

Mysticism and Philosophy in al-Andalus Ibn Masarra, Ibn al-ʿArabī and the Ismāʿīlī Tradition, by Michael Ebstein, (Islamic History and Civilization: Studies and Texts, 103) (Leiden & Boston: Brill, 2014), ix + 276 pp., ISBN: 978-90-04-25536-4, €114.00 / \$148.00 (hb)

As its title indicates, this is a thesis which sets out to identify the many features of the mystical writings of the two Andalusians, Ibn Masarra (883-931) and Ibn al-ʿArabī (1165-1240), which they have in common with the mythical and Neoplatonic cosmogonies and cosmologies in the assortment of works from the late ninth and tenth centuries belonging to what Michael Ebstein calls the Ismāʿīlī tradition. His purpose is to demonstrate the causal connection between the two sets of compositions, and in so doing to account for the difference between the mysticism of the two Westerners and that of Sufis writing in the East. It is a task meticulously carried out under five chapter headings: the Word of God and the Divine Will; Letters; the Friends of God; the Perfect Man: from Shīʿī sectarianism to universal humanism; and Parallel Worlds. The first deals with the problem of relating a pre-Islamic concept of creation through a descending order of emanations with a Creator by definition above and beyond His creation. The second describes the correlation between the hierarchical structure of this creation and the twenty-eight letters of the Arabic alphabet. The third considers the concept of the Friends of God, those who in every generation ensure the guidance of God in succession to His Prophets, specifically Muḥammad, a notion associated in Shīʿism with the Imām and his faithful, otherwise with the individual saint. In the fourth chapter this concept of the Friend of God runs into that of the Perfect Man, a Platonic Idea variously embodied in such Friends as the Prophets and Imāms, but existing at a level of creation immediately below God, and at a lower level bridging the divide between the lower corporeal and the upper spiritual world. That in turn leads into the final chapter, the Parallel Worlds of the macrocosm and the microcosm, in which the correspondence between the two leads to the ascent of the mind through the contemplation of its signs to the understanding of the universe and knowledge of its Creator.

Given that in this literature there is a polar opposition between the Shī'ite and especially the Fāṭimid concept of belief in the Imām as the way to God, and Ibn al-ʿArabī's ascent of the spirit through the hierarchy of the heavens through the contemplative efforts of the individual, Ebstein has shown in convincing detail the debt of the great mystic to the works in his Ismāʿīlī tradition. The problem is one of nomenclature, which raises the question he addresses in his Conclusion, namely the appropriateness of the term Ismāʿīlī. As a modern term, it properly applies to the Nizārīs and the Ṭayyibīs, the sects derived from the community of the Fāṭimid faithful which was finally formed in the 960s with the recognition by the Iranian Neoplatonists, specifically al-Sijistānī, of the line of al-Muʿizz as that of the Seventh Imām, Muḥammad ibn Ismāʿīl ibn Jaʿfar al-Šādiq, the one yet to come. Prior to that, it is better to speak of a variety of such Seveners, a question further complicated by the thesis of Fāṭimid origins in a line of hidden Imāms whose followers were the totality of believers in his second coming, but who split over the appearance of the Fāṭimid Mahdī (who incidentally claimed descent from ʿAbd Allāh ibn Jaʿfar al-Šādiq). As far as their literature is concerned, it is moot point if they could have been the only ones to pick up on the late Classical cosmogonies and cosmologies and incorporate them into Islam. This is acknowledged by Ebstein, who not only includes in his corpus the *Rasāʾil* of the Ikhwān al-ṣafāʾ, which clearly belong to the literature of the Seveners, but the works attributed to Jābir ibn Ḥayyān, supposedly a disciple of Jaʿfar al-Šādiq, and those of the 9th-century Sunnī mystic al-Ḥākim al-Tirmidhī. His preference is nevertheless for 'the Ismāʿīlī tradition,' a bracket which, with the emphasis upon 'tradition,' may be broadly accepted, with this caveat, as the core of a major thesis.

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