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THE ANDALUSĪ RECEPTION OF ONTOLOGICAL  
OPTIONS AND COSMOLOGICAL DESCRIPTIONS  
IN THE IKHWĀN AL-ŠAFĀ' AND *AL-RISĀLA AL-JĀMI'A*:  
A CASE STUDY

This article stems from an interesting article by Rémy Cordonnier that deals with the possible influences of the encyclopedia of the Ikhwān al-Šafā' on Andalusī authors from the fourth/tenth century to the eighth/fourteenth century<sup>1</sup>.

I have examined some of the authors and works mentioned by Cordonnier: Ibn Gabirol (or Avicbron, ca. 1021-1070)<sup>2</sup> and his works *Fons vitae* and *The Royal Crown*; the *Hidāya ilā farā'iq al-qulūb* (Introduction to the duties of the hearts) by Ibn Paqūda<sup>3</sup> (1040-1100), and *Kitāb al-ḥadā'iq* (Book of circles) by al-Baṭalyawsī<sup>4</sup> (1052-1127). These authors evoke various themes of the Ikhwān, the first of which is the well-known comparison of the one God with the number one.

Cordonnier mentions al-Baṭalyawsī in his article only once, in the section devoted to translators from Arabic into Hebrew. He affirms: "Moïse Ibn Tibbon traduisit notamment le *Sefer ha-'agullot ha-re'yoniyot* (*Livre des cercles imaginaires*) d'Ibn al-Sid [sic] al-Baṭalyawsī (d. 1127), qui s'avère être une sorte de compendium de la doctrine des Ikhwān al-Šafā'"<sup>5</sup>.

1. R. Cordonnier, «Influences directes et indirectes de l'encyclopédie des Ikhwān al-Šafā' dans l'Occident chrétien», *Le Muséon* 125 (2012), 421-66.

2. G. Vajda gives 1058 CE as the date of death, «but this date is not absolutely certain». See Vajda, «Ibn Gabirol», in *EP*, 3:770.

3. He was approximately contemporary with Ibn Gabirol. Cordonnier gives the dates 1040-1100; no dates are given in I. B. Kaufmann Kohler, «Bahya ben Joseph ibn Paqūda (also known as Beḥay and Bahīe)», *Jewish Encyclopedia* 5:447-54, online: <https://www.jewishencyclopedia.com/articles/2368-bahya-ben-joseph-ibn-pakuda> (accessed 23 Sept. 2023).

4. E. Lévi-Provençal, «al-Baṭalyawsī, Abū Muḥammad 'Abd Allāh b. Muḥammad Ibn al-Sīd», in *EP*, 1:1092.

5. Cordonnier, «Influences», 446.

There is no doubt that the themes dealt with in the *Kitāb al-ḥadā'iq* (Book of circles)<sup>6</sup> often echo those of the encyclopedia of the Ikhwān. A forthcoming article by Godefroid de Callatāy provides a broad survey of the influence of the Ikhwān al-Ṣafā' on al-Baṭalyawsī's *Kitāb al-dawā'ir*<sup>7</sup> through comparisons that confirm that

the *Rasā'il* and the *Kitāb al-dawā'ir* share a common approach on a large number of essential points of doctrine, among which [are included] the mathematical explanation of the causality of things and their relationship to God, the continuity in this chain of beings, the ontological descent and epistemological ascent of the soul and the ladder motif that go with it, the properties and unmatched perfection of the circles, the microcosm/macrocism analogy, the passage from potentiality to actuality and the human soul's faculty to reach the angelic status by knowing its own substance, or the notion that the death of the body is the life of the soul.

De Callatāy adds, however, that

slavish borrowing from the Brethren's corpus remains very exceptional, if not nonexistent. If... some specific tenets (such as the five kinds of souls) and a few common expressions (such as the abridgement of the Preserved Tablet) rather suggest a quite literal adoption of the text in a few cases, it appears that in most cases the original ideas have undergone a substantial reworking.

Here I present a text belonging to the *Kitāb al-ḥadā'iq* (Book of circles), one that echoes, with some precision, on the lexical and the semantic points of view two passages from the encyclopedia of the Ikhwān al-Ṣafā' and their treatment in *al-Risāla al-jāmi'a* (the "Crown of the epistles") which is understood as an explication of their esoteric meaning.

6. With regard to the title of the work, see Ebstein's clarification: «*Kitāb al-dawā'ir al-wahmiyya* (The Book of Imaginary Circles), known as *Kitāb al-ḥadā'iq*, The Book of the Gardens». M. Ebstein, *Mysticism and Philosophy in al-Andalus. Ibn Masarra, Ibn al-ʿArabī and the Ismāʿīlī Tradition* (Leiden 2014), 236.

7. Cf. G. de Callatāy, «Reconsidering the Influence of the *Rasā'il* Ikhwān al-Ṣafā' on Ibn al-Sīd al-Baṭalyawsī's *Kitāb al-dawā'ir*», in *Religious and Intellectual Diversity in the Islamicate World and Beyond*, ed. S. Schmidtke and O. Michaelis (Leiden forthcoming). I am very grateful to my friend Godefroid de Callatāy for kindly letting me read his article in typescript, during our stay in Princeton.

The passage that concerns us is in chapter 6, where the thesis that “God knows only Himself” is discussed. This is a false assertion that is intended to deny that God knows “other than Himself,” that is, His creatures<sup>8</sup>.

In the preamble, al-Baṭalyawsī mentions two well-known positions that seek to deny this thesis that God knows other than Himself. The first, according to which God knows only universals, is said to result from error and ignorance, and from a misunderstanding of the theses of the “ancient philosophers” (*al-falāsifa al-mutaqaddimīn*). The second, according to which God knows by means of universal knowledge both universals and particulars, is considered to be closest to the truth, even if it is susceptible to argument (*aqrab aqwālihim ilā l-ḥaqq wa-in kāna fihi mawḍi‘ li l-ta‘aqqub*)<sup>9</sup>. The second doctrine could be that maintained by Ibn Sīnā<sup>10</sup>, but I have difficulty in establishing how al-Baṭalyawsī may have come to know it because the sources of this position as given by Iysa A. Bello (the *Kitāb al-najāt* and the

8. The passage is not considered in the general overview recently provided by J. M. Cobos Bueno and J. R. Vallejo Villalobos, «Presencia de la obra *Rasā’il Ikhwān as-ṣafā wa-khullān al-wafā* (*Enciclopedia o Epístolas de los Hermanos de la Pureza*) en la obra filosófica de Ibn al-Sīd al-Baṭalyawsī», in *El legado de la España de las tres culturas (XVIII Jornadas de Historia en Llerena, Llerena, 3 y 4 de noviembre de 2017)*, ed. F. Lorenzana de la Puente and F. J. Mateos Ascacíbar (Llerena 2017), 109–18.

