikhwān to task: their philosophical noology and psychology, with

111 Ibn Taymiyya, *MF*, vol. 12, p. 23.

112 Ibn Taymiyya, *Ṣafadiyya*, vol. 1, pp. 1–2.

113 Ibn Taymiyya, *MF*, vol. 6, pp. 180–181.

regard to the Creator, the angels, the cosmos, our present life, and the hereafter.

There is a tradition attributed to the Prophet which the Damascene theologian repeatedly comes back to in relation to the Ikhwān: ‘The first [thing] that God created was the intellect.’ His reason for doing so is the importance that he believes they give to this tradition in their syncretist philosophy, in this case in order to have Muslims accepting ‘the saying of the philosophizers — the followers of Aristotle — that the first of the [things] emanating from the Necessary Existent is the intelligence’.¹¹⁴ Other words attributed to the Prophet, remarks Ibn Taymiyya, are also cited by the Ikhwān, or by other thinkers, in order to legitimise some of their ideas from an Islamic viewpoint. For example, he recalls:

This [man] also asked me about the *ḥadīths* that the [unionists] put forward as arguments, for example the *ḥadīth* concerning the intellect that was referred to and [which says] that ‘the first [thing] that God, Exalted is He, created was the intellect’. [Another] example was the *ḥadīth*: ‘I was a treasury and was not known; so I loved to become known’, etc. I therefore wrote him an elaborate answer and said that these *ḥadīths* are invented.¹¹⁵

There indeed lies the problem:

As arguments in favour of that they make use of prophetic words. These may be untrue sayings that they relate, as [for example] they relate that the Prophet, God bless him and grant him peace, said: ‘The first [thing] that God created was the intellect’. The *ḥadīth* is inauthentic [*mawḍūʿ*]; those who possess the knowledge of the Tradition [*ḥadīth*] are agreed on that. Moreover, its wording is: ‘When God created the intellect, He said to it: “Turn forward!” and it turned forward. He then said to it: “Turn backward!” and it turned backward.’ They

114 *Nuṣayriyya*, in Ibn Taymiyya, *MF*, vol. 35, p. 153; also in Ibn Taymiyya, *MaF*, vol. 4, pp. 212–213; French trans. in Guyard, ‘*Fetwa*’, p. 191.

115 Ibn Taymiyya, *Kitāb al-Nubuwwāt* (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 1409/1989), p. 83 (hereafter cited as *Nubuwwāt*). Ibn Taymiyya explains that this exchange took place during his stay in Alexandria (709/1309–1310).

alter its wording and say: 'The first [thing] that God created was the intellect.'¹¹⁶

As an argument, they may put forward the *ḥadīth* reported [as follows]: 'The first [thing] that God created was the intellect. He said to it: "Turn forward" and it turned forward. He then said to it: "Turn backward" and it turned backward.' He said: 'By My might! I have created no creature more precious to Me than you. By you I take and by you I give. By you I reward and you have to punish!' This *ḥadīth* is a lie, invented.¹¹⁷

The *ḥadīth* ['The first thing that God created was the intellect'] is, for the people possessing [knowledge of] the science of *ḥadīth*, a lie, invented. It is not [found] in any of the reliable books of Islam. It is only reported by people such as Dā'ūd ibn al-Muḥabbar,¹¹⁸ and those, similar to him, who write about the intellect. It is mentioned by the authors of the *Rasā'il Ikhwān al-Ṣafā'* and similar philosophizers. Abū Ḥāmid [al-Ghazālī] also mentioned it in some of his books; also Ibn 'Arabī, Ibn Sab'īn, and their like. For the people possessing [knowledge of] the science of *ḥadīth*, it is a lie against the Prophet, God bless him and grant him peace, as mentioned by Abū Ḥātim al-Rāzī, Abū al-Faraj ibn al-Jawzī, and other people who write about the science of *ḥadīth*.¹¹⁹

He also states:

The [prophetic words which they use as arguments] may also be [reported by them] from the Prophet, God bless him and grant him peace, with a confirmed wording. [However, then] they detach them from their context as the authors of the *Rasā'il Ikhwān al-Ṣafā'* and their like do. They are indeed among their imams.¹²⁰

116 *Nuṣayriyya*, in Ibn Taymiyya, *MF*, vol. 35, p. 153; also in Ibn Taymiyya, *MaF*, vol. 4, p. 212); French trans. in Guyard, 'Fetwa', p. 190.

