

General Introduction

The second volume of the *Anthology of Philosophy in Persia* deals with some major schools of thought in the early history of Islamic Persia that were not treated in the first volume. In the first volume, in addition to pre-Islamic thought in Persia, special attention was paid to the Peripatetic school associated most of all with the name of Ibn Sinā (Avicenna). This much better known school of Islamic philosophy is usually identified in the West as Islamic philosophy. In most general treatments of the history of Islamic philosophy, little attention has been paid until recently to other schools of thought of that period which are of philosophical significance. In the early centuries of Islamic history, Ismaili philosophy and philosophers influenced by Pythagorean and Hermetic ideas—also usually associated with Shi‘i thought in general and Ismailism in particular—stand out especially as schools of great philosophical significance if philosophy be understood in its traditional and time-honoured sense.

Ismailism, which is a branch of Shi‘ism that shares the first six Imams with the mainstream form of Shi‘ism known as the Ithnā ‘ashariyyah or Twelve-Imam Shi‘ism, began to formulate its philosophical and theological teachings earlier than any other form of Shi‘ism with which it has always shared a common concern for the central role of ‘*aql*, or intellect, in the understanding of religious doctrines. Already one can see the propensity toward intellectual discourse, the significance of ‘*aql*, and the usage of demonstration or *burhān* in the *Nahj al-balāghah* (Path of Eloquence), which is a collection of the sayings and teachings of ‘Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib, the first Shi‘i Imam, collected in its present form by Sayyid Sharif al-Raḍī. The Shi‘i Imams also held occasional discourse with those knowledgeable in Graeco-Alexandrian philosophies and sciences, as can be seen in the meeting between the eighth Imam of the Twelve-Imam School, ‘Alī al-Riḍā, and ‘Imrān al-Ṣābī, who belonged to the ‘Sabaean’ community of Ḥarrān, known to have been a centre where more esoteric currents of Graeco-Alexandrian thought were cultivated and preserved into the Islamic period. Moreover, the sixth Imam Ja‘far al-Ṣādiq—the last person

to be accepted by both Twelve-Imam Shi'is and Ismailis as Imam—was associated with currents of Hermeticism, and Jābir ibn Ḥayyān, the first Muslim alchemist who is a historical figure despite having gained a 'mythological' dimension, was a student of Imam Ja'far. These and many other characteristics of Shi'ism and events in Shi'i sacred history created a more favourable ambience for the propagation of the intellectual sciences of which philosophy is the heart in Shi'i circles compared with most (but not all) climates dominated by later Sunni theological thought. The survival of Islamic philosophy during later centuries in Persia and its reflowering during the Safavid period, when Persia had become predominantly Shi'i of the Twelve-Imam School, is related to this reality as is the central significance of philosophy for the religious thought of Ismailism in general.

There is another cardinal point that must be remembered, and that is the esoteric dimension of Shi'ism that therefore links it at its very roots with Islamic esoterism as such, of which it is a manifestation along with Sufism, which is the central expression of that esoterism. Moreover, Islamic esoterism is based essentially on knowledge of a principal order (*al-ma'rifah/irfān*) and is therefore more than anything else Gnostic, if this term be understood in its original sense and not confused with the sectarian views of historical Gnosticism. From the beginning Shi'ism was concerned with gnosis, and throughout history one can observe the manifestation of Shi'i gnosis in various forms, with many of which we shall deal in later volumes of this series, especially those associated with Twelve-Imam Shi'ism. Meanwhile, in early Islamic history Ismaili gnosis began to manifest itself through a number of works that are both Gnostic and philosophical, or one could say theosophical in nature, if this latter term be understood in its authentic sense as *theosophia* or *al-ḥikmat al-ilāhiyyah* in Arabic and *ḥikmat-i ilāhī* in Persian, terms which are its exact and literal equivalent.

Ismaili thought associated philosophy/theosophy with the esoteric dimension of the religion and the instructions of the Imams, who according to both Twelve-Imam and Ismaili Shi'ism possess knowledge of the esoteric (*bāṭinī*) truths of religion. During Islamic history many Muslims in fact referred to the Ismailis as *bāṭinīs*, sometimes in a pejorative sense accusing them of denying the outward (*ẓāhir*) form of the revelation. Without entering into this theological discussion which has had a long history, it suffices here to emphasize that for the Ismailis philosophy possesses essentially an esoteric, gnostic, and soteriological character and is not simply meant to be mental learning. It is related to the *ḥaqīqah* or truth at the heart of the Qur'ānic revelation, and therefore can be attained only after proper training of not solely the mind but also the whole of one's being, which then makes one worthy of receiving knowledge from the representative of true gnosis, who is none other than the Imam or his representatives. The role of the Imam and the hierarchy of those who know at whose head he stands is, therefore, essential in the disciple's gaining of authentic knowledge.

