

# Studia graeco-arabica

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### *Cover*

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

This collection of papers has the merit of drawing attention to the Epicurean elements used more or less explicitly by Plotinus, against the background of the circulation of Epicurean texts in 2<sup>nd</sup>-3<sup>rd</sup> century Alexandria. It also highlights the connection established in the *Enneads* between Epicureanism and Gnosticism. A limit that I see is that nothing is said of the link between Epicureanism and ancient Atomism, that is also well attested in the *Enneads*. In his refutation of the atomistic theories, Plotinus does not refer necessarily to Epicureanism: his target is atomism in general, of which Epicurean physics is for him only one of the possible versions. His use of Aristotle's arguments shows that he puts Epicurus and Democritus on equal footing. Some attention is paid to this (Ninci, pp. 134-40), but the focus of the volume is primarily on ethics. This collection of essays proves nevertheless useful for those interested in Plotinus' sources.

GG

*Ideas in Motion in Baghdad and Beyond. Philosophical and Theological Exchanges between Christians and Muslims in the Third/Ninth and Fourth/Tenth Centuries*, ed. by D. Janos, Brill, Leiden [etc.], Boston 2015 (Islamic History and Civilization. Studies and Texts, 124), IX + 479 pp.

This multi-authored volume edited by Damien Janos contains a short introduction, eleven essays in chronological order, and a bibliography. Its focus is on the philosophical inter-cultural exchanges between Christians and Muslims in the 9<sup>th</sup>-10<sup>th</sup> century Baghdad, with an eye on further developments. In the words of its editor, the volume aims "to highlight the role that the Arabic Christian philosophers played in the elaboration of the vibrant and cosmopolitan intellectual culture that flourished in medieval Baghdad" (p. 1). This role has often been studied in isolation from the development of mainstream Islamic philosophy, and this volume proposes a more dynamic approach.

Opening the volume, J.W. Watt in his "The Syriac Aristotelian Tradition and the Syro-Arabic Baghdad Philosophers" (pp. 7-43) analyses the Syriac Aristotelian tradition and the activity of the Syro-Arabic philosophers in Baghdad. This is done not from the perspective of their alleged instrumental role in transmitting the Greek texts to the subsequent Arab readership, but from that of their original philosophical agenda. Watt begins with the early, pre-Abbasid phase of Syriac philosophy and in particular from Sergius of Reš'aina, the Syriac scholar who was most influential on the later tradition. A treatment of the monastic school of Qenneshre on the Euphrates follows, then a presentation of the East Syrian patriarch Timothy I (d. 823). Watt ends his contribution examining the shared interest in Aristotelian philosophy of Christian and Muslim scholars in the 9<sup>th</sup> century through the analysis of the East Syrian Ḥunayn ibn Ishāq, and then through the work of the Baghdad Aristotelians from the 10<sup>th</sup> century onwards.

The perspective of a Christian philosophical agenda is the backdrop of the following three contributions. A. Treiger, "Palestinian Origenism and the Early History of the Maronites: In Search of the Origins of the Arabic *Theology of Aristotle*" (pp. 44-80) presents two rival working hypotheses on the theological background – either Melkite or Maronite – of 'Abd al-Masiḥ al-Ḥimṣī, the Christian translator of a selection of Plotinus' *Enneads* that forms the backbone of the so-called *Theology of Aristotle*. In her "Some Observations about the Transmission of Popular Philosophy in Egyptian Monasteries after the Islamic Conquest" (pp. 81-108) U. Pietruschka presents a vivid picture of the transmission of 'popular philosophy' (in S. Brock's terminology) in Egyptian monasteries, where Coptic literature, immediately before and afterwards the Islamic Conquest, was preserved. The Copto-Arabic and Ethiopic literature blossomed benefitting from Syriac manuscripts and thus preserving old translations: several examples are taken from the collections of gnomologies.

O. Varsányi's "The Concept of *'aql* in Early Arabic Christian Theology: A Case for the Early Interaction between Philosophy and *kalām*" (pp. 109-34) sheds light on the use of the concept of 'intellect' in 9<sup>th</sup> century Arabic Christian authors such as 'Ammār al-Baṣrī (d. ca. 840), a Nestorian theologian, Theodore Abū Qurra (d. in 820 or 825), a Melkite, and the Jacobite Ḥabīb ibn Ḥidma Abū Rā'īṭa al-Takrītī (d. probably soon after 830).