117 Ibn Taymiyya, *Jawāb*, vol. 5, p. 37.

118 Dā'ūd ibn al-Muḥabbar ibn Qaḥdham ibn Sulaymān (d. Baghdad, 206/821) was an unreliable *ḥadīth* transmitter. On this, see Khayr al-Dīn al-Ziriklī, *al-A'lām: Qāmūs tarājīm li-ashhar al-rijāl wa'l-nisā' min al-'arab wa'l-musta'rabīn wa'l-mustashriqīn* (Beirut: Dār al-'Ilm, 1990), vol. 2, p. 334.

119 Ibn Taymiyya, *MF*, vol. 18, pp. 336–337.

120 *Nuṣayriyya*, in Ibn Taymiyya, *MF*, vol. 35, p. 153; also in *MaF*, vol. 4, p. 213;

As for the inauthentic tradition of the intellect, for Ibn Taymiyya,

it is amazing that those who desire to make a synthesis between the divine Law and Greek Peripatetic philosophy took this *ḥadīth* for their main reference [*‘umda*] concerning the fundamentals of the religion, knowledge, and realisation [of the truth] [*taḥqīq*]. This [*ḥadīth*] is inauthentic [*mawḍūʿ*] and, yet, they all changed it, and reported [it as] ‘The first [thing] that God created was the intellect. He said to it: “Turn forward”’, took this for an argument, and considered it to correspond to what the Peripatetic philosophers — the followers of Aristotle — say when stating that the first of the [things] emanating from the Necessary Existent is the first intelligence. This spread out in the words of many of the later [thinkers], after they saw it in the books [entitled] *Rasāʾil Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ*.¹²¹

The theologian’s insistence on the inauthenticity of this *ḥadīth* of the intellect comes from his conviction that, once accepted by Muslims, as urged by the Ikhwān and others after them, then nothing less than the entire *Weltanschauung* of the Hellenizing philosophizers will have been welcomed into Islam, along with its concomitant metaphysical and cosmological doctrines — the eternity of the world, the reduction of creation to a process of emanation, the divinisation of heavenly beings — and the ensuing threats, as he sees them, to the scriptural Islamic angelology, psychology, and eschatology.

These [philosophizers] claim that the intelligences are pre-eternal and sempiternal, that the active intellect is the lord of everything which is under this sphere, and that the first intelligence is the lord of the heavens, of the earth, and of that which is between them. The heretics who embarked with them [on such views] among the followers of the Sons of ‘Ubayd, like the authors of the *Rasāʾil Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ* and others, and like the Sufi heretics — for example Ibn ‘Arabī, Ibn Sabʿīn and others — put forward, as an argument in favour of such [ideas], the invented *ḥadīth*: ‘The first [thing] that God created was the intellect.’¹²²

These [thinkers] claim that the intellect proves the truth of their fundamentals and most people do not combine the

French trans. in Guyard, ‘*Fetwa*’, p. 191.

121 Ibn Taymiyya, *Bughya*, pp. 179–180.

122 Ibn Taymiyya, *MF*, vol. 17, pp. 332–333.

knowledge of what the Messengers really came with with [the knowledge of] what these [thinkers] really say. They do not perceive the necessary consequences of what these [thinkers] say, due to which the corrupt nature of what they say becomes obvious to a clear intellect. Moreover, many people have adopted the doctrines of these [thinkers] but changed the way they are expressed. They sometimes express them by means of Islamic expressions so that the listener thinks that what these [thinkers] are saying is the truth with which the Messengers were sent and which is proven by the intellects. The authors of the *Rasā'il Ikhwān al-Ṣafā'* and the propagandists of the missionary calling [*da'wa*] of the esotericist [*bāṭinī*] Qarmāṭīs acted in that manner when they used the expressions 'the preceding' [*sābiq*] and 'the following' [*tālī*] for [respectively] the intellect and the soul. As an argument for this, they put forward the *ḥadīth* which they report on the authority of the Prophet, God bless him and grant him peace, and according to which he said: 'The first [thing] that God created was the intellect.' Afterwards, these things spread among many of the Sufis and the *kalām* theologians, the devout [*ahl al-ta'alluh*] and the intellectuals [*ahl al-naẓar*].¹²³

Ibn Taymiyya is aware of the evolution that the philosophical doctrine of 'God' underwent from Aristotle to Ibn Sīnā, and he far prefers the latter to the Greek. Nevertheless, he fundamentally rejects the reduction of God to an abstraction, which he sees prevalent in the *Rasā'il* as among many other Muslim thinkers, from the Mu'tazilīs negating the divine attributes to Ibn Sīnā's doctrine of the Necessary Existent, and to the unionism of the adepts of *waḥdat al-wujūd*.