9. I quote al-Baṭalyawsī from M. Jevolella (ed. and trans.), *Ibn as-Sīd, Il Libro dei Cerchi (Kitāb al-ḥadā’iq)*, *Testo arabo, traduzione italiana, introduzione e note di M. Jevolella* (Milan 1984), 130. The book reports the Arabic text as M. Asín Palacios established it, «Ibn as-Sīd de Badajoz y su ‘Libro de los cercos’ (‘Kitāb al-Ḥadā’iq’)», in *al-Andalus* 5.1 (1940): 45–154. The text is found in MS 2303 of the Königlische Bibliothek, Berlin, fols. 167b–194a. For a description of the manuscript, see W. Ahlwardt, *Verzeichniss der Arabischen Handschriften [der Koeniglichen Bibliothek zu Berlin]*, vol. 2 (Berlin 1889), 528. The passage that we are concerned with is found at fols. 188b–189a. My translations are somewhat different from Jevolella’s, 76–77 (Text 1) and 77 (Text 4). Massimo Jevolella translates the words I quote here as «sebbene in parte si presti ad osservazioni critiche», but here the term *ta‘aqqub*—usually rendered in English with «pursuit» is ambiguous, because «pursuit» can also mean «investigation». I am grateful to Godefroid de Callataÿ for providing me with the new edition of al-Baṭalyawsī’s work by Ayala Eliyahu, *Ibn al-Sīd al-Baṭalyawsī and His Place in Medieval Muslim and Jewish Thought, Including an Edition and Translation of the Kitāb al-dawā’ir al-wahmiyya known as Kitāb al-ḥadā’iq* [in Hebrew], 2 vols. (PhD diss., Hebrew University of Jerusalem 2010).

10. Cf. I. A. Bello, *The Medieval Islamic Controversy between Philosophy and Orthodoxy: Ijmā’ and Ta’wīl in the Conflict between al-Ghazālī and Ibn Rushd* (Leiden 1989), 111–12.

metaphysical part of the *Ishārāt*) were not known to the Latin world. Moreover, the work by al-Ghazālī that might be relevant to this issue, *Maqāṣid al-falāsifa*, was only translated into Latin by Domingo Gundisalvi (ca. 1110-1181).

Our passage is related to the first of the four meanings of the thesis that “God knows nothing but Himself”. This is the division of being into “absolute” (*muṭlaq*) and “relative” (*muḍāf*). Absolute being is that which does not require anything else to bring it into existence; in other words, that which is not the effect of a previous cause. Relative being is that which requires something else to bring it into existence, which is its cause. Absolute being is proper to the Creator, who exists without any cause. Relative being exists as far as it is derived from the existence of God. Hence if the existence of God were to be annulled, nothing would exist.

From this point of view the comparison of God with the number one is implicit. In the context under examination the text continues:

Text 1<sup>11</sup>

لأجل هذا شبهوا وجود الأشياء عنه كوجود<sup>12</sup> نور الشمس عن الشمس لأن الشمس إذا ذهب  
ذهب نورها، ولم يريدوا بهذا الكلام تشبيها بالشمس على الحقيقة لأن الباري [...] عز<sup>13</sup> أن  
يكون له نظير، وإنما أرادوا بهذا المثل افتقار الموجودات إلى وجوده على جهة التقريب من  
الأفهام كما قالوا أيضا أن<sup>14</sup> وجود الموجودات عنه كوجود الكلام من المتكلم لا كوجود الدار من  
البناء لأن الدار يمكن أن يوجد<sup>15</sup> مع عدم البناء ولا يمكن أن يوجد شيء إلا بوجود الباري [...]

Because of this they compared the existence of things from Him to the existence of the light of the sun from the sun, because when the sun disappears, its light disappears. In saying this, they did not wish [to establish] a likeness to the sun in the true sense, since the Creator... is beyond [any] comparison. They only wanted [to indicate] with this image the need of the existing beings for His existence in a way that is close to the [understanding of] human minds, as they also said that the existence of the existing beings from Him [is] like the existence of the word from the speaker, not like the existence of the house from the builder, since the house can exist when the builder ceases, but nothing can exist except with the existence of the Creator....

11. The text corresponds to Eliyahu's edition [henceforth, E], 72 line 10 to 73 line 2 of the Arabic text.

12. E: بوجود.

13. E: جل عن.

14. E: إن.

15. E: توجد.

Al-Baṭalyawsī departs from the “existence” (*wujūd*) of things and immediately introduces the comparison with the existence of the light (*nūr*) of the sun that derives from it and that fades (*dhahaba*) when the sun disappears (*dhahabat*). Of course, God is beyond comparison. He is incomprehensible and ineffable, but the reference to this “light” is only a means that is comprehensible to human minds of indicating the necessity (*iftiqār*) of God for things to exist: things are not self-sufficient with respect to God. The existence of existing beings (*wujūd al-mawjūdāt*) is subsequently compared with the existence of a word uttered by a speaker (*wujūd al-kalām min al-mutakallim*) but not to the existence of a house made by a builder (*wujūd al-dār min al-bannā*). Indeed, a house may exist even if the builder does not. But nothing could be if the Creator did not exist.

These lines likely echo two passages from the Ikhwān al-Ṣafā’ that are remarkably similar to each other; these are found in Epistle 39 *Fī Māhiyyat al-ḥarakāt* (On the quiddity of motion) and Epistle 40 *Fī l-‘illa wa-l-ma‘lūl* (On cause and effect)<sup>16</sup>.

In Epistle 39 we read:

Text 2: Know that the existence of the world from the Creator... is not like the existence of a house due to a builder or like the existence of a book due to a writer, fixed in itself, independent in its essence, which can dispense with the writer after he has finished writing, and with the builder after he has finished building the house, but [it is] like the existence of speech that is due to a speaker, so that were he to fall silent, the existence of the speech would come to an end. So, speech [is] what is existent as long as the speaker speaks, and when he falls silent, it has no existence. Or [it is] like the existence in the air of the light from a torch: as long as the torch remains, the light continues to exist. Or [it is] like the existence of the luminosity of the sun in the air: if the sun disappears, the existence of the luminosity in the air comes to an end. Or [it is] like the existence of the heat that is stoked up in a fire, which spreads from the mass of the fire: if it is extinguished, its luminosity and its heat come to an end. Or [it is] like the existence of number from the [unit] one that precedes [the number] two, as we have explained in the Epistle ‘On Arithmetic’<sup>17</sup>.

16. I reproduce here, with some slight modifications, the translations I provided in C. Baffioni and I. Poonawala (ed. and trans.), *Epistles of the Brethren of Purity: Sciences of the Soul and Intellect, Part III: An Arabic Critical Edition and English Translation of Epistles 39–41* (New York 2017).

17. Cf. Baffioni and Poonawala (ed. and trans.), *Sciences of the Soul and Intellect*, 45 line 7 to 46 line 7 (Arabic text); 163 (English trans.). For Buṭrus al-

This passage also refers to the existence of the world from the Creator (*wujūd al-‘ālam ‘an al-Bārī*); immediately afterward, we find a denial that this resembles the existence of a house from a builder or that of a book (*kitāb*, only later replaced by the more frequent *kitāba*, “writing”) from a scribe. The house and the book, in fact, have their own stability, their own independence, and they can exist without the scribe and the builder – or rather, without their acts, through which they have been given existence. The term *mustaghni* (“independent”) contrasts semantically with al-Baṭalyawsi’s *iftiqār* because the radicals gh-n-y and f-q-r express the ideas of “wealth” and “poverty” respectively.

