

This chapter, then, is a brilliant *tour d'horizon*. Its final paragraph should be read by all historians working on the Crusades today, and they should focus especially on the wisdom of its last three lines: “Having observed the damaging impact of prejudice and passion in some of our predecessors’ works, we may sensitize ourselves to notice it more readily in the products of our contemporaries – and, hopefully, in our own as well”.

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PAUL E. WALKER, ISMAIL K. POONAWALA, DAVID SIMONOWITZ and
GODEFROID DE CALLATAÿ:

Sciences of the Soul and Intellect. Part 1. An Arabic Critical Edition and English Translation of Epistles 32–36.

(Epistles of the Brethren of Purity.) xxiii, 270, and ۲۰۲ pp. Oxford: Oxford University Press in association with The Institute of Ismaili Studies, 2015. £55. ISBN 978 0 19 875828 0.
doi:10.1017/S0041977X17001331

The present volume is part of a larger enterprise dedicated to editing and translating the entire collection of 52 epistles written by the Brethren of Purity, an esoteric brotherhood active in tenth-century Iraq. While many details concerning the authorship, identity, and ideological affiliation are still unclear, the epistles furnish valuable insights into one of the various strands constituting the intellectual universe of the pre-modern Islamic world. Notably, they are neither purely religious nor exclusively philosophical, but defend a perfect harmony between the two spheres. In order to attain felicity, the Brethren maintain, man must follow the twofold path of religious law and philosophical sciences, the *sine qua non* of purifying body and soul and grasping the truths underlying reality (*ḥaqāʾiq al-mawjūdāt*). Accordingly, their writings aim to provide the reader with the corpus of knowledge required to pursue this goal. As a result, they cover a broad range of subject matter which, notwithstanding its idiosyncrasies, is considerably influenced by the Alexandrian tradition as well as contemporary philosophy (*falsafa*). The epistles have often been described as a populist scientific encyclopaedia aspiring simultaneously to comprehensiveness and accessibility.

With this background, the decision of the Institute of Ismaili Studies (IIS) to edit and translate this compendium is very welcome. It permits the study of the Brethren’s thought even without the mastery of Arabic. With Epistles 32–36 the present book embraces the first fraction of those treatises (E32–41) that deal with soul and intellect, a core topic of the brotherhood’s teachings situated at the interface of cosmology and anthropology. On their account, not only is the entire universe governed through the mediation of Soul by Intellect, but also human beings by virtue of their individual souls partake of intellect and, thus, of the means to accomplish their ultimate goal: the acquisition of knowledge and, hence, felicity. This well-known Neoplatonic motive pervades E32–36 which: first, tackles the intellectual principles of the cosmos: the One, Intellect, and Soul (E32–33); second, establishes a link between the universe – the “macroanthropos” – and the sublunar sphere of

man (E34); third, moves on to the human intellect and its specific object, the intelligible (E35); and, fourth, addresses the heavenly cycles and revolutions, i.e. those principles which affect the material constitution and behaviour of the physical world, including the bodily mixtures (humours) of its animated inhabitants (E36).

In accordance with the other volumes of the series, the book is opened by general editor Nader El-Bizri's foreword. The first main part embraces the translations of the epistles, preceded not by a common but by individual introductions instead. While at first glance this procedure may appear somewhat odd, it is due to the fact that several scholars collaborated in the production of this volume: Paul E. Walker is responsible for E32 (a and b), 33, and 35; Ismail K. Poonawala and David Simonowitz for E34; and Godefroid de Callataÿ for E36. The second main part of the volume encompasses the editions prepared by the respective scholars. Inserted between the two main parts are a select bibliography (of extant editions, sources, and secondary literature), subject index, *index locorum*, and Arabic glossary. Although, unfortunately, the translations and editions are not arranged on facing pages – a general feature of the series – overall the volume presents a useful tool facilitating not only acquaintance with the texts but also with a representative segment of the copious scholarship. Yet, despite the undeniable merits of the series in general and this volume in particular, there are a number of peculiarities which require additional remarks.