What this man [Aristotle] and his followers generally speak about only concerns physics. It was the science with which people occupied themselves in their time. As for *divinalia* [*ilāhiyyāt*], the man and his followers speak extremely little about them. Ibn Sīnā and his like nevertheless mixed their words about *divinalia* with the words of many of the theologians [*mutakallim*] of the [various] religious communities [*milla*], and people started to talk about *divinalia*.¹²⁴

Moreover, [these philosophizers] claim that the [Necessary

¹²³ Ibn Taymiyya, *Ṣafadiyya*, vol. 1, p. 237.

¹²⁴ Ibid.

Existent] is existence absolute on the condition of absoluteness. It is neither given an identity [*muta'ayyin*] nor particularised by a reality by which it would be distinct from the rest of the existents. Rather, its reality is sheer existence, absolute on the condition of denial of all bonds, identifying and particularising. Now, they are learned in logic, and every intelligent [person capable of] conceiving what is thereby said [knows], that such an [existent] has no reality and no existence but in the mind, not in the outside. The Necessary Existent, to which outside existence bears testimony, thus comes to not exist except in the mind, and this participates in the most blatant contradiction, confusion, and conjoining of two contraries. As a necessary result of a real demonstration, they indeed make it existing externally, and as a necessary result of the negation of the [divine] attributes — that is, the [kind of] monotheism [*tawhīd*] which they have imagined — they make it non-existing in the outside; what they say thus comes necessarily to imply its existence and [at the same time] its non-existence! It is similar for what is said by those who travel along their path: the esotericist Qarmaṭīs like the authors of the *Rasā'il Ikhwān al-Ṣafā'* and their like among the unionists — the adepts of the oneness of existence — such as Ibn Sab'īn, Ibn 'Arabī, and their like; or even along the path of the deniers of the attributes among the adepts of *kalām* theology like the Mu'tazilis and others; or even along the path of the rest of those who deny any of the attributes. What necessarily follows from what they say is the reduction of the [Necessary Existent] to nothing [*ta'tīl*] and its denial while, [simultaneously,] affirming its being there [*thubūt*]. It is thus the conjoining of two contraries!¹²⁵

Although he does not explicitly say so, the theologian might also have accused the Ikhwān and their like of self-contradiction in what they say about the angels. Sometimes, they make angels divine, immortal intelligences and souls ruling the world; and, in other contexts, they reduce them to the virtuous or wicked faculties of the soul.

[Ibn Taymiyya] was asked: 'Do all the creatures, even the angels, die?' He answered that most people believe that the

125 Ibn Taymiyya, *Iṣfahāniyya*, p. 52.

entirety of creatures die, even the angels, including Azrael, the Angel of Death. A *ḥadīth* going back to the Prophet, God bless him and grant him peace, is reported about that; and the Muslims, the Jews, and the Nazarenes are agreed about the possibility of that and about God's power to [enact] it. It is only opposed by groups of the philosophizers — the followers of Aristotle and their like — and of those who embark with them [on such views] among the people belonging to Islam, or the Jews, or the Nazarenes, like the authors of the *Rasā'il Ikhwān al-Ṣafā'* and those who, similar to them, claim that the angels are the intelligences and the souls and that their death is in no case possible. On the contrary, for them, the [angels] are gods, and lords of this world.¹²⁶

Whoever says that not all the angels prostrated in front of [Adam], but only the angels of the earth, rebuts the Qur'an through lying and slander. This and similar sayings are not among the things said by the Muslims, the Jews, and the Nazarenes. It is among the things said only by the philosophizing heretics who deem 'the angels' to mean the virtuous faculties of the soul, and 'the demons' to mean the wicked faculties of the soul. They deem 'the prostration of the angels' to mean the obedience of the [soul's] faculties to the intellect, and 'the refusal of the demons' to mean the disobedience of the wicked faculties to the intellect, and similar things that are said by the authors of the *Rasā'il Ikhwān al-Ṣafā'*, their like among the esotericist Qarmaṭīs, and whoever travels along their path, among the straying *kalām* theologians and the pious worshippers. Similar things can also be found in the [Qur'an] commentators' sayings for which there is no reliable chain of authority [*isnād*].¹²⁷

For Ibn Taymiyya, the doctrine of the human soul and its perfecting which is shared by the Ikhwān and others obviously bears the mark of their metaphysics of angelic intelligences, as well as of their prophecy, and is judged by him as fundamentally wrong. He expands on the point:

¹²⁶ Ibn Taymiyya, *MF*, vol. 4, p. 259.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 345–346.

