

Studia graeco-arabica

6



2016

Editorial Board

Mohammad Ali Amir Moezzi, École Pratique des Hautes Études, Paris
Carmela Baffioni, Istituto Universitario Orientale, Napoli
Sebastian Brock, Oriental Institute, Oxford
Charles Burnett, The Warburg Institute, London
Hans Daiber, Johann Wolfgang Goethe-Universität Frankfurt a. M.
Cristina D'Ancona, Università di Pisa
Thérèse-Anne Druart, The Catholic University of America, Washington
Gerhard Endress, Ruhr-Universität Bochum
Richard Goulet, Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique, Paris
Steven Harvey, Bar-Ilan University, Jerusalem
Henri Hugonnard-Roche, École Pratique des Hautes Études, Paris
Remke Kruk, Universiteit Leiden
Concetta Luna, Scuola Normale Superiore, Pisa
Alain-Philippe Segonds (†)
Richard C. Taylor, Marquette University, Milwaukee (WI)

Staff: Elisa Coda, Cristina D'Ancona, Cleophea Ferrari, Issam Marjani, Cecilia Martini Bonadeo.

Submissions

Submissions are invited in every area of the studies on the transmission of philosophical and scientific texts from Classical Antiquity to the Middle Ages, Renaissance, and early modern times. Papers in English, French, German, Italian, and Spanish are published. Prospective authors are invited to check the *Guidelines* on the website of the journal, and to address their proposals to the Editor in chief.

Peer Review Criteria

Studia graeco-arabica follows a double-blind peer review process. Authors should avoid putting their names in headers or footers or refer to themselves in the body or notes of the article; the title and abstract alone should appear on the first page of the submitted article. All submitted articles are read by the editorial staff. Manuscripts judged to be of potential interest to our readership are sent for formal review to at least one reviewer. *Studia graeco-arabica* does not release referees' identities to authors or to other reviewers. The journal is committed to rapid editorial decisions.

Web site: <http://learningroads.cfs.unipi.it>

Service Provider: Università di Pisa, ICT - Servizi di Rete Ateneo

ISSN 2239-012X (Online)

Registration at the law court of Pisa, 18/12, November 23, 2012.

Editor in chief Cristina D'Ancona (cristina.dancona@unipi.it)

Mailing address: Dipartimento di Civiltà e Forme del Sapere, via Pasquale Paoli 15, 56126 Pisa, Italia.

© Copyright 2016 by Industrie Grafiche Pacini Editore, Pisa.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, translated, transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without prior written permission from the Publisher. The Publisher remains at the disposal of the rightholders, and is ready to make up for unintentional omissions. *Studia graeco-arabica* cannot be held responsible for the scientific opinions of the authors publishing in it.

Cover

Mašhad, Kitābhāna-i Āsitān-i Quds-i Raḡawī 300, f. 1v
Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, *grec* 1853, f. 186v

may doubt if this survey by geographical areas is effective, if the aim is that of presenting the grandiose process of transmission of learning in the Middle Ages. The last translators presented are, as we have just seen, Stephen of Pisa and Philip of Tripoli, who belong rather to the first stages of the process with which this book deals. All in all, a chronological presentation still remains the best option in my opinion, but the book is useful and its author deserves our gratitude.

CDA

Ruth Glasner, *Gersonides. A Portrait of a Fourteenth-Century Philosopher-Scientist*, Oxford U.P., Oxford 2015, 160 pp.

This concise book presents the attitude of Levi ben Gerson (1288-1344) towards the Aristotelian cosmology. The background for his reflections about the structure of the cosmos are provided by the so-called ‘Andalusian revolt’, namely the rejection of Aristotle’s description of the nature and movement of the heavens attested in the works of astronomers of the twelfth-century Iberian peninsula like al-Biṭrūḡī – a moment in the history of science on which attention was called by an essay by A.I. Sabra (“The Andalusian Revolt Against Ptolemaic Astronomy: Averroes and al-Biṭrūḡī” (in E. Mendelsihm [ed.], *Transformation and Tradition in Sciences*, 1984).

Chapter 1 (pp. 1-11) briefly discusses the application of mathematics to physics in ancient times (Ptolemy) and in the Arabic Middle Ages (Ibn al-Hayṭam and the Andalusian astronomers). Chapter 2 (pp. 14-18) outlines the life and works of Gersonides. These are subdivided into three categories: the philosophical commentaries, the biblical commentaries and the *Wars of the Lord*, i.e. a lifelong project on which Gersonides started to work in 1317, and whose astronomical part was still on its way in 1340. Chapter 3 (pp. 19-37) addresses the main question of the book: “Aristotle’s physics, cosmology and astronomy (based on the models of Eudoxus) joined to an all-encompassing harmonious structure, held together by the natural motions of bodies. Gersonides refuted the basic premises underlying Aristotle’s concept of motion, thus undermining the whole structure” (p. 19). By dismissing Aristotle’s idea that the celestial motions are governed by the homocentric structure of the universe, by going instead for the eccentric model, and finally by challenging the idea of absolute natural motion, Gersonides parted company with the basic laws of Aristotle’s cosmology. “Gersonides’ account of the natural motion of a body, as dynamically determined by the relation between its heaviness (or lightness) and that of the medium at each point of its path, undercuts the basis of the Aristotelian distinction between natural and forced motions. The regular upward motion of fire and its exceptional motion in other directions are equally due to external circumstances” (p. 25). In this chapter finds its place a discussion on the “Prehistory of the Principle of Inertia”. It is worth noting that Gersonides was well aware of his debt to John Philoponus’ attack to the Aristotelian cosmology: the relevant passage from the *Wars of the Lord* is quoted at p. 32.