The editor of the volume D. Janos contributes an article on "Active Nature and other Striking features of Abū Bishr Mattā ibn Yūnus's Cosmology as Reconstructed from his Commentary on Aristotle's *Physics*" (pp. 135-77). Some features of the cosmology of the Nestorian Abū Biṣr Mattā ibn Yūnus can be derived from the notes (*ta'ālīq*) on Aristotle's *Physics* which survive in the Leiden manuscript *Or.* 583, and which cover books II, 3; III, 2, plus parts of books V and VII. Abū Biṣr Mattā appears to be less a mere transmitter of ancient philosophical learning than an active protagonist of the 10<sup>th</sup> century philosophical debate in Arabic. Nature is a teleological "principle of motion and rest that is internal to physical things and responsible for bringing about their actualization" (p. 149). Nature induces motion, and applies form on the material substrate to reach a given end. Departing from Aristotle, Abū Biṣr Mattā seems to ascribe a certain degree of rationality to nature and calls it an agent: "active nature" (*al-ṭabī'a al-fā'āla*). The most interesting example of "active nature" which he uses five times is that of the animal semen (p. 151). According to Janos, Mattā's original theory of nature has probably been shaped by a combination of Aristotle's zoological treatises, Alexander of Aphrodisias's works, especially the Arabic Alexander's *On the Principles of the Cosmos*, and Philoponus's *Commentary on the Physics*, parts of which are transmitted by the same manuscript.

The magisterial contribution by G. Endress, "Theology as a Rational Science: Aristotelian Philosophy, the Christian Trinity and Islamic Monotheism in the Thought of Yaḥyā ibn 'Adī" (pp. 221-52) is the first of four papers devoted to another protagonist of the 10<sup>th</sup> century philosophical debate: the Nestorian Yaḥyā ibn 'Adī (d. 974). Endress presents Yaḥyā ibn 'Adī's philosophical project which, following the teaching of Abū Biṣr Mattā, considers the Aristotelian science of demonstration, with its criticism of non-demonstrative procedures, as the universal criterion of rational discourse. On this basis Yaḥyā ibn 'Adī founded his epistemology, designing "a universal theology, monotheist and creationist, a theology claiming the rank of rational science, supported by apodictic proofs and refuting the claims of his critics – the theologians of the *kalām* – with the weapons of logic" (p. 227). In order to discuss Yaḥyā ibn 'Adī's account of the first principle of his rational theology, Endress analyses the treatise *On the Affirmation of the [divine] Unity*, which forms also the object of O. Lizzini's contribution (see below). In this treatise, Yaḥyā ibn 'Adī presents an implicit critique of the Muslim creed, declaring the absolute unity (*al-tawḥīd*) of God. The aim of the treatise is both theological (to account for God's nature) and apologetic (to defend the Christian account of God from the charge of polytheism). To exemplify Yaḥyā ibn 'Adī's logical refutation of the Muslim theologians, Endress presents Yaḥyā ibn 'Adī's discussion of the favoured topoi of his Aṣ'arite contemporaries. Yaḥyā ibn 'Adī wants to establish the *contingentia futura* against those who, invoking the prescience and omnipotence of God, deny future contingency; he refutes the human 'acquisition' (*iktisāb*) of deeds whose origin is in reality only God, a doctrine that according to Yaḥyā ibn 'Adī leads to contradictions. Finally, Endress discusses Yaḥyā ibn 'Adī's critique of atomism based on Aristotle's *Physics*, which is preserved in three treatises edited by the same scholar in 1984, and in a fourth one, extant in the ms. Tehran, Madrasa-yi Marwī 19.

This treatise is edited and translated by D. Bennett and R. Wisnovsky: "A Newly Discovered Yaḥyā ibn 'Adī Treatise against Atomism" (pp. 298-311). Yaḥyā ibn 'Adī depends on Aristotle's *Physics*, but the question of atomism has also theological implications: atomism was famously one of the solutions proposed by the Muslim theologians to explain God's omnipotence and omniscience. Yaḥyā

ibn 'Adī's arguments insist on the fact that spatial extension presupposes elementary magnitudes, with ends or extremities that can meet, get into contact, or unite. Indivisibles have no parts and no extremities that could join, thus it is impossible that they give rise to continuous magnitudes as evidently the bodies are.

As mentioned above, another study is devoted to this author, by O. Lizzini: "What Does *Tawḥīd* Mean? Yaḥyā ibn 'Adī's *Treatise on the Affirmation of the Unity of God between Philosophy and Theology*" (pp. 253-80). The distinction of the two meanings of the label "unity", namely "oneness" and "uniqueness" lies at the core of this short treatise. Yaḥyā ibn 'Adī enumerates the various meanings of the term 'one', and analyses the theological implications of this notion in order to obtain "a Trinitarian formulation of divine unity, which, in contrast to the absolute doctrine of Islam, reveals a relative or 'modulated' understanding of monotheism" (p. 257).