Groups of esotericists — Shi'i esotericists like the authors of the *Rasā'il Ikhwān al-Ṣafā'* and Sufi esotericists like Ibn Sab'īn, Ibn 'Arabī, and others — state, and one also finds this in the words of Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī and others, that the adepts of the [spiritual] exercises, of the cleansing of the heart, and of the purification of the soul by means of the laudable moral characters, may know, without the mediation of the information [given by] the prophets, the real essences [*ḥaqīqa*] of what the prophets have told regarding the faith in God, the angels, the Book, the prophets, the Last Day, and the knowledge of *jinn* and demons. [Such an idea] is based on this corrupt foundation, namely, that when they cleanse their souls, that [knowledge] comes down upon their hearts, either from the active intellect or from somewhere else.¹²⁸

In fact, the theologian remarks that the claims sometimes made by philosophizers and their like about the quasi-revealed nature and, hence, irrefutable character of their doctrines could well result from nothing more than autosuggestion:

There is also somebody who pretends that he learned that [i.e. the Throne of God being the ninth celestial sphere] by the way of [mystical] uncovering [*kashf*] and contemplation [*mushāhada*]. He is lying in what he pretends. He only took that from these philosophizers, by imitating [*taqlīd*] them or agreeing with them on their corrupt road, just as the authors of the *Rasā'il Ikhwān al-Ṣafā'* and their like did. He imagines [*takhayyala*] in his soul what he gets from another by imitating him and thinks that it is [some mystical] uncovering, just as a Nazarene imagines the Trinity in which he believes. He can also see that in his sleep and think it is [some mystical] uncovering, although it is only imagining what he believes in. For many of those who have corrupt beliefs, when they exert themselves, this exertion polishes their souls, and similitudes of their beliefs present themselves [*tamaththala*] to them, which they think is [some mystical] uncovering!¹²⁹

128 Ibn Taymiyya, *Radd*, p. 433.

129 Ibn Taymiyya, *MRK*, vol. 1, p. 258; also in Ibn Taymiyya, *MF*, vol. 6, p. 547 (with variants).

Moreover, he believes that the Ikhwān and other philosophizers are also misled and misleading in their intellectualist understanding of the soul's bliss in the hereafter, of its government and morality in this life, and, more generally, in the 'theoretical-practical wisdom' which they adopted from the Greeks and then spread, often wrapped in an Islamic garb.

[For] those Ṣābi'ans among the philosophers, the utmost happiness of the souls consists in reaching the active intellect. The authors of the *Rasā'il Ikhwān al-Ṣafā'* composed their epistles according to the fundamentals of these [thinkers], mixed with things that they drew from the religion of the original monotheists [*ḥanīf*] . . . As for the original monotheists, they believe that there is no servant whose Lord will not talk to him [in the hereafter], without any chamberlain or interpreter between them.¹³⁰

The insight of many people falls short of knowing what God and His Messenger love, regarding the things that benefit the hearts and the souls and those that corrupt them, what is useful to them — the truths of the faith — and what harms them — negligence and lust. As God, exalted is He, said: 'Do not obey any whose heart We have made negligent of Our remembrance, who follows his own lust and whose affair is excess.'¹³¹ The Exalted also said: 'So, shun those who turn away from Our remembrance and want nothing but the life of this world. That is their attainment of knowledge.'¹³² You will find that many of these [people], in many of the rulings [*ḥukm*] [of the religion], as far as benefits and causes of corruption are concerned, see nothing but things that go back to a financial or bodily benefit. And the furthest that many of them go, when they go beyond that, is to pay attention to the government of the soul and the refinement of morals [*siyāsāt al-naḥs wa-taḥdhīb al-akhlāq*], in correlation to their attainment of knowledge. Such things are notably mentioned by the philosophizers and the Qarmaṭīs, such as the authors of the *Rasā'il Ikhwān al-Ṣafā'* and their like. They talk of the government of the soul and the refinement of morals in correlation to their

