The scribe has used different inks to delineate the headings and text. The title is written in red, with the subsection title in green, followed by the text in black.

This diagram is a representation of al-Kirmani’s cosmological scheme.
An enumeration of al-Kirmānī’s schema of the degrees of the spiritual world and their functions.

A chart illustrating the correspondences between the natural world and the world of religion.

This page shows the opening lines of the sixth chapter and is illustrative of the use of different inks by the scribe.
Hamid al-Din al-Kirmani was a major Muslim scholar and writer who flourished during the time of the Fatimid Imam al-Hakim bi-Amr Allah (who reigned from 996 to 1021 CE). Al-Kirmani’s nisba connects him to the province of Kirman, and although he may have come from there and even retained control over its local da’wa, his main centre of activity was Iraq.

In the early years of the eleventh century, al-Kirmani became the first of the great eastern Iranian Ismaili da’is to take up residence in Cairo, the capital city of the Fatimid state which was then at the height of its glory and influence in the Muslim world. It is known that al-Kirmani had left Egypt by 1019, returning to Iraq where he died in 1020 or soon thereafter.

The writings of al-Kirmani seem to belong to two periods defined and separated by his earlier activities in Iraq and the east and a later one in Egypt. Of his corpus of nearly thirty works, only eighteen seem to have survived. Manuscripts of all his extant works are in the Library of The Institute of Ismaili Studies.

One of al-Kirmani’s important work, his magnum opus, is the Rahat al-’aql. The Zahid Ali Collection of Ismaili manuscripts, now housed at the Institute, includes a very fine nineteenth century manuscript of this text. It is one of seven copies of this work in the Library’s collection, and all the illustrations shown here are taken from this manuscript.

The Rahat al-’aql was al-Kirmani’s final work. It has been suggested that al-Kirmani composed an earlier version of this text in Iraq which he subsequently brought with him to Egypt. He returned once again to revise this work at the end of his career in Iraq.
Being al-Kirmani’s last work, the *Rahat al-‘aql* was intended to contain a distillation of all knowledge, collected into the form of a city, the city of knowledge, the city of which the Prophet himself had said, “I am the city of knowledge, and ‘Ali is its gateway; so let whoever wants knowledge enter through its gate.” The title and plan of the book convey this extremely important concept of knowledge embodied in the image of an archetypal city.

The goal of this work is specified in its very title. *Rahat al-‘aql* has the sense of “peace of mind”, “comfort of reason,” and it implies freedom from the doubt and confusion that go with life in a constantly changing and perennially unsettled world. Al-Kirmani intended to provide the reader an opportunity to grasp and possibly understand how to obtain the eternal life of the mind, the paradise of reason.

The organisation of the *Rahat al-‘aql* is remarkable for its complex structure configured in the image of a city that represents the city of God. The subject-matter is arranged in seven chapters designated as walls or ramparts (*aswar*) and each rampart yields or leads to seven sections referred to as pathways or thoroughfares (*mashari’*) leading to the heart of the city. Only the seventh rampart exceeds the strict plan of sevens since it contains an extra seven pathways in order to complete the full circle and make it into the fortress it becomes when understood in its fullness. Thus, travelling along the fifty-six ‘pathways’ enclosed within the seven ‘walls’ of this ‘city’, the searching soul acquires a sense of the structure of the universe and all that is in it, from the absolute Oneness of God, through the celestial beings, to the mundane world of minerals, plants and animals.

The *Rahat al-‘aql* is the expression of a fully mature and deeply perceptive mind, comparable in its originality and scholarship with the best of al-Kirmani’s contemporaries, including the philosopher Ibn Sina (Avicenna). In that era of creative and profound contributions to Islamic thought, this work belongs among the most interesting of all literary productions by the Fatimid *da‘wa*, and represents one of the intellectual high points of Ismaili achievement.

Source URL: https://iis.ac.uk/library/rahat-al-aql-hamid-al-din-al-kirmani

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