Understanding the true nature of this esoteric knowledge is related to grades of initiation and the attainment of spiritual virtues. The *Rasā'il Ikhwān al-Ṣafā'* (Treatises of the Brethren of Purity), composed in the fourth/tenth century, which the Ismailis have claimed over the centuries as their own (but which it might be said reflects the wider climate of Shi'ism in general), a work that had much influence in the Islamic world at large, is based more than anything else on the link between philosophy and the virtuous life. The Ismailis emphasized from the beginning the fact that a philosopher or *ḥakīm* had to be a sage in the traditional sense of the term, in whom perfection of knowledge and being were wed. They thereby propagated a view that the whole of Islamic tradition was also to embrace as the major intellectual schools of that tradition were crystallized. Such later masters of Islamic thought in Persia as Suhrawardī and Mullā Ṣadrā, though not Ismaili, never ceased to emphasize the inalienable link between knowing and being and the moral and spiritual qualifications necessary for the understanding of philosophy. The Ismailis and later schools of thought also often made a distinction between *falsafah* as the fruit of ratiocination and *ḥikmah* as true philosophy, adding that the first was attainable through the training of the mind and the second only through the training of one's whole being. This distinction was not, however, absolute and there are a number of authors who use *falsafah* and *ḥikmah* practically interchangeably and as closely associated terms, enumerating the same conditions for the mastering of *falsafah* as they do for *ḥikmah*.

In any case, Ismaili philosophy with its Gnostic nature was able to integrate readily into its perspective other schools of thought of a Gnostic and esoteric character with which it came into contact. These included not only the esoteric strands of Graeco-Alexandrian thought such as Hermeticism and Neopythagoreanism, but also certain cosmological ideas associated with Mazdaism and Manichaeism. Nor were the Ismaili philosophers indifferent to Neoplatonism. On the contrary, they showed great interest in this last major metaphysical synthesis of the Greek tradition, but they did not display the same degree of interest in Aristotelianism as did the Muslim Peripatetics. It is true that both the Peripatetics and the Ismaili philosophies integrated elements of Graeco-Alexandrian thought into their perspectives drawn essentially from the Islamic worldview and created philosophies which for this very reason were Islamic. But precisely because of the difference in emphasis and the type of Graeco-Alexandrian thought that they integrated into different dimensions of the Islamic intellectual universe, they created different and distinct schools of philosophy which interacted with each other in many ways and which must be considered fully in any serious study of philosophy in Persia. This claim holds true especially since nearly all the major early Ismaili philosophers, although associated with the Fatimids and their capital in Cairo, were Persians.

The selections of Ismaili philosophy presented in this volume cover some five centuries, from the second/eighth to the seventh/thirteenth, starting with the

enigmatic *Umm al-kitāb* (The Archetypal Book), the earliest Ismaili philosophical text written in archaic Persian, to the writings of Naṣīr al-Dīn Ṭūsī, who was devoted to the study of Ismailism while in the service of the Ismaili rulers of Alamūt, but who emerged as a Twelve-Imam Shi'i who wrote the first systematic work of theology in this branch of Shi'ism, entitled *Kitāb al-tajrīd* (The Book of Catharsis). The period considered in the present volume was marked by the ascendance of the Fatimids. Later on the period was punctuated by the 'Resurrection of Alamūt', announced in 559/1164 by the Ismaili Imam of the time, and associated with the name of Ḥasan-i Ṣabbāḥ and the establishment of Ismaili states in the mountainous regions of northeastern Persia, especially Quhistān in Khurāsān. This period came abruptly to an end with the Mongol invasion of western Asia by Hūlagu. Henceforth in Persia Ismailism took another form, going for the most part underground and becoming intermingled with certain forms of Sufism. In effect, the 'golden age' of Ismaili philosophy is the very period treated in this volume, which from the point of view of philosophy came to an end with Ṭūsī, although Ismaili thought continued to produce works of mystical and theological significance and even some of a philosophical nature, especially in Yemen and India.

Of special interest regarding philosophy in Persia is the fact that this early period of Ismaili philosophy, which also marks in many ways its peak, involved the cultivation of the Persian language as a medium for philosophical discourse. This tendency can be seen from the *Umm al-kitāb* onward and culminates, from the point of view of the beauty and maturity of language, in the works of Nāṣir-i Khusraw. Usually, Ibn Sīnā is credited with writing the first philosophical work in Persian, the *Dānish-nāmah-yi 'alā'ī* (The Book of Science Dedicated to 'Alā' al-Dawlah). This statement is certainly true for Peripatetic philosophy, but if we look at philosophy in general, including other schools of thought, then the major contribution of Ismaili writers to the very foundation of philosophical Persian must be given serious consideration. Moreover, perhaps the only figure in the history of Persia who was at once a major poet and a major philosopher is the Ismaili Nāṣir-i Khusraw, 'Umar Khayyām being the only other possible candidate for such an honour. There were of course other Persian philosophers who were also poets, such as Afḍal al-Dīn Kāshānī, Mīr Dāmād, Mullā Ṣadrā, and Sabziwārī, but none held the same position of eminence in poetry as did Nāṣir-i Khusraw, who is considered by most authorities to be one of the seven greatest poets in the Persian language. At the same time he was a major philosopher who wrote all his works in Persian.