The existence of the world is rather likened to that of the speech of a speaker: if the speaker is silent (*sakata*), then the speech vanishes (*baṭala*). Other comparisons emerge with the light of a torch (*nūr al-sirāj*), the light of the sun (*ḍū’ al-shams*) that fades (*baṭala*) when the sun sets (*ghāba*), the heat of fire and the existence of numbers derived from unity, where the reference is usually to Epistle 1 “On Arithmetic”.

And Epistle 40 states:

Text 3: The majority of people think and imagine that the existence of the world due to the Creator... is like the existence of a house built by a builder, independent in itself, no longer in need of the builder after he has finished building it; but the issue is not as they have thought and imagined, because the building of a house is a composition and an aggregate of things [already] existing of themselves, autonomously subsisting, such as earth, water, stones, dried brick, gypsum, baked brick, wood, and the like, whereas origination and invention are neither a composition nor an aggregate, but an innovation and a bringing into existence from nothing. This can be compared to the speech of a speaker and to the writing of a scribe, indeed one of these two is similar to origination – namely, speech – and the other is similar to composition – namely, writing, and because of this it happens that if the speaker falls silent, the existence of the speech ceases, whereas when the writer stops, what has been written does not cease [to be]. Therefore the existence of the world due to the Creator... is like the existence of speech from a speaker: when he stops speaking, the existence of the speech ceases. An indication of the veracity of what we have said, and of the truth of what

Bustānī’s edition, see *Rasā’il Ikhwān al-Ṣafā’ wa-khullān al-wafā’*, 4 vols. (Beirut 1957), 3:337, lines 9–18.

we have described is God's saying..., *It is Allah who sustains the heavens and the earth, lest they cease (to function): and if they should fail, there is none... can sustain them...*, and His saying, may He be glorified and honoured,... *every day in (new) splendour doth He (shine)!<sup>18</sup>*, and no concern distracts Him from any other<sup>19</sup>.

Here we find the repetition that the existence of the world with respect to the Creator (*wujūd al-‘ālam min al-Bārī*) is not like that of a house with respect to its builder. The new reason adduced is that the construction of a house is a “composition” (*tarkīb*) and an “aggregate” (*ta’līf*) of things already self-existing. God, on the other hand – and this time the statement is unequivocal – creates the world through an “origination” (*ibdā’*) and an “invention” (*ikhtirā’*). These are neither a composition nor an aggregate, but an “innovation” (*iḥdāth*) and a “bringing into existence from nothing” (*ikhrāj min al-‘adam ilā l-wujūd*). The comparison with speech and writing returns anew. The former is an origination (*ibdā’*), while writing is a composition. The terms used to indicate the lack of agents are still *sakata* and *baṭala*, to which *amsaka* is added. Epistle 40 ends with two partial Qur’ānic quotations from 35:41 and 55:29. These testify to the continuous connection between God and His creation.

These two passages variously parallel the existence of the world from the Creator (*wujūd al-‘ālam ‘an al-Bārī*) to the speech of a speaker, which exists only as far as the speaker speaks. Whereas the existence of the world does not resemble the writing of a scribe nor a house, which can subsist independently from the scribe or the builder because they result from the composition and aggregation of pre-existing elements, the world is an “origination” (*ibdā’*) and an “invention” (*ikhtirā’*) – that is, an “innovation” (*iḥdāth*) and a “bringing into existence from nothing” (*ikhrāj min al-‘adam ilā l-wujūd*).

It is evident that al-Baṭalyawsī and the Ikhwān share some characteristics – the Ikhwān’s texts are richer – and that only the terminology is somewhat different. These similarities enable us to see

18. Translations by Abdullah Yusuf Ali, here and later (<https://quranyusufali.com>). The second verse quoted can be interpreted, literally, as «Every day He is in a new concern».

19. Cf. Baffioni and Poonawala (ed. and trans.), *Sciences of the Soul and Intellect*, 81 line 8 to 83 line 2 (Arabic text); 189–90 (English translation); al-Bustānī, *Rasā’il Ikhwān al-Ṣafā’*, 3:350 line 19 to 351 line 9.

the Ikhwān al-Ṣafā' as the occult subjects of the position referred to by al-Baṭalyawsī in Text 1 by means of a series of verbs in the third person plural.

But al-Baṭalyawsī's discourse continues:

Text 4<sup>20</sup>:

فلما كان البارئ [...] هو الموجود الصحيح الوجود<sup>21</sup> كان وجود غيره لاحقاً بوجوده وتابعا له ولم يكن في الوجود إلا هو ومصنوعاته صار الموجود من هذه الجهة كأنه موجود واحد والمعلوم كأنه معلوم واحد وصار إذا علم نفسه فقد علم كل وجود<sup>22</sup> تابع لوجوده.<sup>23</sup>

Since the Creator... is that which exists in the true sense, the existence of other-than-Him is linked to His existence and [is] consequential to it, and there is nothing in existence but Him and His artifacts. From this standpoint, the existent will be as one existent, and the knowable as one knowable. Then, the knowledge of Himself [will be] the knowledge of every existent consequential to His existence.

God's existence is the true (*ṣaḥīḥ*) existence because, as a consequence of the previous distinction between "absolute" and "relative" being, it is the only one that is uncaused; every other existing being, as far as it is caused, is linked (*lāḥiq*) to God and consequential (*tābi'*) to Him<sup>24</sup>.

Al-Baṭalyawsī adds that, from such premises one can speak of a kind of "unity" between God and His artifacts (*maṣnū'āt*), and certainly in this case *wujūd* indicates not only "existence" but "being" as well. A further consequence will be that God and creatures can also be considered a single "knowable". Therefore, by knowing Himself God also knows every other creature. Thus, the Qur'ānic premises emphasized in the Ikhwān's quotations are safe.

Al-Baṭalyawsī's comparison, though it strongly agrees with the Ikhwān's texts, shifts from ontology to gnoseology<sup>25</sup>. Hence it

20. The text corresponds to E, 73 lines 3-6 of the Arabic text.

21. E adds: *و*.

22. Instead of *وجود*, E has: *وجوده*.

23. Cf. Jevolella (ed. and trans.), *Ibn as-Sīd*, 130.

24. Cf. for this Jevolella (ed. and trans.), *Ibn as-Sīd*, 39.

25. See Jevolella (ed. and trans.), *Ibn as-Sīd*, 29, 41, and 45. Gnoseology is closely related to ontology in al-Fārābī's explanation of emanatism (in al-Fārābī, it is precisely by knowing Himself that God «emanates» the first Intellect), and the assimilation of ontology and gnoseology is found, at least in part, in the Ikhwān al-Ṣafā' (see, e.g., later, 294-95).



seems legitimate to investigate what concept of *ibdāʿ* is reflected in these passages and especially, given the unmistakable model of al-Baṭalyawṣī, in the passages of the Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ.

