



KETĀB AL-EŞLĀḤ

KETĀB AL-EŞLĀḤ, an early Ismaʿili work in Arabic, the title of which can be translated as *The Book of Correction*, written by **Abu Ḥātem Rāzi**, who was a leading *dāʿi* in the first half of the 4th/10th century in what is now northwestern Iran. The book was intended to refute, or to “correct” (*aşlahā*), the *Ketāb al-maḥşul* by Moḥammad Nasafi (d. 332/943). The *Eşlāḥ* quotes and discusses many of the theses in the now lost *Maḥşul*, one of the oldest Ismaʿili works that extensively utilized Neoplatonist philosophical ideas, thus becoming one of the few extant texts from the earliest phase of Neoplatonist-influenced Ismaʿilism. The text covers various topics, both philosophical and non-philosophical, such as cosmology and cosmogony, the theory of the soul (*nafs*) and the intellect (*ʿaql*), divine transcendence, prophethood, sacred laws (*sharāʿe*), and Ismaʿili missionary activity (*daʿwa*). The surviving text of the *Eşlāḥ* consists of six parts (*ajzāʿ*), but its beginning and ending are missing. Part I deals with the *dāʿis*’ administration of their communities. Part II contains a number of sections (*foşul*) that discuss philosophical issues. Other parts deal mainly with the interpretation of the stories of the prophets in the Qorʿān and sacred history as divided into seven cycles (*adwār*).

The *Eşlāḥ*’s polemic against Nasafi triggered a doctrinal debate among his fellow Ismaʿilis that continued up to the early 5th/11th century. Taking sides with Nasafi, **Abu Yaʿqub Sejestāni** (fl. mid-4th/10th century) wrote the now lost *Ketāb al-noşra*. Later, in an attempt to reconcile Nasafi, Rāzi, and Sejestāni (who are also called the “Persian School” because of their common presumed-Persian origin and Neoplatonist influence), **Ḥamid-al-Din Kermāni** (d. after



411/1020-21) wrote *Ketāb al-riāz*, in which he mainly revisited the issues debated in Part II of the *Eşlāḥ*.

Part II of the *Eşlāḥ* displays a cosmological framework common to Rāzi and Nasafi (and, later, Sejestāni), which uses Neoplatonist notions and terminology: with His creative Word (*kalema*) the absolutely transcendent God, called “the Originator” (*al-Mobde*), even the negation of whose attributes (*şefāt*, sg. *şefa*) should be negated, originated the hypostatic Universal Intellect, from which the Universal Soul emerged (*enba’ata*; cf. W. Madelung, [COSMOGONY AND COSMOLOGY vi. IN ISMA’ILISM](#)). One of the major philosophical points of disagreement between the two thinkers is the relation of the Universal Soul to the human rational soul. Whereas Nasafi holds that the human rational soul is a “particle” (*joz*) of the Universal Soul, thus emphasizing their closeness to each other, Rāzi maintains that the rational soul is a mere “trace” (*aṭar*) of the Universal Soul, insisting on their distance. Paul E. Walker points out the similarity of Nasafi’s thesis with the theory of Plotinus, the late ancient philosopher, and that of Rāzi to Proclus (Walker, 1993, pp. 51-60; idem, 1992). In Part III, due to Rāzi’s insistence on the distance of the human soul from the Universal Soul, Rāzi denies that the enunciator-prophets (*nuṭaqā’*, sg. *nāṭeq*), such as Abraham and Moses, may directly recognize the Universal Soul and Intellect, whereas Nasafi accepts that they indeed are able to recognize thereof (Halm, 1978, pp. 67-71). Thus, in these debates, Rāzi and Nasafi incorporate the issue of philosophical cosmology and the theory of the soul into their doctrinal discussion on prophecy.

In addition, in the *Eşlāḥ* some notions of Greek natural philosophy are used in order to explain the development of sacred history and the role of prophets in it. For example, the four religious communities—Jews, Christians, Zoroastrians, and Sabeans—are compared to the four elements (*ommahāt*). From their convergence emerges a new “form” (*şura*) of being, by which is meant the Muslim community. Likewise, after four Muslim groups, the Morje’a, the Māreqa (i.e. the [Kharijites](#)), the Qadariya, and the Rāfeza, the fifth one—the Isma’ilis—emerged. The Isma’ilis are designated as “the people of the pure religion” (*ahl al-din al-kāleş*) and “the people of reality” (*ahl al-ḥaqiqa*). Further, the seventh enunciator-prophet, that is, the messianic Qā’em (literally the “one who rises”), is compared to “ether” (*aṭir*), which is, according to Rāzi, the distinct element encircling or comprising (*moḥiṭ*) other elements; similarly, the Qā’em can grasp the spiritual meaning of all the sacred laws, which belongs to the higher “simple world” (*al-’alam al-basiṭ*).



The debates in the *Eṣlāḥ* also reflect the religious and political situation of the Isma‘ilis of Rāzi’s time. For example, against Nasafi’s denial of the existence of Adam’s sacred law, Rāzi maintains that Adam had actually brought a law. Thus, although propagating the Carmatian prediction of the imminent advent of the Mahdi, Rāzi was strongly opposed to their millennialist antinomianism that culminated in their declaration of the advent of the Mahdi and abolishment of the sacred law in Bahrain in the year 319/931. It has also been pointed out that this criticism by Rāzi suggests that the *Eṣlāḥ* may have been written after the rapid disastrous fall of the Mahdi of Bahrain (Madelung, 1988, pp. 96-99). Furthermore, Rāzi interprets the status of prophetic figures such as David and Solomon in the Qor’ānic stories as the chief *lāḥeq* (“lieutenant”), or the dignitary ranked next to the Imam, and refers to the importance of this position as the leader of the *da‘wa*. This suggests that Rāzi did not recognize the Fāṭemid claim to the imamate nor the Carmatian claim of the appearance of the hidden Mahdi-Qā’em (Halm, 1991, pp. 335-36; tr. Bonner, pp. 378-79; Madelung, 1961, p. 110; and Nomoto, 1999, pp. 285–305).

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