The Ismaili philosophers under consideration in this volume did not simply repeat the same philosophical ideas. While they were all concerned with the soteriological function of knowledge, the esoteric character of philosophy, the relation between religion and philosophy, the development of an esoteric cosmology and anthropology, the study of the philosophical significance of the presence of the Imam as the source of infallible knowledge, and many other issues, one can see as

well a gradual unfolding over the centuries of ideas concerning other matters. For example, the development of a metaphysics based upon not Being but the Beyond-Being, of which Being is the First Act, and the incorporation of the Neoplatonic idea of emanation into the Ismaili worldview took place gradually.

The centuries under consideration here also reveal extensive interaction between Ismaili philosophy on the one hand and various schools of Islamic philosophy and theology as a whole on the other. This fact can be seen in Abū Ḥātim Rāzī's criticism of Muḥammad ibn Zakariyyā' Rāzī, the interaction between Ibn Sīnā's synthesis and systematization of Peripatetic philosophy and the writings of Ḥamīd al-Dīn Kirmānī, and the response of Sunni thinkers to the *Rasā'il* of the Ikhwān al-Ṣafā', read extensively by many of these thinkers including such a major Sunni figure as Abū Ḥamid Muḥammad Ghazzālī, who at the same time wrote against Ismailism. In any case, the tradition of Ismaili philosophy, developed mostly in Persia during the earlier centuries of Islamic history, is of much philosophical interest and is certainly one of the important schools of philosophy that developed during the Islamic period. Its treatment of such subjects as the relation of time and eternity; cosmic cycles; the nature of the *anthropos*; a metaphysics based not on Being but the Absolute as Beyond-Being whose first manifestation is Being; a cosmology related to the hierarchy of spiritual beings; the relation between religion in its formal aspect and philosophy, reason, and revelation; and many other intellectual themes are of innate philosophical value as well as being of great significance for the in-depth understanding of Islamic philosophy in general.

The selections chosen for this volume begin with the *Umm al-kitāb* (The Archetypal Book), meaning literally 'Mother of all Books', which is one of the names of the Qur'ān itself. The work purported to be the result of certain questions posed to the fifth Shi'i Imam, Muḥammad al-Bāqir, contains many themes of philosophical interest that were to be expanded in many later works of Ismaili philosophy. There is an explanation of the letters of the Divine Name 'Allah' interpreted according to Shi'i esoterism. This concern with the symbolism of letters, which is also found in the Kabbala, is in evidence among numerous Shi'i as well as Sufi authors and is said to go back to the science of the esoteric meaning of letters and their numerical values or *jafr* associated with 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭalīb and taught by him to those who were inheritors of his esoteric knowledge.

The *Umm al-kitāb* also discusses the relationship between the Prophet and 'Alī, the legislating aspect of revelation and its esoteric aspect, and delves into the technical Ismaili terminology of the silent (*ṣāmit*) and the enunciator (*nāṭiq*). This whole section points to the sharp delineation made by Ismaili thought between the exoteric and esoteric dimensions of religion and the association of philosophy as *ḥikmah* with the esoteric dimension. It is in light of this esoteric view of philosophy that the text deals with the correspondence between macrocosm and microcosm,

astrological symbolism, and the explanation of sacred history based on the number 7, which is central to the Ismaili perspective to the extent that they have sometimes been referred to as the Seveners. These ideas reveal the early integration of certain elements of Hermeticism, Pythagoreanism, and other strands of esoteric ideas in the Graeco-Alexandrian world into the perspective of early Shi'ism in general and Ismailism in particular.

The selections from the *Umm al-kitāb* include also a section dealing with the esoteric significance of events and realities of Islamic sacred history, specifically the seven prophets and major spiritual figures of this cycle—Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, Jesus, the Prophet of Islam, and 'Alī—and what has been the most important event or object associated with them, namely, in consecutive order, the *bayt al-ma'mūr* (the heavenly prototype of the temple of Mecca), the Ark, the bird (mentioned in the Qur'ān in association with Abraham), Mount Sinai, the birth of Jesus, and the Dhu'l-fiqār (the two-pronged sword of 'Alī). All of these realities of Islamic sacred history are treated from the point of view of their esoteric meaning. The *Umm al-kitāb* also analyses chapters of the Qur'ān according to early Ismaili cosmology, identifying various chapters with stages in the cycle of prophecy. The same symbolic approach is used in the study of the tenets of the Shari'ah. It is of particular interest to note how the five daily prayers are shown to be correlated with both the external senses of man and his inner constitution. This type of study was to be pursued by many later Sufis and philosophers, and we find extensive studies in works concerned with 'secrets of worship' (*asrār al-'ibādāt*) in later centuries by such figures as Qāḍī Sa'id Qummī and Ḥājī Mullā Hādī Sabziwārī, both of whom will be treated in the last volume of this anthology.