Chapter 4 (pp. 39-50) discusses the Ptolemaic account of the celestial bodies as animated, and the problems Gersonides sees in it. Glasner describes Ptolemy’s transmission of motion in an eccentric universe as an “animistic model of propagation (התפשטות). The motion which originates in the world’s soul propagates (מתפשטת) in the different spheres, which are analogous to the limbs” (p. 40). The passage from Ptolemy’s *Planetary Hypotheses* that supports this claim is quoted at p. 31. One might wonder if, besides the (Platonic) idea of the whole cosmos as a living being that survives in the Hellenistic cosmologies, one should not also have recourse to the idea of a δύναμις that permeates the heavenly structure and permits the transmission of movement, like that which – more or less in the same age as that of Ptolemy – was adopted by Alexander of Aphrodisias. Be that as it may, Gersonides

states that motion is possible only by contact, and refutes the idea of propagation. Chapter 5 (pp. 51-70) deals with the epistemological premises of Gersonides' account of the physical universe and describes them in terms of "empiricism", thus paving the way to Chapter 6 (pp. 71-79), entitled "Metaphysics: doubts and reservations". The book ends with two chapters on astronomical issues: rays and the theory of vision (Chapter 7, pp. 82-98), and the place of doubt in astronomy (Chapter 8, pp. 99-103). From all this, Glasner reaches the conclusion that Gersonides "turned his back on metaphysics at the end of the early period" – namely, around 1325 (p. 16), then "gradually detached himself from the Aristotelian natural sciences during the middle period" – namely 1325-1328 – "and focused almost exclusively on the applied mathematical sciences in the late period" (p. 106). A general index, including both authors and concepts, completes the book.

EC

Ch.H. Manekin - Y.T. Langermann - H.H. Biesterfeldt (eds.), *Moritz Steinschneider. The Hebrew Translations of the Middle Ages and the Jews as Transmitters*. Vol. I. *Preface. General Remarks. Jewish Philosophers*, Springer, Dordrecht - Heidelberg - New York - London 2013 (Amsterdam Studies in Jewish Philosophy, 16), 255 pp.

As the Editors state in their Preface (pp. 1-5), and elaborate further in their Introduction ("The Genesis of *Die hebraeischen Uebersetzungen des Mittelalters*", pp. 7-36), this volume inaugurates a "larger project to translate, update, and revise, in short, to transform *HUe* for the modern reader" (p. 3). *HUe* stands for *Die hebraeischen Uebersetzungen des Mittelalters und die Juden als Dolmetscher*, one of the two masterpieces by Moritz Steinschneider (1816-1907), the other being his *Die arabische Übersetzungen aus dem Griechischen*, namely the collection of several long inventories on the transmission of scientific and philosophical works to the Arabic-speaking world published between 1889 and 1896 on the journals *Beihefte zum Centralblatt für Bibliothekswesen*, *Zeitschrift für Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft*, and *Archiv für pathologische Anatomie und Physiologie und für klinische Medizin*.

Published in 1893, *HUe* is admittedly "a work of gargantuan proportions [...] spanning over a thousand pages of closely-set type, and including approximately seven thousand footnotes. Even the long title fails to describe adequately the work's contents. For Steinschneider expanded the story of the medieval Hebrew translations and their authors to include information about all types of Hebrew adaptations, versions, commentaries, supercommentaries, etc., that pertain to philosophy, science, medicine, and belles-lettres, as well as bio-bibliographical information about their authors" (p. 1). Thus, it comes as no surprise that the Editors, in their endeavour to put at the disposal of contemporary scholarship such a wealth of information of all kinds, had to make some choices. Here is how they account for their decision: "*HUe*'s comprehensiveness and the slow but steady progress in the field, suggests that the best way to deal with ongoing research is not by replacing Steinschneider's masterpiece, but by reworking and updating it. [...] The present work is itself a *Bearbeitung*, a version or adaptation, of the section of *HUe* devoted to the Hebrew translations of Judaeo-Arabic philosophy" (p. 3). As such, it counts as "the first part of our larger project to translate, update, and revise, in short to transform, *HUe* for the modern reader" (*ibid.*).

The subdivision of the task among the three authors is presented at p. 4. Having thus stated the overall scope of their work, they move on to describe the background and steps of Steinschneider's project. This is a very interesting excursus, that includes information on the works that inspired him: Wüstenfeld's *Geschichte der Arabischen Ärzte* (1840), Flügel's *Dissertatio de arabicis scriptorum graecorum interpretibus* (1841), and Wenrich's *De auctororum Graecorum versionibus et commentariis*