Epistle 40 concludes the argument with the Qurʾānic quotations, but Epistle 39 continues:

Text 5: And know that the speech of a speaker is not a part of him, but an act he accomplishes and a deed he makes manifest where there was no act before. The same rule applies to the light from the mass of the sun, which is visible in the air: it is not a part of [the sun], but is free flowing from it and [is] a surplus of emanation. The same rule applies to the heat [that] spreads from and around [a fire]: it is not a part of its essence, but a surplus it confers, the emanation of a goodness that it emanates, and an act it accomplishes where there was no act before, just as the speaker makes [his] speech manifest where before he had not been speaking, and the speech is not a part of the speaker, but an act he accomplishes and a work he makes manifest. How the existence of the world [is] due to the Creator... has already been explained in what we have said in these examples mentioned above. Neither was it decreed, nor should you think, that the existence of the world due to the Creator... is a disposition without any choice by Him, just as the existence of sunlight in the air [is] a disposition without any choice by it [i.e., the sun], and it was not decreed that its light and effusion be hindered, because it [i.e., the sun] is disposed to that to which the Lord of the worlds disposed it, glorified be His mention. As for the Creator,... He is One who freely chooses His act: when He wishes, He acts, and when He wishes, He refrains from acting, like a speaker who has power over [his] speech: when he wishes, he speaks, and when he wishes, he is silent. The same rule applies to the [way in which] the Creator... brought the world into existence and invented it: when He wished, He emanated His goodness, His overflow, His blessings and His favour, and made His mercy and wisdom manifest; if He wished, He refrained from [some] act by abandoning [it]; and if He wished, He refrained from repeating the labour of his act, because He has power over action and over the abandoning of an action through choice, as was mentioned in His book through the tongue of His prophet, and He said, *It is Allah who sustains the heavens and the earth, lest they cease (to function): and if they should fail, there is none – not one – can sustain them thereafter*, and He said,... *every day in (new) splendour doth He (shine)!*, and no concern distracts Him from any other<sup>26</sup>.

26. Cf. Baffioni and Poonawala (ed. and trans.), *Sciences of the Soul and Intellect*, 46 line 7 to 49 line 5 (Arabic text); 163–65 (English translation); al-Bustānī, *Rasāʾil Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ*, 3:337 line 19 to 338 line 16.

Text 5 explains that speech is not a “part” but an “act” of the speaker who originated it from nothing. This discussion is clearly related to the consideration of the status of the divine attributes. But let us follow the text point by point.

In the same way, the Ikhwān say that the light of the sun is not a part of that body but an effusion (*inbijās*) and a surplus (*faḍl*) emanating from it. Similarly, the heat of a fire is an effused surplus, the emanation of a good (*jūd*) and an act established after it had not been [there] (*ba‘d an lam yakun*): just as the speech of a speaker, mentioned earlier, is not a part of him but his act and work.

While neither the speaker’s act nor the outpouring and surplus of light and heat are “parts” of the subjects from which they proceed, a clear distinction is made between the speaker’s act and the outpouring and surplus of light and heat. The latter images are similar to those used by Neoplatonists to explain emanation, which is itself a way of explaining the origin of the world, as was the word of the speaker in the Ikhwān’s passages.

But in these passages the concept of creation is far removed from the Neoplatonic concept. In line with what has just been said, we note that the existence of the world caused by the Creator (again: *wujūd al-‘ālam ‘an al-Bārī*) is not a disposition (*ṭab‘*) in which choice plays no role: this is unlike the light of the sun in that it was prepared by God to emit and hence the sun can neither desire nor prevent such emissions.

The Creator freely chooses His own acts, as does a speaker who speaks if he wishes to and remains silent if he so wishes. If giving existence to the world is here a result of divine choice, contrary to numerous other places in their encyclopedia, the Ikhwān radically contrast a divine act of *ibdā‘* with an emanative process that by its nature is inevitable and involuntary<sup>27</sup>.

Immediately afterward, however, God’s “bringing into existence” (*ījād*) and “inventing” (*ikhtirā‘*) the world result precisely in an emanation of His goodness (*jūd*) and favor (*faḍl*), however voluntary: if God wished, He could cease to do so and could interrupt the emanation, thereby eliminating the world. At this point the passage concludes with almost the same Qur’ānic quotations found at the end of

27. This was one of the objections that al-Ghazālī made against the theory.

the passage in Epistle 40 above (only a few more words are quoted from Q 35:41)<sup>28</sup>.

This passage once again makes explicit the inconsistencies of the Ikhwān's system, which even in its representation of the origin of the world wavers between Shī'ī, Ismā'īlī, and even, at times, Sunnī positions<sup>29</sup>. This is not the time to return to the question of whether this and other ambiguities contained in the encyclopedia should be considered the result of a multi-authored and/or stratified work, or of a sort of *taqiyya* practiced by the Ikhwān in cases of "sensitive" issues.

Rather, note here – as I did in the introduction to my edition and annotated translation of Epistles 39 and 40 – that the passage in Epistle 39 introduces an important parallel: the existence of the world through the word, which ceases as soon as the speaker stops speaking, as opposed to the house when its construction is complete. The house is actually a composition of pre-existing components (earth, water, stones, dried brick, gypsum, baked brick, wood, and the like), whereas the word is a mere *flatus vocis*.

Though the text obviously deals with human speech, this comparison inevitably brings to mind the creative Word of God, in that God's "free action" mentioned in Epistle 39 is nothing but His imperative (*amr*), His saying *kun* ("be"). The Ikhwān make use of this image to support their idea of the creation of the world from nothing. It is not entirely clear whether the idea of *creatio ex nihilo* matches unequivocally the letter of the holy book, but the doctrine of the dependence of the world, moment by moment, on God certainly belongs to the Qur'ān.

From this standpoint, the parallel with the speaker's discourse is most fitting: the enduring relationship between God and creatures makes it clear that God's Word is not merely *flatus vocis*.

Although the position of the Ikhwān al-Ṣafā' with regard to the divine attributes is unclear<sup>30</sup>, by far the most widely held view in Islam is that the attributes are eternal, as is the Qur'ān.

28. The second part of the chapter restates the same concepts with further considerations – a syllogistic argument is included.

29. Cf. for example, Baffioni and Poonawala (ed. and trans.), *Sciences of the Soul and Intellect*, 115–16.

30. Cf. e.g., C. Baffioni, *L'Epistola degli Iḥwān al-Ṣafā' «Sulle opinioni e le religioni»* (Naples 1989), 147 and 192–200; C. Baffioni, *Appunti per un'epistemologia profetica. L'Epistola degli Iḥwān al-Ṣafā' «Sulle cause e gli effetti»* (Naples 2006), 75–78, 85, and 178.