There is a body of writings in Arabic attributed to Jābir ibn Ḥayyān al-Tūsī al-Ṣūfi, which has caused a great deal of debate among scholars in both East and West. Some Western scholars have gone so far as to deny that there ever was such a figure as Jābir, while most Muslim scholars accept the traditional account that such a figure actually did exist and that he was a disciple of the sixth Shi'i Imam Ja'far al-Ṣādiq. Most likely the latter view is correct and many of the treatises attributed to him are by him, while many other titles within the vast *Jābirean Corpus* were written by later authors of mostly Ismaili background inspired by him. In any case, the body of works associated with Jābir, who hailed from Khurāsān, forms an important chapter in Islamic intellectual history in general and that of Persia in particular.

Jābir is the founder of Islamic alchemy and its most famous practitioner, while he also exercised vast influence in the West where he was known as Geber and where, because of his authority, some Latin works were written and attributed to him. The *Jābirean Corpus* deals naturally to a great extent with Hermetic philosophy. But it also deals with many other subjects, including the philosophy of science in general and the philosophy of language. The vastly diverse domains that form the subject

matter of the *Corpus* are united by the central concept of the balance (*al-mīzān*), which Jābir applies in both a quantitative and a qualitative manner to nearly every realm of existence and its study ranging from alchemy to the science of the soul, which constitutes its inner dimension, to the study of language. He also establishes correspondences between these and other realms in the manner that one finds in Hermetic philosophy in both East and West.

The selection from the writings of Jābir consists of the *Kitāb al-aḥjār* (The Book of Stones), where he seeks to clarify the views of Balinās (Apollonius of Tyana) on the balance, complementing his own studies on the subject in the series of works he wrote under the title *Books of Balances*. The text reveals Jābir's mastery of the sciences of language (concerning Arabic) as well as alchemy and his acceptance of the traditional idea, later expounded by other Persian thinkers, that the name of a thing is related to that thing's nature and reality. For most authors this view involves the sacred language of Arabic and not just any language, and within the Islamic world this view is ultimately based on the Qur'ānic verse that God taught Adam the names of all things by virtue of which he and his progeny were able to gain knowledge of them. In this perspective the name of a thing is not simply a man-made word having nothing to do with the nature of that thing. Rather, each letter of that name corresponds to a nature or quality and also to numerical symbols. Through the balance, these numbers and qualities determine the outward and inward nature of a thing, as the term *nature* is understood in ordinary language and not in its alchemical connotation.

Hermeticism and the alchemical philosophy of nature, the philosophy of language in its relation to the study of the natural world, the idea of correspondences between various orders of reality, and many other ideas to be found in the *Jābirean Corpus* are all of great significance for the history of science as well as philosophy. One cannot in fact understand the depth and breadth of philosophy in Persia and the many different issues with which it was concerned without at least some sampling of the vast *Jābirean Corpus* whose origin and many of whose works certainly go back to the historical figure of Jābir, at once a Sufi, a man from the famous Khurāsānī city of Ṭūs, and a disciple of the sixth Shi'i Imam after whom the Twelve-Imam Shi'i Law (the Ja'farī) that has dominated Persia since the tenth/sixteenth century is named.

With Abū Ya'qūb Sijistānī we reach perhaps the earliest systematic expositor of Ismaili philosophy. The Persian text of his *Kashf al-maḥjūb* (Unveiling of the Hidden) included in this volume is based on an earlier fourth/tenth century text in Arabic that has been lost, but the survival of this early Persian translation attests to the role played by Persian in the whole tradition of Ismaili philosophy. The work is composed of seven treatises on divine knowledge, making use of the central sacred number of Ismailism. In the first discourse, Sijistānī deals with Divine Unity (*tawḥīd*) in the language of the radical apophatic theology that characterizes this

phase of Ismaili thought. He also deals with the angelic ranks and degrees of creation so central to Ismaili cosmogony and cosmology. Sijistānī emphasizes also the seven cycles of prophecy, each cycle beginning with a prophet and ending with an imam, who becomes enunciator (*nāṭiq*) of the next cycle.

In the selections from Sijistānī's other major work, *Kitāb al-yanābī'* (The Book of Wellsprings) the discussion of *tawḥīd* continues, but most of the material is devoted to the intellect (*'aql*)—its rapport with the Divine Origin (*Mubdī'*) on the one hand and with the soul (*nafs*) and the natural world on the other. A definition is given of the intellect and its primacy emphasized. The knowledge acquired by *'aql* is discussed in relation to divine assistance (*ta'yīd*) and as inspired by divine guidance (*mu'ayyid*). These are specifically Ismaili terms that help to define the Ismaili understanding of *'aql*, which plays such a pivotal role in Ismaili philosophy as well as theology.

