

other contemporaries including the *malāmatiyya*. Chowdhury's reference to "isnād provisions" as part of al-Sulamī's apologetics is not accurate. Al-Sulamī used *isnād* since this was one of the basic features of the Islamic writing tradition and was not considered an apologetic tool. Al-Sulamī's exegesis, on the other hand, could certainly be added as part of his apologetic tools. On a technical level, while the translations of many passages of primary sources are a significant contribution of Chowdhury's book, some long quotations of secondary literature are unnecessary (pp. 68–9, 71).

To sum up, *A Ṣūfī Apologist of Nīshāpūr* provides a study model for examining important Sufi authors during the fourth/tenth and fifth/eleventh centuries. This endeavour is particularly significant in light of the fact that al-Sulamī differs prominently from other contemporary authors of Sufi compendia since he did not provide us with one comprehensive textbook that combines Sufi rules of ethics, jargon, training methods, biographies of great masters, and al-Sulamī's own conception of the different ranks of the Sufi path. Examining al-Sulamī through a multiplicity of documents and writings is very compelling.

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ABŪ ḤAYYĀN AL-TAWḤĪDĪ and ABŪ 'ALĪ MISKAWAYH:

The Philosopher Responds. An Intellectual Correspondence from the Tenth Century. Edited by BILAL ORFALI and MAURICE POMERANT.

Translated by SOPHIA VASALOU and JAMES E. MONTGOMERY.

(Library of Arabic Literature.), xli, 300 pp. (Volume One), xi, 324 pp. (Volume Two). New York: New York University Press, 2019.

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The *Kitāb al-hawāmil wa-l-ṣawāmil* is a collection of 175 questions that the philosopher-litterateur Abū Ḥayyān al-Tawḥīdī (d. 414/1023) addresses to the philosopher and historian Abū 'Alī Miskawayh (d. 421/1030), accompanied by the latter's answers. The peculiar collective nature of the work – responding to the literary form of *masā'il wa-ağwiba* – and the wide range of themes covered – reflecting the variety of al-Tawḥīdī's interests – make it an exceptional portrait of the "dialogic spirit of the intellectual culture" (p. xiv) that flourished at the Buyid court in the fourth/tenth century.

Two fundamental merits of this publication are immediately evident. It constitutes the first critical revision of the *editio princeps* published in 1951 by Aḥmad Amīn and Sayyid Aḥmad Ṣaqr. Based on a new examination of the *codex unicus* (MS Aya Sofya 2476) the two editors, Bilal Orfali and Maurice Pomerant, propose both conjectures to the transmitted text and various corrections to the previous edition. In addition, the work's first full-length English translation, by Sophia Vasalou and James E. Montgomery, is printed on the page facing the Arabic text, this being the second complete translation in a Western language, after the Italian version published in 2017 by Lidia Bettini.

In her introduction (pp. xi–xxxi) Vasalou offers an overview of the main exegetical issues concerning the *œuvre* as a whole, retracing the history of studies. The constant reference to examples taken from the Arabic text lends structure to and reinforces her arguments. A concise presentation of the two thinkers' biographies and works and of the historical–cultural context is followed by a review of the main hypotheses for dating the work. While admitting that the exchange belongs to the early stages of both thinkers' careers, the author refrains from setting precise chronological limits. The chronological question, as rightly underlined (p. xv), is not an end in itself, but constitutes a preliminary investigation into the understanding of the spirit that animated the erudite exchange and consequently into the nature and purpose of the work itself. The remaining pages of the introduction mainly focus on these aspects. First, the content, style and expressive peculiarities of both al-Tawḥīdī's questions and Miskawayh's answers are analysed in the light of the intellectual and psychological profile of both.

Vasalou then emphasizes Miskawayh's dual role as author and editor of the redaction of the correspondence as it has been preserved. The preface and other internal elements suggest that Miskawayh received al-Tawḥīdī's questions all at once, accompanied by an introductory letter not included in the work. In answering, he would have recorded the questions formulated by al-Tawḥīdī in a more or less literal way, which we thus read in mediated form. Moreover, in some instances, Miskawayh shows a literary awareness that surpasses the boundaries of one-to-one correspondence and seems implicitly to address an audience of learned readers. The last formal aspect discussed by Vasalou concerns the labels that introduce a good part of the questions and indicate their subject. While there are no elements that support the attribution to al-Tawḥīdī, it is plausible that these are later additions by a copyist or part of Miskawayh's editorial intervention. In support of the latter hypothesis, Vasalou notes that labels represent a cataloguing tool consistent with the systematic approach that Miskawayh exhibits throughout this work and which meets the needs of a potential readership. She convincingly adds that many of the labels do not coincide so much with the theme addressed in the question as with the arguments introduced by Miskawayh in his answer.

