

The phoenix after the Ikhwan al-Safa

The king cast an eye on the apparition and saw a parrot perched on a branch close by who watched closely the speaker from the audience; The king then said: “Who are you?”, he answered “I am the ruler of the birds of prey.” He asked: “Who sent you?” He answered: “Our king.” “Who is he?”, “The Anqa mughib”. He then asked: “From which country?” “From the mountains rising off an island in the green sea, rarely visited by ships and empty of men”. So he said: “Do describe this island”, and he answered: “Its riches are countless, it enjoys a rich soil, a pleasantly moderate temperature. It is situated below the Equator; the water of its springs and rivers is sweet, great teaks rise to the sky. There are no reeds there but rather cannas; bamboo grows instead of fescue while the animals are elephants, pigs and God only knows what other animal species”. He then asked him to describe the anqa, its nature and dispositions. He answered: “It is indeed the largest bird and the one who flies most. It has huge head, a big beak like an iron pickaxe, immense wings that spread open like sails, it carries off buffaloes or elephants with the ease of a kite swooping on a mouse”. “How does he behave?” “He is the most just and the best.”

Rass'el Ikhwān as-ssafa, II, Les Epîtres des frères de la pureté, full text in 5 volumes. Beirut-Paris Edition Ouidat, 1995, p. 234 – 235. Translation of the French by the course translator