Many Ismaili philosophers were knowledgeable in the doctrines of other religions and showed keen interest in comprehending their meaning, which according to their perspective they usually sought on the esoteric level. The section on Sijistānī terminates with a text that belongs to the field now often called comparative religion. Therein Sijistānī discusses the symbolism of the cross and why it is venerated by Christians. He also explains why its veneration for them is like the veneration of the *shahādah* for Muslims. Here again early Shi'i thought in general, and Ismailism in particular, displays interest in issues later treated in Sufism, often in similar or parallel fashion. The Sufi doctrine of the symbolism of the cross has become well known in the West thanks to the classical work of René Guénon, *The Symbolism of the Cross*, which deals in a much more extensive and thorough manner with a subject for which concern is nevertheless present in this early work of Sijistānī written a millennium earlier.

Abū Ḥātim Rāzī's *A'lām al-nubuwwah* (Science of Prophecy) is not only a major text of Ismaili thought but also an important text of Islamic philosophy concerned with what is today called the philosophy of religion. Like Sijistānī, Rāzī was deeply interested in the universal reality of religion and revelation within as well as across the religious frontiers of Islam, and he dealt with many issues that lie at the heart of the current discussion in the West on religious diversity, or what many now call religious pluralism. This seminal work also deals, however, with another subject of great importance to Islamic thinkers—namely, the origin of the sciences. Rāzī considers the sciences including astronomy and pharmacology, especially knowledge of the medical properties of herbs, to have been originally revealed knowledge. Rāzī writes that in teaching Adam the names of all things, as asserted in the Qur'ān, God also taught him the medicinal properties of plants. Rāzī in fact presents a kind of sacred history of science that was shared by many other Muslim thinkers and is also found in traditions such as Hinduism, as well as among certain Christian and Jewish authors. His views are, needless to say,

of much importance for the Islamic understanding of the sciences of nature themselves.

With Ḥamid al-Dīn Kirmānī, we reach the most systematic treatment of early Ismaili philosophy. Kirmānī, whose systematic treatment of that philosophy caused him to be called by some later authorities the Ismaili Ibn Sīnā, wrote a number of works, among which *Rāḥat al-‘aql* (Repose of the Intellect) stands out as the best known and most influential. In pages chosen for this anthology from this work, arguments for the existence of God, the nature of the intellect, the system of emanation reaching down to the world of nature, and other major philosophical issues developed in Ismaili philosophy are treated in a logical and systematic fashion that bears comparison with the Peripatetic theses of masters such as Fārābī and Ibn Sīnā. In a comparison and contrasting of Ismaili and *mashshā’ī* philosophies, the *Rāḥat al-‘aql* serves as a particularly valuable text that reveals the richness and diversity of philosophical thought in Persia in the early Islamic period.

The selections from the works of Kirmānī include also his treatise *al-Risālat al-durriyyah* rendered by its translator as *The Brilliant Treatise* while it literally means *The Pearly Treatise*. In this concise work, Kirmānī deals with the question of unity and the different meanings that technical Arabic terms such as *wāḥid*, *aḥad*, *fard* as well as *muwaḥḥid* and *muwaḥḥad* have in the context of Ismaili philosophy and theology. It is well known that Ismaili thought considers the Divine Reality, the Originator (*al-Mubdi’*), to stand even above Being. Kirmānī follows the same doctrine in this treatise in considering God as the Originator to stand even above *tawḥīd*, since He is the Originator of both *wāḥid* and *aḥad*, Names of God associated with unity. Kirmānī also deals briefly with numerical symbolism in relation to his discussion of the relation between the unifier and the unified and the manifestation of unity in the domain of contingency. This treatise represents a summary of Kirmānī’s views on the central subject of Islamic thought and was written in his later life after his major philosophical masterpiece *Rāḥat al-‘aql* to which he refers in this text.

The *Rasā’il* (Epistles or Treatises) of the Ikhwān al-Ṣafā’, the enigmatic Brethren of Purity who lived in Iraq in the fourth/tenth century in the Shi’i milieu of Baṣra and perhaps Baghdad, are not the product of a single figure, Arab or Persian, but a group nurtured in a climate dominated by both Arab and Persian elements. Even their Ismaili affiliation has been doubted by some scholars in favour of a more general Shi’i character. They were, however, claimed later specifically by the Ismailis; the treatise entitled *Risālat al-jāmi’ah* (The Treatise of Summation), which summarizes the teachings of the *Rasā’il*, and the even more esoteric *Jāmi’at al-jāmi’ah* (The Summation of the Summation) especially are not only Ismaili texts but are also used as esoteric works taught only to those who have reached the higher levels in the hierarchy of Ismaili initiation. They were not even available to the general public until fairly recently. The *Rasā’il*, therefore, belong to any general treatment

of Ismaili philosophy as it developed in Persia, although their influence went far beyond the Ismaili, or even the general Shi'i world, and there were few major Shi'i or Sunni figures of later Islamic thought, concerned with the esoteric dimension of Islam, who were not familiar with it, including such colossal figures as Ghazzālī, Ibn 'Arabī, and Mullā Ṣadrā.

