



## The Ikhwan al-Safa and their Rasa'il: An Introduction (Epistles of the Brethren of Purity)

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Ikhwan al-Safa' (The Brethren of Purity) were the anonymous adepts of a tenth-century esoteric fraternity of lettered urbanites that was principally based in Basra and Baghdad. This brotherhood occupied a prominent station in the history of science and philosophy in Islam due to the wide reception and assimilation of their monumental encyclopedia: *Rasa'il Ikhwan al-Safa'* (*The Epistles of the Brethren of Purity*). This compendium contained fifty-two epistles that offered synoptic explications of the classical sciences and philosophies of the age. Divided into four classificatory parts, it treated themes in mathematics, logic, natural philosophy, psychology, metaphysics and theology, in addition to moral and didactic fables. The Ikhwan were learned compilers of scientific and philosophical knowledge, and their *Rasa'il* constituted a paradigmatic legacy in the canonization of philosophy and the sciences in mediaeval Islamic civilization.

This present volume gathers studies by leading philosophers, historians and scholars of Islamic Studies, who are also the editors and translators of the first Arabic critical editions and first complete annotated English translations of the *Rasa'il Ikhwan al-Safa'*, which will be published in the OUP Series that this present volume initiates, as well as being members of the Editorial Board.

The chapters of this present volume explore the conceptual and historical aspects of the philosophical and scientific contents of the *Rasa'il* and their classification, as well as investigating the authorship and dating of this corpus and the impact that the Ikhwan's intellectual tradition exercised in the unfolding of the history of ideas in Islam.

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### Editorial Review

#### Review

The project team, led by the editor Nader el-Bizri, are to be congratulated for collecting the leading specialists on this important early corpus of texts to produce a work that will whet the appetite of those awaiting the editions and translations. Sajjad H. Rizvi, *Journal of Islamic Studies* The publications that are planned within this project will no doubt rekindle the interest of scholars and students of Islam in Islam's rich cultural, educational and historical legacy ... The work of the Ikhwan al-Safa, like many other works that make up the classical Muslim educational thought, need to be seriously studied and reflected upon. This new publication project contributes immensely towards realizing this educational aim. Abdullah Sahin, *Muslim World Book Review* - about *Epistles of the Brethren of Purity* series

#### About the Author

**Nader El-Bizri** is a Research Associate in Philosophy at The Institute of Ismaili Studies, London, and General Editor of the OUP series: *The Epistles of the Brethren of Purity*. He has been an Affiliated Lecturer at the Department of History & Philosophy of Science at the University of Cambridge since 1999, and he is a Visiting Professor of Visual Studies at the School of Architecture at the University of Lincoln, and a Chercheur Associé at the Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique (CNRS) in Paris.

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