imminent publication of the Long Version is great news not only for scholars whose focus lies on Ikhwānī studies but also for those interested in the reception, assimilation, and circulation of scientific and technical knowledge (and of "magical" lore in particular) in the early ʿAbbāsī period.

Theo Loinaz

BAFFIONI, Carmela (ed. and trans.), *On the Natural Sciences. An Arabic Critical Edition and English Translation of Epistles 15-21*, Epistles of the Brethren of Purity, Oxford, Oxford University Press – The Institute of Ismaili Studies, 2013, 441 pp. (English) + 491 pp. (Arabic).

The book here reviewed makes the sixth volume of the aforementioned OUP – ILS *Epistles of the Brethren of Purity* series and the second one authored by Carmela Baffioni after her edition and translation of Epistles 10–14 (*On Logic*, 2010). Modelled after its predecessors, *On the Natural Sciences* contains an Introduction (pp. 1–59) and a Technical Introduction (pp. 61–106), a first-time critical edition of the Arabic text (pp. ٤٨٣–٥), and a fully annotated English translation (pp. 107–357). Three appendices (on pp. 359–369, 371–383, and 385–392 respectively) offer the Arabic edition, the English translation, and a brief but clarifying commentary of three interpolations found in different manuscripts: in Appendix A an addition to Epistle 15 is given (it is in fact a passage borrowed from Balīnūs' *Sirr al-Khalīqa*), in Appendix B an Addition to Epistle 20, and in Appendix C an Addition to Epistle 16. The Arabic text is complemented with an exhaustive index of *termini technici* on pp. ٤٩١–٤٨٥ , while in turn the English part includes a Bibliography (pp. 393–407) and a thorough set of indexes: a Subject index (409–428), an Index of ancient names (429–434), and an *Index locorum* (435–441).

The edition of *On the Natural Sciences* is based on MS Atıf Efendi 1681 (the oldest one containing any fragment of the Epistles, dated 1182 CE) and a full collation of all fifteen manuscripts selected for the series (a very detailed description is given on pp. 65–78). Establishing a critical text on such a great number of copies must have been a daunting task in view of the poor state of the tradition especially regarding Epistle 21 *On Plants* (٤٨٣–٤٠٩ | 315–357). Further elucidatory work shall have to be made, for sure, on some obscure mineralogical passages (the consultation of Fabian Käs' monographic *Die Mineralien in der arabischen Pharmakologie* [2010] might have been of some help) as well as on our understanding of the

botanical section (renderings such as [man-made] 'syrup' for [natural] دبس, for instance, seem at least arguable). Nevertheless the editor's cautionary words "mine is a first attempt" (p. 65) do little justice to her successful achievement in making available (both in its original garb and in translation) a bulky, dense, and often difficult text.

At the very beginning of her almost three score pages of introduction Baffioni makes clear her qualified opinion regarding the still open debate about the dilettantism and religious standpoint of the Brethren in their compendium: "the religious perspective of the Ikhwān affects neither the theoretical value of their philosophy, nor the technical importance of the data they elaborate" (p. 3). It is from this perspective (i.e. from the assessment of the scientific and technical contents of the Epistles rather than from the doctrinal qualification of the views transmitted therein) that Epistles 15–21 (duly summarized on pp. 15–21) are analysed in the Introduction. That does not mean, however, that the discussion of religious aspects is ignored or minimized at all: after a thorough explanation of the fundamentals of the Ikhwān's philosophy (pp. 39–51, covering such diverse topics as creation, eschatology, divine wisdom and providence, theodicy, or angelology), the "spiritual meaning" of the natural science treatises is examined (pp. 51–54), and finally Ismaili elements are specifically dealt with (pp. 54–59).

The introduction also includes a cursory review (pp. 16–29) of the Ikhwān's debt to Aristotle, Pythagoreanism, Hippocrates, and Plato, alongside some remarks (pp. 30–34) on the remarkable use that Epistles 15–21 make of the Qur'ān, ḥadīth, and tafsīr, with over 70 quotations and paraphrases—the revealed text would be indeed, in the author's view, an "exoteric counterpart" to the Brethren's doctrines (p. 32).

Far from being an unprecedented Islamicate project, Epistles 15 through 19 "mirror the succession of the Aristotelian natural science writings as they were arranged in late Greek antiquity" (p. 3). The Stagyrite's *Physics*, *On Heavens*, *On Generation and Corruption*, and *Meteorology* provide the basic frame for the Brethren's discourse (including *Meteorology* Book IV, on fossils and minerals, which finds a correspondence in Epistle 19 *On the formation of Minerals*). Also Epistles 21 and 22, on plants and animals, are modelled after (Pseudo-)Aristotelian treatises. Nicolaus of Damascus' *On Plants* (ed. Drossaart and Poortman) is introduced in a profuse footnote on pages 328–329 and reference is

systematically made to it afterwards in the notes to the translation. In contrast, even though the author "share[s] Zonta's opinion that Balīnūs was one of the most important sources" for this treatise (p. 329, n. 50), oddly enough no parallel or comparison at all is provided in the otherwise well documented footnotes to the Epistle in question—in fact mostly notes address terminological cruces. Concerning Epistle 22, for Aristotle's authentic *On Animals* only the editions of Kruk and of Brugmann and Drossaart are referred to, but future research may have to pay attention also to the pseudoepigraphical *Nuʿūt*, abundantly documentted in its indirect tradition, for which one can still rely on Ullmann's overview (1972: 8–9, 23).

Unlike the rest of the sections on the natural sciences, Epistle 20, even if not absolutely void of Aristotelian doctrines, reflects rather a preoccupation with Ismailism and angelological matters. Seemingly interpolated into the sequence of chapters, Epistle 20 is, in Baffioni's words (pp. 4–5), actually more suited to be an *introduction* to these epistles.

With *On the Natural Sciences* Baffioni has taken us one big step further towards the establishment of the first critical edition of the Brethren's encyclopaedical corpus and has provided historians of Arabic Islamic science with a refreshed reading of a primary source of first rank.

Theo Loinaz

RAPOPORT, Yossef and Emilie SAVAGE-SMITH (eds. and transs.), *An Eleventh-Century Egyptian Guide to the Universe.* The Book of Curiosities, Islamic Philosophy, Theology and Science, Texts and Studies volume 87, Leiden – Boston, Brill, 2014, xii + 796 pp. (with 51 illustrations and facsimile).

Brill's unshakeable commitment to the highest standards of academic publishing has combined with the erudite scholarship of two first-rank researchers in order to produce one of the finest contributions to the field of Islamicate studies of the last years. Behind this gorgeous volume there lies over a decade of hard work since the acquisition of the manuscript of the *Book of Curiosities* (MS Arab c.90) by the Bodleian Library in 2002—the book was in fact long preceded by a website (on line since 2007). The task of the editors-translators has greatly benefited from the collaboration of a long list of scholars who have contributed with their expertise in the most disparate areas of knowledge (pp. xi–xii).

In a compact introduction (pp. 1–35) some clues are given regarding