What is of particular interest in the *Rasā'il* is not only their assertion of the esoteric nature of true philosophy, grades of initiation, degrees of knowledge and the wedding between philosophy and spiritual realization combined with moral rectitude – so characteristic of Ismaili philosophy in general – but their clear exposition of Islamic Pythagoreanism and Hermeticism. No single treatise in Islamic philosophy is in fact more impregnated with Pythagorean ideas integrated into the Islamic perspective as are the *Rasā'il*. This is to be seen especially in the treatise on arithmetic, which is without doubt one of the major sources for understanding the Islamic philosophy of mathematics, but also in the treatises on music, geometry, astronomy—in fact, practically throughout the fifty-one treatises that constitute the *Rasā'il*. Herein is to be found an exposition in depth of the *quadrivium* and the *trivium* as these disciplines were understood in the medieval West and going back to Greek philosophy and the *artes liberales* of Cicero.

The selections chosen from the *Rasā'il* deal not only with this Pythagorean philosophy but also with the Hermetic idea of the relation between the microcosm and macrocosm, which Muslims trace back to 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib. Extensive correspondences are described by the Ikhwān between the structure of the human state and the structures of the heavens and the earth; detailed resemblances are shown between man and the three kingdoms of minerals, plants, and animals, which are synthesized in man's being.

The selections from the *Rasā'il* conclude with a section on the debate between man and the animals, who argue about their respective rights before the king of the *jinn*. This writing by the Ikhwān is one of the most pertinent in the annals of Islamic philosophy as far as the current environmental crisis is concerned. At a time when man is usurping the rights of other creatures and destroying the natural environment on the assumption of his absolute rights over creation, the philosophical arguments provided by the Ikhwān concerning the rights of animals are of incredible timeliness and display an 'ecological philosophy' that is of the greatest significance for the formulation of an Islamic philosophy of the environment and a response to the current environmental crisis.

Of all the Ismaili figures presented in this volume, al-Mu'ayyad fi'l-Dīn Shīrāzī is in a sense the least philosophical. Yet, as one of the greatest figures of Fatimid Ismailism, his expositions of the tenets of Ismaili teachings are both authoritative and revealing as far as the philosophical dimensions of Ismaili theological doctrines are concerned. Shīrāzī deals, in the selections from his *Jāmi'at al-ḥaqā'iq* (The Sum of Truths), first of all with *ta'wīl*, which means literally taking something back to its

source, based on the metaphysical principle that all that is manifested or revealed has an inward (*bāṭin*) and an outward (*ẓāhir*) aspect and issues from the inward to the outward. *Ta'wīl* is therefore a casting aside of the veil of outwardness or *kashf al-mahjūb*, a term used by both Sufis and Shi'is to denote not arbitrary rejection of the outward form, but of reaching the inward through the outward with the aid of a science, that comes from the dimension of inwardness associated with the Imam in Shi'ism. *Ta'wīl* can be said to be hermeneutic interpretation if the term hermeneutics is understood in its original sense as dealing with the inner mystery of things which was the function of Hermes to reveal or unveil according to Hermeticism.

With this understanding in mind, Shīrāzī, then, deals with the 'initiatic power' (*walāyah/wilāyah*) associated in the Islamic revelation with 'Alī and the necessity of the Imam, who is the inheritor of the power of *walāyah/wilāyah*, and the guide for those who aspire to carry out *ta'wīl* with respect to both revelation in the sense of sacred scripture and that primordial revelation which is the cosmos. As an example, Shīrāzī applies the method of *ta'wīl* to the understanding of the famous *ḥadīth* of the Prophet, 'I am the city of knowledge and 'Alī is its gate', in which the 'gate' itself is identified as the science of *ta'wīl*. He also follows the teachings of the sixth Shi'i Imam, Ja'far al-Ṣādiq, in providing a profound metaphysical interpretation of another well-known *ḥadīth*, 'he who knows himself knows his Lord', in which Shīrāzī has recourse to specifically Ismaili ideas and terms such as *ḥadd* (pl. *ḥudūd*) or limit(s), which is associated by Ismailism with the hierarchy of being and which he calls 'the parents of the soul'. It needs hardly to be emphasized how significant these ideas are for the understanding of Ismaili philosophy and theosophy and also how fecund they are philosophically speaking even independent of the Ismaili matrix within which they were cultivated.