The section "Note on the text" (pp. xxxiii–xxxviii) offers a brief description of the manuscript and its history, the list of principles adopted in establishing the critical edition and a presentation of the English translation. The latter paragraph contains some fundamental methodological considerations concerning the translation task.

Beyond the obvious textual difficulties due to a tradition consisting of a single incomplete testimony, a work with such heterogeneous contents and multiple authorship poses specific challenges. One initial difficulty lies in finding a compromise between the preservation of an internal coherence in the lexical choices and the rendering of oscillations in meaning of certain terms due both to the polysemy of the word itself and to the interpretive nuances given by the two authors (see the concrete example of *quwwa*, pp. xxvii–xxviii). Similarly, the English translation is required to reflect the stylistic peculiarities of each author, as in §§ 4.1–4.14, where al-Tawḥīdī's rhetorical phrasing contrasts visibly with Miskawayh's more synthetic and technical prose.

Finally, the authors call attention to the metalinguistic issue involved in rendering a set of questions and answers that deal with matters of Arabic grammar and lexicography. In such cases the challenge lies in providing a translation that, while remaining faithful to the original text, could still be read independently from it and be accessible even to a general reader. An illustrative example is §§ 34.2–17, in which Miskawayh explains the basic meaning of some technical terms of

philosophy and religion. The English translation reproduces the arguments of the thinker – based on morphological and semantic considerations internal to the Arabic language – with philological precision. Transliteration is extremely rare and is limited only to instances where it is essential to highlight derivation patterns, within the same Arabic root, between two or more words. Where the discussion becomes more technical, as in the definition of *tamkīn* “enabling” (p. 155), the translators offer an alternative version in note (nr. 37) that is more conservative and adherent to the original. The apparatus of succinct and punctual notes does in fact provide key information for understanding the text and guides the reading in view of further investigation without weighing down the translation.

In conclusion, this publication not only offers a new critical reference edition of the Arabic text, but also, through an elegant and fluent English translation, makes this unique work accessible to an audience of non-specialists.

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OMID GHAEMMAGHAMI:

Encounters with the Hidden Imam in Early and Pre-Modern Twelver Shīʿī Islam.

(Islamic History and Civilization: Studies and Texts.) xii, 276 pp. Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2020. ISBN 978 90 04 34048 0.

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A long-standing tendency in Islamic studies has been to study and document religious schools and ideas separately from their political contexts. Many representative works treat the thought of various schools with little or no recourse to the interests of authors and to the polemical contexts in which they operated. Many writings on Islamic thought offer minute philological observations, analyses of authorship and dating, and other information useful to situate a text or an idea in space and time, and describe the contours of its thought content. Few, however, situate ideas in their historical context, exploring how authors have responded to external stimuli.

Omid Ghaemmaghmi’s thoroughly researched monograph avoids all of these pitfalls. It offers a well-documented and well-argued historical contextualization of a central idea in Twelver Shiism: whether it is possible for a mortal to see the twelfth Imam, who was believed to have gone into occultation as a child after the death of his father, the eleventh Imam Ḥasan al-ʿAskarī. The strength of the book is that it combines thorough philological groundwork with broad historical contextualization. The central question it explores is how the vagaries of the Twelver Shii community between the ninth and seventeenth centuries have informed the evolution of the idea of encounters with the Hidden Imam. As Ghaemmaghmi convincingly shows, the historical factors that have influenced how this idea was formulated at one time or another included politics within the Twelver community and the interests of its leadership; polemics between the Twelvers and other schools of thought; eschatological fears arising from the Mongol invasion; and the emergence of the Twelver Shii scholars as a separate class with corporate interests in the early modern period.

The book is divided into four chapters arranged in chronological order. The first centres on the earliest Twelver Shii sources to have addressed the issue of the