Among other things, the series proclaims to offer a “critical edition” (beyond the title, see for instance p. xix) of the epistles. However, it is not clear either from El-Bizri's general foreword or from the individual introductions why and how the 19 manuscripts (out of more than 100 known copies) selected by the IIS should be suited to grant a sufficiently solid basis for a critical edition. The only indication to be found in the foreword is a reference to these manuscripts' early dating (p. xxi, n. 3), but as is well known, more recent copies are often closer to the original than more ancient ones. Moreover, as the scholars who collaborated in the production of this volume consistently underscore, it is impossible to establish a stemma on the basis of these nineteen manuscripts (or rather thirteen [Walker, p. 1 and 109; Callataÿ, p. 157] or fourteen [Poonawala, p. 69] – without further explanation of this discrepancy). This raises the question of why the IIS did not attempt to get hold of additional copies, particularly since some of them “could have been easily obtained”, as Poonawala observes in the introduction to E34 (p. 68, n. 45).

Moreover, although there is nothing wrong with the IIS's decision to commission E32–36 to several scholars, the reader will be surprised by the disparity of treatment concerning all essential aspects: editorial standards, accuracy of translations (terminology), extent of annotations, and diligence of introductions. Whereas, with respect to these factors, the treatment of E36 is excellent (particularly the meticulous explanations of the underlying astronomical theories), other cases are rather disappointing if not utterly misleading. This is especially striking in the case of E35, a key text within the frame of the Brethren's doctrine. Nonetheless, the introduction offers only a couple of pages dedicated to the treatise's content, lamenting primarily the obscurity of the epistle's “message” and wondering “why it exists” (p. 111); there are hardly any explanatory annotations to the translation; and several renderings are quite debatable (see for instance the technical terminology in chapter 15, p. 132 with n. 36, e.g. *taṣawwur* translated as “imagination” instead of “concept formation”; *i' tibār* rendered as “expression” instead of “intellectual contemplation”). On the whole, the impression resulting from working with this volume is somewhat mixed. Given the significance of the series, this is deplorable; it would be desirable for the IIS to put more emphasis on elucidating their editorial principles and,

particularly, on ascertaining the homogeneity as well as quality of the individual contributions.

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MAIRAJ U. SYED:

Coercion and Responsibility in Islam: A Study in Ethics and Law.

(Oxford Islamic Legal Studies.) xiii, 259 pp. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017. £60. ISBN 978 0 19 878877 5.

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In this lucid work of intellectual history Mairaj Syed investigates how Mu'tazilī and Ash'arī theologians and Ḥanafī and Shāfi'ī jurists discussed coercion and its effects on moral responsibility and on civil and criminal liability. The Mu'tazilīs denied that coercion could excuse immoral behaviour: bad acts were bad acts and that was that. Their justifications did evolve, though. Ash'arī determinism evolved so that al-Juwaynī and al-Ghazālī could reject the idea that God would impose impossible obligations, such as an obligation to resist a coercer's attempt to compel an immoral act. These later Ash'arīs claimed that it would be incoherent (in some sense) for God to require compliance with an impossible obligation.

Ḥanafī jurists had to justify a complex set of legal doctrines. Seriously coercive threats, involving loss of life or limbs, could excuse liability for physical harm and cancel liability for commercial transactions, but not for marriage contracts or pronouncements of divorce. The Shāfi'īs, on the other hand, allowed that credible coercive threats could mitigate liability in most areas of the law. In this regard, Shāfi'ī jurisprudence was more straightforward than Ḥanafī, even though Shāfi'īs in Iraq were more disposed to consider contextual nuances and those in Khurasan more likely to draw a bright line around threats that counted as legally coercive.

Syed provides an admirably clear presentation of the theologians' and jurists' views. His exploration of Ḥanafī and Shāfi'ī legal reasoning on questions that transcend narrow legal concerns shows how argumentation in the domain of Islamic positive law, *fiqh*, is often both separate from and driven by different logics to the concerns of Islamic legal theory, *uṣūl al-fiqh*. He notes that, in coercion jurisprudence, Ḥanafī jurists were more scriptural and Shāfi'ī jurists more rationalist and empirical than the field might have led one to expect. Hermeneutics plays a relatively minor role in both juristic traditions' treatments of coercion. One might have concluded from this interesting fact that Islamic legal theory does not aim to guide or constrain applied legal reasoning.

Syed also looks beyond the carefully collected data of his book to wider issues in the study of Islamic intellectual history. One issue that troubles Syed is why pre-modern Muslim writing on coercion in law and ethics shows no interest in political liberty; Syed notes that some modern Western writers on freedom use coercion as a starting-point for their discussions of liberty. While coercion jurisprudence in Islamic law is politicized in the sense that jurists consider coercion by the ruler a relevant standard for assessing the seriousness of coercive threats, the attempt to link that fact to modern writings on liberty struck me as an unnecessarily apologetic