Hence, it is not by chance that the comparison with writing must have been introduced into this passage. On the one hand it is problematic<sup>31</sup>, as writing is similar in nature to the house because it exists independently of the scribe, and it too is formed from pre-existing, though unspecified, elements. In this sense the image is correctly used to deny any similarity between the world originating from nothing and a script's origination from a scribe. But the universe is considered, metaphorically, to be the second Book written by God, after Qur'ān. And since the Qur'ān is viewed as eternal if applied to the universe as divine script, the Ikhwān's comparison would contradict their idea on the contingent origin and duration of the world.

In fact, the universe has a so-to-speak "conditional" duration that represents a mediation between the two extremes of an eternal existence and a momentary existence, such as that of a *flatus vocis*. This intermediate connotation of the universe is precisely the "voluntary" emanation of divine goodness and favor, to which the duration of the world is subordinated on pain of extinction, without the need to introduce pre-existing components that would invalidate its origin from nothing. In this case the contradiction can be resolved.

The mention of *ta'līf* (aggregate) and *tarkīb* (composition) recalls two key terms of the ontology of the Ismā'īlī *dā'ī* Abū Ya'qūb al-Sijistānī. In his well-known ontological representation in the form of a "Christian cross," al-Sijistānī places at the top of the cross the Intellect (that is, the first originated being, *al-mubda' al-awwal*), to which corresponds, at the base of the cross, the *asās*, whose proper acts are *ta'yyid* and *ta'wīl* (inspirational help and interpretation); and he places at the extremities of the horizontal branch of the cross the Soul and the *nuṭaqā'* ("speaking") prophets, whose proper acts are *tarkīb* (composition) and *ta'līf* (aggregate, in this case, of letters). The Soul and the speaking prophets enact two types of composition: that of matter and form giving rise to Nature, and that of letters giving rise to God's books.

In al-Sijistānī the sublunar world finds an exact correspondent in the "Word of God" that has become a book. But there is no explicit mention of the possible existence of either one or the other independently of the Intellect, which according to this conception would take the place of God the Creator.

31. See the English translation, 163 and 189, respectively.

On the other hand, it is noteworthy that in another passage of the *Kitāb al-yanābī*<sup>32</sup> (Book of wellsprings) (*Yunbū*<sup>33</sup> 39), al-Sijistānī explains the distinction between speech and writing by linking speech to “verbal compilation” deriving from the “power” of the speaking prophets, and by linking writing to interpretation (*ta’wīl*), which is the act proper to the *asās* at the base of the cross:

Text 6: [paragraph 183] In a similar fashion, parallel to the letters of *kalima(t) Allāh*, things have existence in four [different] senses: that is, as essences, as psychic-motifs, as speech, and as script. Corresponding [to these] are spiritual inspiration, physical composition, verbal compilation, and interpretation. Spiritual inspiration parallels the essences of things, [... and] is within the domain of intellect, and thus accordingly things also possess significations that have been produced by intellect.

[paragraph 184] As for the psychic-motifs, they parallel physical compounding since physical compounding is in the domain of the Follower. And as for speech, it parallels the verbal compilation that the Speaking-prophet compiles by means of his power, since compilation parallels the sounds that exist through the power [of speech].... Script parallels interpretation, since interpretation is explanation and the engraving of intellectual forms in the hearts of novices. As there is nothing in the world that is not susceptible to script, be it wood, clay, the species, minerals, or animals, accordingly, interpretation extracts something from everything and finds an inference in all things. Speaking does not exist except in a person capable of speech....<sup>32</sup>

The “power” of each speaking prophet is the same as the speaker’s “act” in the Ikhwān’s passages: it gives sounds or *flatus vocis* a distinct existence by making them comprehensible through mutual connection (“verbal compilation”). The durable form of a speech is writing once it has been inscribed on a material medium. Similarly, the words of the sacred books find their stability in the hearts of initiates through interpretation. “Interpretation” is obviously beyond the scope of the passages that we have examined, but al-Sijistānī adds that while everything can be inscribed, speech can only exist in someone capable of speaking.

32. Cf. P. E. Walker, *The Wellsprings of Wisdom: A Study of Abū Ya‘qūb al-Sijistānī’s Kitāb al-Yanābī*<sup>34</sup> Including a Complete English Translation with Commentary and Notes on the Arabic Text (Salt Lake City 1994), 108-9.

Ideally we could consider the Ikhwān's encyclopedia and the *Jāmiʿa* as the origin of these doctrines. Closer to our texts – in an addition to Epistle 50 *Fī kammiyyat anwāʿ al-siyāsāt wa-kayfiyyatihā* (On the quantity and the quality of the species of a [proper] attitude) found in MS Esad Efendi 3638 that I have recently edited<sup>33</sup> – there is a distinction between *khilqa ibdāʿiyya* (“creation through origination”, proper to the higher hypostases) and *khilqa tarkībiyya* (“creation by composition”, proper to the sublunar world)<sup>34</sup>.

Later, when clarifying the significance of the particular – that is, the biblical-Adam –, “the first of the human forms and of creation by composition (*al-khilqa al-tarkībiyya*)”<sup>35</sup>, and his sin, the author(s) mention God's entrusting Adam with the “letters of the names by which the knowledge of things is extracted, after [their] composition and aggregation”. Here we find once again the *tarkīb* of the natural beings *via* the action of the Universal Soul and in parallel the *taʿlīf* of the letters through the prophets who write down revelations<sup>36</sup>. Their comprehension of such letters also makes things comprehensible.

But what about the relationship of these texts with al-Andalus?

With respect to the above distinction between “part”, “[voluntary] act,” and “[necessary] disposition”, al-Baṭalyawī's discourse does not seem to take a position. It could be inferred that for him creation is in some way a “part” of God.

An aid to understanding al-Baṭalyawī's position may be drawn from the passage in *al-Risāla al-jāmiʿa*, which echoes the two texts of the Ikhwān examined above:

Text 7: And know O my brother... that the origination of the Creator... is neither a composition, nor an aggregate, but [it is] an origination and an invention, and a bringing from non-existence to existence. The example

33. Cf. W. Madelung, C. V. Uy, C. Baffioni, and N. Alshaar (eds. and trans.), *Epistles of the Brethren of Purity: On God and the World. An Arabic Critical Edition and English Translation of Epistles 49–51* (New York 2019), 237–77. For my translation of the Arabic word *siyāsa* in the title of the epistle, see *ibid.*, 124.

34. I refer here to paragraph 4 of the Arabic text.

35. The word I read *tarkībiyya* is completely undotted in the text. The term hints at the creation of the sublunar beings consisting in composition of matter and forms, whereas the heavenly beings emanate from each other. I refer to paragraph 21 of this addition.