130 Ibn Taymiyya, *Istighātha*, vol. 2, pp. 478–479.

131 Qur'an (*al-Kahf*) 18:28.

132 Qur'an (*al-Najm*) 53:29–30.

attainment of philosophical knowledge and, added to this, their opinions about the Law. Now, at the furthest point which they eventually reach, they are still far beneath the Jews and the Nazarenes!¹³³

The edifice of the [philosophers'] practical wisdom is only based on the fact that they know that the soul has the faculty of concupiscence and anger — concupiscence for attracting what is suitable, and anger for repelling what is incompatible. They have then based [their] edifice of ethical wisdom on that. One ought, they said, to refine concupiscence and anger in order for each of the two to be between neglect and excess. This is called 'continence',* that is called 'courage', and the balance between the two, 'justice'. These three [qualities] are sought for in order to perfect the soul by means of theoretical-practical wisdom. Perfection, for them, then becomes these affairs: continence, courage, justice, and science [*ilm*]. [Various] groups of those who entered Islam spoke of this and used as testimonies to that, what they found in the Qur'an, the *ḥadīth*, and the sayings of the Ancients [*salaf*] in praise of these affairs. Those who wrote about morals and actions according to their way base what they say on this principle. It is, for example, the case with *The Balances of Actions* [*Mawāzīn al-a'māl*] of Abū Ḥamid [al-Ghazālī], the authors of the *Rasā'il Ikhwān al-Ṣafā'*, the books of Muḥammad ibn Yūsuf al-Āmirī, and others. However, they were wrong. What God and His Messenger mean by the science that He praises is indeed not the theoretical science which the Greek philosophers had in mind.¹³⁴

There is no doubt that Ibn Taymiyya's judgement on the Ikhwān al-Ṣafā' is in the whole very negative, in regard to their main philosophical doctrines as well as to the syncretist perspective in which they developed them, and as much on the grounds of rational consistency as for religious motives. Although his condemnation is not aimed at them exclusively but at all the philosophizers whose ideas they share and illustrate particularly well, it is radical. Just before the passage already quoted in which he accuses them of 'sophistry and Qarmatizing', he thus writes:

It was once said to one of the great shaykhs — from among those knowing *kalām* theology, philosophy, *ḥadīth*, etc.: 'What is the difference between the prophets and the philosophers?' He said: 'The red sword'.*

That is, a sword reddened with the blood of beheaded philosophers. In conclusion to another passage relating, among other 'esotericist Qarmatīs', to 'the authors of the *Rasā'il Ikhwān al-Ṣafā'*', the Damascene mufti is even more explicit:

¹³³ Ibn Taymiyya, *MF*, vol. 32, p. 233; also in Ibn Taymiyya, *MaF*, vol. 2, p. 15.

¹³⁴ Ibn Taymiyya, *Radd*, pp. 368–369.

* Ibn Taymiyya, *MF*, vol. 9, p. 36. See p. 151.

These are all unbelievers whom it is necessary to kill — the people of faith are agreed on this.¹³⁵

This being so, there is also no doubt in Ibn Taymiyya's mind that by his time, the *Rasā'il* had exerted a palpable influence on various Muslim thinkers. Some of the texts already quoted speak clearly of this influence, as well as of a convergence between their views and those of later philosophers such as Ibn Rushd or 'heretics relating themselves to Shi'ism or to Sufism, like Ibn 'Arabī, Ibn Sab'īn, and those similar to them'.¹³⁶ It is Ibn Sīnā, however, and, even more so, Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī, whom the theologian regards as disciples of the Ikhwān.

The privileged link which Ibn Taymiyya maintains existed between the Ikhwān and the Shaykh al-Ra'īs has been analysed earlier on. It is also confirmed by a particularly clear passage that deserves to be quoted here:

Ibn Sīnā invented a philosophy which he assembled from the things said by his Greek predecessors and from what he drew from the innovating Jahmī *kalām* theologians and their like. He travelled along the road of the Ismaili heretics in many of the matters — related to knowledge [*'ilmī*] and practical — about which they [spoke] and mixed it with some of the words of the Sufis. His [ideas] really go back to the things said by his brothers, the Ismaili Qarmaṭī esotericists. Indeed, the members of his house were Ismailis: ** followers of al-Ḥākim, who was reigning in Egypt and in whose time they were living. Their religion was the religion of the authors of the *Rasā'il Ikhwān al-Ṣafā'* and similar imams of the hypocrites of the [various] communities who are neither Muslims, nor Jews, nor Nazarenes.¹³⁷

As for al-Ghazālī, Ibn Taymiyya is aware of two important things: (1) The diversity of the views sometimes displayed in his many writings. (2) The multiplicity of the influences by which he was affected.