With Nāṣir-i Khusraw we reach in many ways the peak of Ismaili philosophy. Some Persian scholars have even gone so far as to consider him the most challenging of Persian philosophers. The selection presented in this volume deals most of all with the relation between religion and philosophy, or faith and reason, which has been of concern to all Islamic philosophers. Like other Ismaili philosophers, Nāṣir-i Khusraw identifies philosophy with the inner dimension of religion and seeks to harmonize what he calls the *ḥikmatayn* or two philosophies/wisdoms (that is, philosophy and wisdom derived from the intellect and from revelation), this harmonization being the basic theme of his most important work, the *Jāmi' al-ḥikmatayn* (The Sum of the Two Wisdoms). To this end he elaborates on the correspondences between man and the cosmos, cycles of prophecy, and the history and grades of Ismaili initiation. He speaks of the seven angelic lights and the seven prophets, and provides a philosophical explanation of such realities as angels, *parīs* (fairies), and devils—all of whom possess a specifically religious significance and play a major role in the religious cosmos. Through these explanations one gains

a glimpse of a rhapsodic Ismaili vision of reality dominated by the number 7, so central to Ismaili philosophy and theology and mentioned in the Qur'ān and *ḥadīth* in relation to the structure of both the heavens and the earth.

Nāṣir-i Khusraw also delves deeply into the meaning and significance of the intellect (*'aql*) and its relation to knowledge. He accentuates the general Shi'i emphasis on the significance of the intellect, an emphasis central to an understanding of why—as already mentioned in general, although not necessarily always—Shi'i theology and jurisprudence were more favourable to the intellectual sciences, of which philosophy is the heart, than were the majority of Sunni theologians and jurists and why an antiphilosophical *kalām* such as that of the Ash'arites did not have its equivalence in Shi'i theology despite the deep interaction between Sunni and Shi'i theologies

The section on Nāṣir-i Khusraw includes a discussion of cosmology drawn from his *Gushāyish wa rahāyish* (literally 'Opening and Liberation' but also translated as 'Knowledge and Liberation'), which contains a most penetrating example of early Ismaili thought concerned with the complicated questions of the genesis of the world, its newness or eternity, and similar issues that have been of concern to philosophers and theologians in Persia over the ages. Being the great moralist and philosophical poet that he was, Nāṣir-i Khusraw could not be included in this volume without a sample of his poetry. A few philosophical poems are therefore presented to bring to an end the selection of his writings.

Selections from the Ismaili writings of Naṣir al-Dīn Ṭūsī who was not only an expositor of Ismaili teachings, but also a leading Peripatetic (*mashshā'ī*) philosopher as well as the founder of Twelve-Imam Shi'i rational theology, brings this volume to a close. This section begins with a segment of Ṭūsī's *Sayr wa sulūk* (literally 'Journeying and Spiritual Wayfaring' but also translated as 'Contemplation and Action'), which has an autobiographical element within it although also dealing with philosophical issues. The title of the work, literally 'spiritual wayfaring', is associated especially with Sufism. But in it Ṭūsī deals more with his intellectual journey rather than with personal spiritual matters. Because he is one of the greatest intellectual figures in Persian history, at once supreme philosopher, theologian, and scientist, his own account of his intellectual journey is of great interest for the understanding of the tradition of Islamic philosophy in Persia in general.

In the *Sayr wa sulūk* Ṭūsī explains his early attraction, after studying *Uṣūl* or the principles of religion and the Sacred Law, to the intellectual sciences and his study of theology and philosophy. But in turning to the study of the supreme object of metaphysics, that is the Divine Reality, Ṭūsī gives an account of how he realized that ordinary philosophy was not enough and that there was the necessity of a 'truthful instructor' and 'instruction' (*ta'līm*) from an infallible teacher who had received knowledge of God from God Himself. Herein lies the specifically Ismaili nature of this treatise for this idea of receiving instruction (*ta'līm*) from the infallible Imam

was so characteristic of the Ismailis that they came to be known in Islamic society at large also as ‘those who receive instruction’ (*ta’līmiyān*). In discussing the necessity of instruction in the particular sense given to it by Ismaili doctrines, Ṭūsī also discusses the nature of the Divine Intellect in its relation to the human intellect and the whole act of intellection.

As for selections of Ṭūsī drawn from his *Taṣawwurāt* (Notions), they begin with the definition of the soul (*nafs*) in its various levels of reality and distinct from the intellect. Ṭūsī emphasizes the supreme importance of knowledge (*‘ilm*), which is the ultimate goal of the soul and whose realization marks the soul’s perfection. He also discusses the levels of intelligence within human beings, going back to Ibn Sīnā’s enumeration of the four stages of the intellect. Ṭūsī then turns to the human body and why the soul becomes attached to it. In the manner of the Ikhwān al-Ṣafā’, Ṭūsī compares the body to a city while he also considers the stages of the growth of the body from its inception in the womb until its birth, a process governed at each stage by one of the planets.