36. For an overview of this doctrine see e.g., P. E. Walker, *Abū Yaʿqūb al-Sijistānī's, Intellectual Missionary* (New York 1998), 50.

for that [is] the discourse of a speaker and the writing of a writer: one of them resembles origination – namely, discourse – and the other resembles composition – namely, writing. Because of that, when a speaker is silent, the existence of the discourse ceases, whereas when the writer refrains [from writing], the existence of writing does not cease; and likewise, if the Creator ceased His generosity, the existing beings would instantaneously cease. Through this demonstration it has been confirmed that the creation of creatures [is] an origination and an invention, and it is not a composition or an aggregate, since composition and aggregate remain if the aggregator refrains from his aggregation, and the composer is cut off after his composition, as a writer is stopped from his writing, and the form of its letters remains. The evidence of the soundness of what we have said and of the true nature of what we have described [is] God's saying, *It is God who sustains the heavens and the earth, lest they cease (to function): and if they should fail, there is none – not one – can sustain them thereafter...*, and His saying, *... every day in (new) splendour doth He (shine)!*, no concern distracts Him from any other. Through this exposition one attains knowledge of causes and effects<sup>37</sup>.

This immediate negation that *ibdā'* is a composition and an aggregate thus summarizes what was said in Epistle 40, and it is repeated that *ibdā'* is an *ibdā'*<sup>38</sup> and an *ikhtirā'*, as well as an *ikhrāj min al-ʿadam ilā l-wujūd*. This is followed by a comparison with the speech of the speaker (*kalām al-mutakallim*), which is also similar to an *ibdā'*, while writing is considered a *tarkīb* (composition). We still find the verb pairs *sakata-baṭala* and *amsaka-baṭala*.

Essentially this text summarizes the two texts of the encyclopedia, but with some major differences. The *Jāmiʿa* is the only one that overturns the plans, moving not from the world but from the creative act of God that is unquestionably indicated as *ibdā'*.

There are also some entirely new elements. God, it is said, could

37. Until the new edition by Wilferd Madelung and Mourad Kacimi is published, I base myself on the edition by Muṣṭafā Ghālib (ed.), *al-Risāla al-jāmiʿa: Tāj Rasāʾil Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ wa-khullān al-wafāʾ, taʾlīf al-imām al-mastūr Aḥmad b. ʿAbdallāh b. Muḥammad b. Ismāʿīl b. Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq* (Beirut 1984). Cf. here 481 line 8 to 482 line 2.

38. This repetition might be a mistake. Kacimi, like Jamāl Ṣalībā (*al-Risāla al-jāmiʿa al-mansūba li l-ḥakīm al-Majrītī, al-Juzʾ al-awwal*; *al-Risāla al-jāmiʿa al-mansūba li l-ḥakīm al-Majrītī wa-hiya tāj Rasāʾil Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ wa-khullān al-wafāʾ, al-Juzʾ al-thānī* [Damascus 1949], 2:288 line 2) has instead *wa-huwa iḥdāth*. I refer to Kacimi's provisional edition, which I am translating for the Institute of Ismaili Studies.

“withhold” (*qabaḍa*) His generosity if, as Epistle 39 states, He chose to do so. The verb *qabaḍa* expresses the opposite idea to that of “emanating” (*fāḍa*). For the first time we encounter the term *khalq* (*khalq al-khāliq al-makhlūqāt*), again explicitly identified as an *ibdāʿ* and an *ikhtirāʿ* but not as a *tarkīb* or a *taʿlīf*. The permanence of the effects of the acts of the *muʿallif* and the *murakkib* is rendered with various forms of *baqā*, and the interruptions of their acts with forms of *amsaka* (to stop) and *qaṭaʿa* (to be cut off). And for the first time letters are mentioned as the pre-existing elements of the scribe’s writing that enable the writing to persist. The evidence (*dalīl*) of the veracity of the speech is still indicated by the partial quotations of Q. 35:41 and Q. 55:29. The general impression is that speech is the same as divine emanation, but the parallels variously established by the Ismāʿīlī texts between words, scriptures, and things are completely abandoned.

Above all, the *Jāmiʿa* passage presents an extremely interesting conclusion: “Through this exposition (*iʿtibār*) one attains knowledge (*takūnu maʿrifa*) of causes and effects”. These words reflect the title of Epistle 40, which the *Jāmiʿa* clarifies. But this is also the first time that the idea of knowledge appears in the passages we are examining, as in the passage by al-Baṭalyawsī.

The key to understanding al-Baṭalyawsī’s claim is to be found in the contexts from which we have taken our quotations, particularly those from the *Jāmiʿa* and Epistle 40. They present some significant differences from one another, but the issue is more clearly addressed in Epistle 40, where the emphasis, though in a similar context, is quite different.

The long chapter 1 of Epistle 40 mentions the confusion and doubts of those who try to understand the “origination of the world from nothing” (*ibdāʿ [li l-ʿālam] min ghayr shayʿ*). These doubts arise from the fact that every artisan makes his artifact from a given matter, in a given space and time, and through given movements and tools, while the innovation (*ḥadath*) and the making (*ṣanʿa*) of the world by the Creator were a process of bringing of such things – matter, space, time, movements, and tools – into existence out of nothing<sup>39</sup>.

Many, the Ikhwān say, believe that God’s knowable objects are eternal (*lam tazal*), as are the artifacts in the souls of craftsmen before

39. Cf. Baffioni and Poonawala (ed. and trans.), *Sciences of the Soul and Intellect*, 181; and Jevoellella (ed. and trans.), *Ibn as-Sīd*, 55.



they implement them in the materials proper to their arts, or as are the forms of the knowable objects in the souls of the learned, but this is not so. The context censors the opinion of those who think that the forms of the intelligible objects in the science of the Creator (*ṣuwar al-ma'lūmāt fī 'ilm al-Bārī*) are similar to the forms of artifacts in the souls of craftsmen before they make them explicit (*qabla ikhrājihā*) by placing them in the material proper to their arts, or to the images of the forms of the intelligible objects of the learned (*'uqalā*) and their representations.

The knowledge of artifacts in the souls of artisans only occurs after they have examined the artifacts of their masters, who, because of their mental sharpness, have grasped the forms in the objects of nature – the effects (*maḥ'ūlāt*) of nature –, and the original creations (*badā'i'*) of the Universal Soul, in the same way as the learned know the intelligible objects after their examination of the sensible objects.

Therefore, it is clear that forms are not innate in human minds but are derived from something that precedes those who know them – teachers, nature, the Neoplatonic hypostases. What about the forms in the mind of God?

The difference with respect to human knowledge is explained with the origin of numbers from the number one<sup>40</sup>. Things are substances and forms that emanate and originate from the Creator, just as a number consists of various substances that emanate from the number one by repetition in human minds:

Text 8: ... things were in the knowledge of the Creator..., since He was the source of the existing beings and the root of the generated beings before His origination and His invention of them, like the coming-to-be of numbers in the [unit] one before their appearance in the minds of people (*al-ashyā' kānat fī 'ilm al-Bārī*) ... *annahu 'ayn al-mawjūdāt wa-aṣl al-kā'ināt qabla ibdā'ihī lahā wa-ikhtirā'ihī iyyāhā, mithla kaww al-a'dād fī l-wāḥid qabla ṣuhūrihā fī afkār al-nufūs*)<sup>41</sup>.