¹³⁵ Ibn Taymiyya, *MF*, vol. 4, p. 314. See p. 163.

¹³⁶ Ibn Taymiyya, *Jawāb*, vol. 5, p. 37.

¹³⁷ Ibn Taymiyya, *MF*, vol. 11, p. 571; also in Ibn Taymiyya, *MRK*, vol. 2, pp. 288–289; French trans. in Michot, *Musique*, pp. 77–79.

It is because of this Ghazālīan lack of consistency that Ibn Taymiyya, as seen earlier on,¹³⁸ can quote a passage of the *Munqidh* attacking the Ikhwān, or some other Ghazālīan statement directed against the ‘Ismaili ‘Ubaydids of Cairo’, and, on another occasion, quote this statement of al-Māzarī:

Some of the Companions of [al-Ghazālī, al-Māzarī] said, informed me that he was addicted [‘ukūf ‘alā] to reading the *Rasā’il Ikhwān al-Ṣafā’*.¹³⁹

No wonder, then, that the inauthentic *ḥadīth* of the intellect embodying the Ikhwān’s syncretism is also found in certain works of al-Ghazālī, or attributed to him, especially his famous *Maḍnūns*.

In *al-Kutub al-maḍnūn bi-hā ‘alā ghayr ahli-hā* [The Books Kept Away From Those Who Are Not Worthy of Them] and other discourses of that sort that are attributed to Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī, there is also a bit of that [syncretism].¹⁴⁰

‘The first [thing] that God created was the intellect.’ In what is said by Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī in *al-Kutub al-maḍnūn bi-hā ‘alā ghayr ahli-hā* [The Books Kept Away From Those Who Are Not Worthy of Them] and others, there is also a great deal of the ideas of those.¹⁴¹

As if he wanted to clear al-Ghazālī from any wrongdoing relating to the pseudo-*ḥadīth* of the intellect, Ibn Taymiyya reports once that ‘it is said that he abjured [*raja‘a ‘an*],¹⁴² such ideas’, and, elsewhere, he writes that

[he] does not use this [material] deliberately but quotes it either from the *Rasā’il Ikhwān al-Ṣafā’* or from what is said by Abū Ḥayyān al-Tawḥīdī, or from this sort of [authors].

138 See p. 149.

139 Ibn Taymiyya, *Iṣfahāniyya*, p. 133.

140 Ibn Taymiyya, *Jawāb*, vol. 5, p. 37.

141 Ibn Taymiyya, *MF*, vol. 17, p. 333; Ibn Taymiyya, *Radd*, p. 410.

142 Ibn Taymiyya, *Bughya*, p. 181.

In reality, these people belong to the genus of the Ismaili esotericists.¹⁴³

This last passage already confirms that, for Ibn Taymiyya, the Ikhwān are not the only thinkers to have influenced al-Ghazālī. Partly following al-Māzarī, he underlines in various texts the importance of their specific impact on the Ḥujjat al-Islam's philosophy, and judges it comparable to that of al-Tawḥīdī or, even more, of Ibn Sīnā, notably in the *Mishkāt al-Anwār*.

'I found,' [al-Māzarī] said, 'that this al-Ghazālī relies on [Ibn Sīnā] in most of what he alludes to concerning the sciences of philosophy; so much so that, at some moments, he textually quotes his words, without change, whereas, at other moments, he changes them and relates them more to questions pertaining to the Law than Ibn Sīnā had done, as he is more knowledgeable of the secrets of the Law than him. . . . Al-Ghazālī relied on Ibn Sīnā and the author of the *Rasā'il Ikhwān al-Ṣafā'* concerning the science of philosophy. As for the doctrine of the Sufis,' [al-Māzarī] said, 'I don't know who he relies on concerning them, nor who he relates himself to in order to know it. . . . I think,' [al-Māzarī] said, 'that it is Abū Ḥayyān al-Tawḥīdī the Sufi that he relies on for the doctrines of the Sufis.'¹⁴⁴

