

RISĀLAT AL-TA'ĀLĪM:
A TRANSLATION AND HISTORICAL
CONTEXTUALIZATION OF ḤASAN AL-BANNĀ'S
«LETTER OF THE TEACHINGS»

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ABSTRACT · This article provides a first edition and an annotated translation of al-Banna's *Risālat al-ta'ālīm* introduced by an analysis of the historical and ideological meaning of the text.

The *Risālat al-ta'ālīm*, most probably written in its final form in 1943 by the Muslim Brothers' founder and main ideologue Ḥasan al-Bannā, strongly reflects a crucial moment in the history of Egypt, and in that of the largest and oldest Islamist movement. At the same time, the *Risālat al-ta'ālīm* is until today the single basic ideological and creedal text that every full member of the *Jamā'at al-Ikwān al-Muslimīn* is required to know, especially as it lays down the ten pillars of the oath of allegiance (*arkān al-bay'a*) due to the Society and its leader. The «Letter of the teachings» has so far not been the object of a full scholarly translation and commentary in any Western language.

KEYWORDS · Muslim Brotherhood, Egypt, Hasan al-Banna, Modern History, Letter of Teachings.

1. INTRODUCTION¹

THE *Risālat al-ta'ālīm* or «Letter of the teachings» (hereafter: Rt),² the document translated and commented here, was written between 1940-1943 (see § 2) by Ḥasan Aḥmad 'Abd al-Raḥmān Muḥammad al-Bannā (b. Maḥmūdiyya 14 October 1906 – d. Cairo 12 February 1949). Al-Bannā was an Egyptian schoolteacher and imam best known for founding in 1928 the *Jamā'at al-ikhwān al-muslimīn*, the first modern Islamic mass movement and the largest and most influential 'Islamist' organization in the contemporary Arab world (Guazzone 1995 and 2015), known in English as the Society of the Muslim Brothers (Mitchell 1993) or simply the (Muslim) Brotherhood.

The Rt adopts the traditional Arabic prolific literary form of the «*risāla*» that consists in a medium length message of exhortation, addressed to a specific target of readers. In al-Bannā's Rt the message is addressed «to the fighters (*mujāhidīn*) within the Muslim Brothers» when that of *mujāhid* was the most advanced rank in the Brotherhood membership, as discussed below.

The Rt consists of two main parts, introduced by a few lines of presentation signed by al-Bannā and sealed by a short conclusion. The first part is entitled³ «The Pillars

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¹ This article is the product of a collaborative work, where L. Guazzone is responsible for § 1, 2 and 4 and for the translation of the Rt from the «*jihād*» pillar to the «*khatima*», while D. Pioppi is responsible for § 3, 5, 6 and for the translation from the «*muqaddima*» to the «*'amal*» pillar included.

² The Rt is also known in English as the «Epistle of the Teachings» (al-Anani 2016), the «Message of the Teachings» (Lia 1998: 174); the «Epistle of Edification» (Kandil 2015: 17) and «Instructions» (Krämer 2010).

³ The division in two parts is emphasized by subtitles that however appear to be a later addition to the text to facilitate the contemporary use of the Rt as the main compulsory educational text for the full members of the