40. Number being compared, as in Epistle 1, to «divine writing». Cf. e.g., Baffioni and Poonawala (ed. and trans.), *Sciences of the Soul and Intellect*, 182; Arabic text, 70 line 5; further references *ibid.*, 104, nn. 74 and 75, and 112. In the *Jāmi'a*, it is Epistle 1 «On Arithmetic» that is called «the way to divine unity and oneness» (cf., e.g., 93 line 5). Divine knowledge is assimilated to the existence of number in the one (*kaww al-'adad fī l-wāḥid*) also in the *Jāmi'a*. See Ghālib (ed.), *al-Risāla al-jāmi'a*, 479 lines 13–14.

41. Cf. Baffioni and Poonawala (ed. and trans.), *Sciences of the Soul and Intellect*, 74 lines 4–7 (Arabic text); 185 (English translation).

Alongside a number of notions frequently expressed in the encyclopedia<sup>42</sup>, we read that

Text 9: ... if the Creator... had an opposite (*didd*), that would be non-being ('*adam*'), but non-being is not a thing whereas the Creator... is in everything, and with everything, without any admixture or blending with them, just like the [unit] one is in every number and [in every] numbered [thing], without any admixture or blending with them<sup>43</sup>.

In conclusion, "His knowledge belongs to His essence ('*ilmuhu min dhātihi*'), just as a number belongs to the essence of the [unit] one (*min dhāt al-wāḥid*)"<sup>44</sup>.

This enables us to understand the status of created beings with respect to the Creator in al-Baṭalyawsī's passage: they are neither act nor disposition nor part<sup>45</sup> [of God] if there can be no intermingling between God and His creatures; the total otherness of the one with respect to the others is a fundamental assumption of both Sunnī and Shī'ī Islam.

Quite different is the question of divine knowledge with respect to God. In the *Jāmi'a*, in the chapter preceding the quotation numbered Text 7, the ultimate stage of the knowledge of causes and effects is identified in the knowledge of the cause of the world (*ma'rifat 'illat al-'ālam*), of the cause of the existence of the world (*sabab wujūdihi*), and of that existence from the First Cause (*hādihā l-wujūd 'an al-'illa al-ūlā*), as well as of the appearance of things from one another:

42. The Creator does not change while inventing things, just as the one does not change after the appearance of other numbers. The Creator is the source and cause of beings, just as the one is the root, beginning, and origin of numbers. He encompasses everything with His knowledge, power, and mercy, just as the one implies every number or numbered thing. Therefore, when the one is removed, all numbers are lost, but if a number is removed, the one is not removed. Thus, if there were no Creator, nothing would exist, but when things cease, He does not cease. All things are arranged in relation to God like the various numbers in relation to the one. Some of these concepts are expressed in Jevoilella (ed. and trans.), *Ibn as-Sīd*, 56.

43. Cf. Baffioni and Poonawala (ed. and trans.), *Sciences of the Soul and Intellect*, 185.

44. Cf. Baffioni and Poonawala (ed. and trans.), *Sciences of the Soul and Intellect*, 187.

45. Despite what has been tentatively suggested above, at p. 288.

Text 10: Therefore, the greatest of the searched [objects] with regard to the cognizance (*wuqūf*) of causes and effects is the modality of the cognizance of [1] the knowledge of the cause of the world (*maʿrifat ʿillat al-ʿālam*) from which it occurred, and from which came the reason for its existence (*sabab wujūdihi*), [of] [2] how that existence came from the First Cause (*hādihā l-wujūd ʿan al-ʿilla al-ūlā*), and [of] [3] the appearance of things from each other<sup>46</sup>.

If we understand *ʿillat al-ʿālam* as a possessive of *maʿrifā* and not as its object, it becomes clear that the existence of the world is an actualization of that knowledge – an actualization of forms existing in the divine mind; and the legitimacy of this interpretation is due precisely to the fact that the cause that gives rise to the world is distinct from the cause mentioned earlier, to the extent that a different – though synonymous – term (i.e., *sabab*) is used to designate it. Subsequently, the *ʿilla* is made explicit as *al-ʿilla al-ūlā* (i.e., in this case, God). Immediately afterward, the *Jāmiʿa* also restates the radical otherness between the knowledge of the forms of the intelligible objects by the Creator and their knowledge by craftsmen and scholars.

Created things are therefore the cognitive patrimony of God. It is precisely suggestions like these that seem to be present in al-Baṭalyawī. In them there are the seeds of an explanation for his simultaneous mention of *maʿrūf* and *maʿrūf* (Text 4). His final considerations appear to derive from the idea that in a certain sense God and His artifacts are identical.

These artifacts can be compared to the generation of numbers from the one, because craftsmen learn the forms of the various artifacts only after they have studied them from their masters, and those, in turn, have grasped the forms in the objects of nature; the same is true of the intelligible objects that are formed from the sensible. We may deduce that unlike objects knowable by humans, God’s knowledge is eternal. God is indeed far beyond human knowledge – and science is one of God’s attributes.

Both the *Jāmiʿa* and the Ikhwān express this by resorting to the expression *min dhātihi*, to which they ascribe the meaning of “belonging to an individual’s essence”. From the alleged “identity” of known objects and created objects it follows that they are identically knowable and hence God’s knowledge of creation is guaranteed.

46. Ghālib (ed.), *al-Risāla al-jāmiʿa*, 479 lines 3–6.

Text 11:

*Jāmi'a*:

His knowledge belongs to His essence (*min dhāṭihī*), as number belongs to the essence of the [unit] one (*min dhāt al-wāḥid*). The example [of that] must be applicable to what is exemplified in the majority and the most general of senses, not in [just] a few or the most defective of them. Therefore, His image... [is] the [unit] one, and the created beings (*mabrū'āt*) [are] like numbers...

Every complete existing being is cause for what [is] below itself – that, because from every complete existing being a perfect emanation is emanated into the one below itself, and that emanation belongs to its substance, namely, to its preceding form that is its essence<sup>47</sup>.

Epistle 40:

... [the Creator's] knowledge belongs to His essence (*'ilmuhu min dhāṭihī*), just as number belongs to the essence of the [unit] one (*min dhāt al-wāḥid*). The example of that must be applicable to what is exemplified in the majority of senses (*ma'ānī*), not in [just] a few of them. So, exemplifying the Creator... with the [unit] one is the most suitable, and [exemplifying] the created beings (*mabrū'āt*) with numbers has a greater applicability than other examples...

Every complete existing being emanates a certain emanation into the one below itself, and... [that emanation] belongs to (*min*) its substance, namely the constitutive form that is its essence<sup>48</sup>.

Both contexts end with a well-known concept – the continuity of emanation as a warrant for the permanence of creation; the *Jāmi'a* explicitly mentions the Neoplatonic hypostases.

47. Ghālib (ed.), *al-Risāla al-jāmi'a*, 480 lines 1–7.

48. Cf. Baffioni and Poonawala (ed. and trans.), *Sciences of the Soul and Intellect*, 79 lines 2–7 (Arabic text); 187–88 (English translation). Needless to say, the reading *muqawwima* at the end of the passage is more suitable for the context than *muqaddima*, as we find in the *Jāmi'a* (in his edition, Mourad Kacimi reads *al-muqawwima li-dhāṭihī* and not *allatī hiya dhātuhu*). The *Jāmi'a* emphasizes that causes are the same as emanation.