The material [used by] Abū Ḥāmid in philosophy comes from the words of Ibn Sīnā — this is why it is said that Abū Ḥāmid was made sick by *al-Shifā'* [The Healing] — from the words of the authors of the *Rasā'il Ikhwān al-Ṣafā'*, from the epistles of Abū Ḥayyān al-Tawḥīdī, and others. As for Sufism, which is the most sublime of the sciences that he [possessed] and by which he is ennobled, most of his material in it comes from the words of the Shaykh Abū Ṭālib al-Makkī, whom he mentions in [the part of the *Iḥyā'* called] *al-Munjiyyāt* [The Things That Save] — [what he writes] about patience, gratitude, hope, fear, love, and sincerity is generally drawn from the words of Abū Ṭālib al-Makkī, but Abū Ṭālib [al-Makkī] was more intense and superior. Most of what he mentions in the quarter [of the

¹⁴³ Ibn Taymiyya, *Nubuwwāt*, p. 83.

¹⁴⁴ Ibn Taymiyya, *Isfahāniyya*, pp. 133–134.

Ihyā' called] *al-Muhlikāt* [The Things That Make One Perish], he drew from the words of al-Ḥārith al-Muḥāsibī in *al-Ri'āya* [The Observance], as is the case with what he reports about blaming envy, amazement, pride, ostentation, haughtiness, and the rest.¹⁴⁵

There is much philosophical material [*mādda*] in what al-Ghazālī says, because of what Ibn Sīnā says in *al-Shifā'* [The Healing] and elsewhere, [because of] the *Rasā'il Ikhwān al-Ṣafā'* and what Abū Ḥayyān al-Tawḥīdī says.¹⁴⁶

[Al-Ghazālī] divided the book [entitled *The Niche of Lights* — *Mishkāt al-Anwār*] into three chapters. The first chapter expounds that the real light is God, exalted is He, and that, for others than Him, the word 'light' is purely metaphorical, without reality. His words go back to [the idea] that 'light' has the meaning of 'existence'. Before him, Ibn Sīnā proceeded in a similar fashion to that, by making a synthesis between the Law and philosophy — and likewise did the Ismaili esotericists proceed in their book called the *Rasā'il Ikhwān al-Ṣafā'*. After him, Ibn Rushd also did so. And likewise for the unionists [*ittiḥādī*]: they make His appearance and His epiphany in the forms have the meaning of His existing in [these forms].¹⁴⁷

To the names (i.e., al-Ghazālī, Ibn Sīnā, Ibn Rushd, and the rest) mentioned by Ibn Taymiyya in this last passage could be added numerous ones which he associates with the Ikhwān. In some of his other texts he mentions al-Fārābī or Mubashshir ibn Fātik, al-Suhrawardī, Ibn 'Arabī, and Ibn Sab'īn as scholars associated with the corpus of the Ikhwān. Unfavourable though he was to them, the theologian's opinion of the Ikhwān indirectly demonstrates that he acknowledged the centrality of the *Rasā'il* in the development of philosophy and spirituality in the classical period of Islam, to the point that he maintained that they influenced two of its major representatives: Ibn Sīnā and al-Ghazālī. Even today, some analysts would still be reluctant to give so prominent an intellectual role to the Ikhwān, Ismaili esotericists and other Qarmaṭī heretics in the history of mainstream Islamic thought.

¹⁴⁵ Ibn Taymiyya, *Bughya*, p. 449.

¹⁴⁶ Ibn Taymiyya, *MF*, vol. 6, p. 54.

¹⁴⁷ Ibn Taymiyya, *Bughya*, p. 199.

Did Ibn Taymiyya in some way overstate the Ikhwān's intellectual importance? This possibility cannot be dismissed, as it is clear that he had his own agenda when talking about the Ikhwān, and perhaps he made them into bugbears for the purposes of his wider and strictly anti-philosophical undertakings. This being so, two questions, which could not be addressed here, still deserve attention at some point: (1) What is the real relevance of the convergences detected, or of the connections established, by Ibn Taymiyya, between the Ikhwān and other Muslim thinkers or movements of thought? And (2) How did the Damascene theologian's views on the Ikhwān influence the reception of their *Rasā'il* in later Islamic thought?