In a section of particular interest for understanding the continuities and discontinuities of the philosophical tradition of Persia, Ṭūsī discusses the nature of good and evil and points out that they are not ontologically equivalent. He explicitly rejects the usual understanding of Zoroastrian dualism in which Yazdān and Ahrīman, to use Ṭūsī’s language, are opposite forces of good and evil that seem to possess the same ontological status. Throughout its long history, Persian thought has been concerned with the question of good and evil, but with the advent of Islam, which emphasizes unity above all else, the metaphysical background of the ethical discussion changed and even those such as Suhrawardī who supported the wisdom of the ancient Persian philosophers (*ḥukamā-yi furs*) asserted that these sages were unitarians and did not believe in dualism and the ontological equivalence of good and evil.

Ṭūsī then turns to *ta’wīl*, in the time-honoured sense of the term already discussed, to deal with the thorny issue of the newness or eternity of the world. He asserts that time is cyclic and in each cycle there is a new world that did not exist before. Therefore, *this* world is not eternal but new (*ḥādīth*). Yet, there is always *a* world but not *this* world that did not exist in the last cycle and will cease to exist in the next cycle. As there is always *a* world, there is also always *a* humanity but not the humanity of this cycle. In each world man must be present because he is the final purpose of the world. Ṭūsī also deals in greater detail with the seven smaller cycles of cosmic history, each cycle consisting of seven thousand years after which—that is, after forty-nine thousand years—the Great Resurrection takes place and the whole of present creation reaches the end of its cycle.

The subjects and themes treated by the major Ismaili philosophers of Persia in this volume constitute the heart of Ismaili philosophy as such and have been treasured by later Ismaili thinkers of not only Persia itself but also of the Yemen,

India, Syria, and other lands where much of the later Ismaili writings saw the light of day. But it must be remembered that this Ismaili philosophical tradition is not to be identified solely with the Ismaili branch of Shi'ism. Rather, it belongs to the integral tradition of Islamic philosophy as well as Shi'i thought in general. Like Sufism, Ismailism and Twelve-Imam Shi'ism drew their inspiration, knowledge—in fact their very existence—mostly from the esoteric dimension of the Islamic tradition and their philosophy bears the imprint of that source. That is why Ismailism shared certain ideas with Sufism and after the Mongol invasion it went underground in Persia to appear in many places as a form of Sufism. In this context it is noteworthy that one of the greatest masterpieces of Persian Sufi poetry, the *Gulshan-i rāz* (The Secret Garden of Divine Mysteries) of Maḥmūd Shabistari had not only later Sufi commentators but also Ismaili ones.

Ismaili philosophy also shares much with later Islamic philosophy as it developed in Persia in the Twelve-Imam Shi'i milieu created by the Safavids. It is true that it was most of all Mullā Ṣadrā who, in the eleventh/seventeenth century, drew the full implications of the philosophical saying of the Shi'i Imams, as one observes in his commentary upon Kulaynī's *Uṣūl al-kāfi* (The Sufficient Principles). But long before Mullā Ṣadrā, the early Ismaili philosophers drew to a large extent from the teachings of the Shi'i Imams whom, up to and including the sixth Imam Ja'far al-Ṣādiq, they shared with the Twelve-Imam Shi'a. That is why they must be considered as being among the predecessors of Mullā Ṣadrā from the point of view of the exposition of the philosophical dimension of the esoteric teachings of the Imams. It should be added that Mullā Ṣadrā was in fact familiar with some of their writings. In any case, Ismaili philosophy is an important manifestation of philosophical thought in Persia related in profound ways to Sufism on the one hand and the later flowering of philosophy in the Shi'i Persia of the Safavid period on the other. The Ismaili philosophical tradition also created some of the most important philosophical works in the Persian language, and left an indelible mark upon the development of Persian as a vehicle for philosophical discourse, a vehicle that was to be used continuously by Persian philosophers through the centuries continuing in fact up to today.

Ismaili philosophy provides teachings of great depth about time and eternity, cosmic cycles, the nature of the *anthropōs*, a metaphysics based not on Being but the Absolute as Beyond-Being whose first manifestation is Being, a cosmology related to the hierarchy of spiritual beings, the relation between religion in its formal aspect and philosophy or reason and revelation and many other basic philosophical themes. It is certainly one of the major schools of Islamic philosophy associated in its early centuries nearly completely with Persia and also to a large extent with the Persian language. Although Ismailism went underground in Persia after the Mongol Invasion, its influence in later schools of philosophy, theology and even certain strands of Sufism is evident while the major philosophical

works written by such figures as Abū Ḥātim Rāzī, Ḥamīd al-Dīn Kirmānī and Nāṣir-i Khusraw, not to mention the *Rasā'il* of the Ikhwān al-Ṣafā' written by both Arabs and Persians, are among outstanding monuments of the long tradition of philosophy in Persia.

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