Text 12:

*Jāmi'a:*

And know that insofar as emanation (*fayḍ*) into the object of emanation (*mufaḍ*) is uninterrupted [and] continuous (*mutawātiran muttaṣilan*), it [= the object of emanation] remains (*bāqin*) as it is; and if [the emanation] fails to reach it (*qaṣara 'anhu*), its existence ceases (*baṭala*); likewise the existence of things, [is] uninterrupted from the giver of their existence (*mūjīd*): they come out from non-existence to existence through His generosity and graciousness, and if He withholds (*qabaḍa*) that generosity, [that leads] to the cessation of [their] existence (*li-buṭūl al-wujūd*).

The example for that [is] the succession of the union of light with air: until it is continuous, [and the] coming of [light] to it [is] uninterrupted, it [= the air] shines and radiates, and when light and brightness are shut off (*inqabaḍa*) from it, it becomes obscure...

So the emanation of the Intellect [is] into the Soul, and the emanation of the Soul into the bodies, and Matter [is] continuous with the first [originated being], and the first [originated being] is continuous with the Creator....

And as when the soul separates from the body life disappears, death occurs to it, and its movement

Epistle 40:

Know that, insofar as an emanation is uninterrupted and continuous (*mutawātiran muttaṣilan*) from [its] emanating [source], that [emanation] will continue [emanating] into what is emanated. When it is no [longer] uninterrupted and continuous, then the existence [of the emanation] upon [the emanated object] will vanish and cease for it, because it fades away accordingly.

This can be compared to brightness in the air: when lightning is uninterrupted and continuous, the air continues to light things up, as in daytime, when the emanation of the sun from itself into the air is uninterrupted and continuous; and when there is a barrier between the two, that light will vanish from the air...

And likewise continuous and uninterrupted life is [emanated] from the soul into bodies, and when

ceases, so all things – if the Creator’s emanation unto them and His looking at them with the glance of the heavenly volition that makes them come to being as they exist, running according to His purpose, will, and omnipotence disappears – ..., their existence ceases, and they drop into the abyss of not-being<sup>49</sup>.

the soul departs from the body, its life instantaneously ceases... And the same is true for the rule [that governs] the existence and permanence (*baqāʾ*, here and later) of the world due to (*min*) the Creator... as long as the emanation, the generosity, and the gift are uninterrupted and continuous [from God], the existence and the permanence of the world will last, and if it is obstructed [even] for an instant, the existence of the world will cease and instantaneously vanish<sup>50</sup>.

To sum up, I hope that the foregoing may modify, at least in part, de Callatay’s judgment quoted at the beginning of this article. On the other hand, I fully share his words on the late Mauro Zonta’s view that *Kitāb al-dawāʾir* is “a sort of compendium of the Brethren’s doctrine” that can be fully shared. Certainly, as de Callatay states, the Ikhwān “unquestionably inspired [...] a large part of the ideas at the basis of [Baṭalyawsī’s] treatise”. However, as he explains, «the *Kitāb al-dawāʾir* deserves to be regarded as an innovative work in which the material deriving from other sources – the *Rasāʾil Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ* but also many other works of the past – has been re-elaborated into a new and profoundly original synthesis”.

The comparisons in my paper also show that al-Baṭalyawsī not only had the Ikhwān’s encyclopedia and the *Jāmiʿa* in mind, but that he also revised and reworked them profoundly. Other examples from the *Kitāb al-dawāʾir* (Book of circles) could of course be provided in support of this claim.

But let us confine ourselves for the moment to recalling Michael Ebstein’s assertion that: “Unfortunately, the Ikhwān’s Epistles are the only Ismāʿīlī text known to have directly influenced the intellectual scene in al-Andalus”<sup>51</sup>. The Ismāʿīlī suggestions are undoubtedly

49. Ghālib (ed.), *al-Risāla al-jāmiʿa*, 480 line 14 to 481 line 7.

50. Cf. Baffioni and Poonawala (ed. and trans.), *Sciences of the Soul and Intellect*, 80 line 4 to 81 line 8 (Arabic text); 188-89 (English translation).

51. Ebstein, *Mysticism and Philosophy*, 236.

also found in the passages that we have discussed. But such suggestions seem to have been entirely lost in al-Baṭalyawsī, as is clear from the concerns in chapter 6, to which we have referred: divine knowledge of creatures. Despite Ebstein's idea of some influence of al-Baṭalyawsī on Ibn 'Arabī, I think that his *Kitāb al-dawā'ir* (Book of circles), although rich in the influence of the Ikhwān, is some distance removed from Ismā'īlī sentiment – at least with regard to the examination of its references to the Ikhwān al-Ṣafā'. Preserving the close connection between God and creatures through his philosophical elaborations on the divine knowledge of them, however, one could say that al-Baṭalyawsī gave some emphasis to – in Ebstein's words – the “spiritual” and “salvational” intentions of the Epistles over and above their possible Ismā'īlī commitment.

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## ABSTRACT

Carmela Baffioni, *The Andalusī Reception of Ontological Options and Cosmological Descriptions in the Ikhwān al-Ṣafā' and al-Risāla al-Jāmi'a: A Case Study*

In line with M. Epstein's considerations in his book *Mysticism and Philosophy in al-Andalus: Ibn Masarra, Ibn al-ʿArabī and the Ismāʿīlī Tradition*, my article considers a few lines from al-Baṭalyawsī's *Kitāb al-ḥadāʾiq* that are strongly influenced by two passages from the *Rasāʾil Ikhwān al-Ṣafā'*. Al-Baṭalyawsī substantially differs in his general approach from the Ikhwān, despite his literal borrowing from their texts. His aims seem to follow their own goal, far from the possible Ismāʿīlī reading of the *Epistles*, legitimized in particular by some cosmological descriptions in *al-Risāla al-jāmi'a*. The *Jāmi'a* emphasizes, in fact, terms and themes close to Ismāʿīlī cosmological representations (such as the concepts of *amr*, divine imperative; or *ibdāʿ*, immediate origination). An Ismāʿīlī approach can also be recognized in conceptions similar to those of the Ikhwān's passages found, for example, in the Ismāʿīlī *dāʿī* Abū Yaʿqūb al-Sijistānī or in an addition to Epistle 50 that I have recently discovered and edited. On the one hand, al-Baṭalyawsī's elaboration of the Ikhwān's sources can be better understood through their rather different version in *al-Risāla al-jāmi'a* that, contrary to the widespread framework of neo-Platonic origin often recurring in the Ikhwān al-Ṣafā', combines the "Ismāʿīlī" cosmological representations with the idea of "emanation." On the other hand, while one cannot deny the similarities between the aforementioned Ismāʿīlī texts and the Ikhwān's encyclopedia, the contacts scholars claim to have existed between the Ikhwān and Andalusī thinkers do not automatically imply an Ismāʿīlī reading of them in al-Andalus.

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