C. Baffioni's chapter "Movement as 'Discrete': Yaḥyā ibn 'Adī as a Source for the Iḥwān al-Ṣafā'?" (pp. 281-97) sheds light on the unusual representation of movement in the well-known Encyclopedia. Two passages from Epistle 7 and 11 of the *Rasā'il Iḥwān al-Ṣafā'* are analysed, where line, surface, solid space and time are considered the species of continuum, and number and motion are given as examples of discrete quantities. In Aristotle's *Physics*, motion is considered as a continuum, and continuous motion is stated to exist before all other movements; it is local, circular, perpetual and without interruption, while rectilinear motion cannot be continuous, being produced by a single motionless agent in a single moving thing, which is a dimensional magnitude. Baffioni maintains that the Iḥwān al-Ṣafā' departed from Aristotle probably under the influence of Ibrāhīm al-Nazzām (d. 835 or 845) a Mu'tazilite theologian and poet, and she wonders whether the Iḥwān al-Ṣafā' did also influenced the much later Yaḥyā ibn 'Adī, with his idea of 'instant' in motion.

There are only two papers that do not concern the Arabic Christian tradition, and one is Ph. Vallat's "Between Hellenism, Islam, and Christianity: Abū Bakr al-Rāzī and his Controversies with Contemporary Mu'tazilite Theologians as Reported by the Ash'arite Theologian and Philosopher Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī" (pp. 178-220). Some years ago, M. Rashed collected from the *Advanced Investigations into Theology*, a nine-volume encyclopaedic theological work by Faḥr al-Dīn al-Rāzī (d. 1209), some fragments in which Abū Bakr al-Rāzī (d. 925) is quoted by name. These fragments are taken from Abū Bakr al-Rāzī's *Divine Science* and from one of the epistles that the latter wrote in his long controversy with Abū l-Qāsim al-Balḥī, a Mu'tazilite theologian who died in 933. Vallat collects new textual evidence (a set of 19 fragments of which he offers the translation and commentary) where Faḥr al-Dīn al-Rāzī seems to quote Abū Bakr al-Rāzī without naming him. According to Vallat, they contain Abū Bakr's refutation of the very idea of Quranic prophecy, and maintain that reason is self sufficient for all that ought to be known for human beings to reach salvation, a tenet that makes prophecy superfluous.

The last contribution, D. Twetten's long article "Aristotelian Cosmology and Causality in Classical Arabic Philosophy and its Greek Background" (pp. 312-412), is devoted to the problem of how God exerts causation in creating the world in Arabic-Islamic philosophy of the classical age. Twetten traces the continuity between late ancient Greek and Arabic cosmologies: both transformed Aristotle's unmoved mover to fit with Plato's *Timaeus* and *Parmenides*, the crowning part of the Neoplatonic curriculum. Ammonius and Simplicius were the first to transform the prime mover into a demiurgical efficient cause of the existence of the heavens, labelled here an "onto-poietik" cause: "a cause that efficiently produces what is below it from eternity, without presupposing even matter" (p. 408). They considered the prime mover the first of the separate intellects, which is between the One and the Soul and moves the ensouled spheres. In the Christian Neoplatonism of Philoponus and of the pseudo-Dionysius the One and the prime mover were identified with God, who creates the

cosmos timelessly and without change with nothing presupposed, yet at a first moment in time. Thus the Arabic philosophers inherited two different paradigms of God's creation. According to the first, God is the creator of a cosmos possessing a first moment in time. According to the second, God is an "onto-poietik" eternalist first cause. Twetten's outline of the history of Arabic classical cosmology draws "a shift from the creationist 'Aristotle' of al-Kindī to the derivationist 'Aristotle' of the mature al-Fārābī and the effort at getting at the true Aristotle and the true Aristotelian philosophy results, for example, not only in Maimonides's denial of creationism to Aristotle, but also in Averroes's denial of *ontopoiesis*" (p. 408).

This provoking volume draws a picture of great interest, that certainly will lead to a rethinking of the role of Christian intellectuals from the 6<sup>th</sup> to the 10<sup>th</sup> centuries in the development of Arabic-Islamic thought.

CMB

*Trajectoires européennes du Secretum secretorum du Pseudo-Aristote (XIII<sup>e</sup>-XVI<sup>e</sup> siècle)*, sous la direction de C. Gaullier-Bougassas, M. Bridges et J.-Y. Tilliette, Brepols, Turnhout 2015 (Alexander Redivivus, 6), 513 pp.

W.F. Ryan and C.B. Schmitt edited in 1982 a collection of essays entitled *Pseudo-Aristotle. The Secret of Secrets. Sources and Influences* (The Warburg Institute, London), and this volume resumes the task of exploring the dissemination of one of the most famous among the pseudo-Aristotelian works in early modern Europe. The three editors C. Gaullier-Bougassas, M. Bridges, and J.-Y. Tilliette open this multi-authored volume by a general introduction entitled "Cheminements culturels et métamorphoses d'un texte aussi célèbre qu'énigmatique" (pp. 5-25), where the basic information on the text is given, and the rationale behind this collection of studies is presented. The *Secretum secretorum* is the Latin version of the Arabic *Sirr al-asrār*, "une œuvre originale de la culture arabe, écrite à partir d'influences tant grecques qu'arabes, perses et indiennes" (p. 9), but allegedly recording the teaching imparted by Aristotle to his pupil Alexander in epistolary form. Both the *Sirr al-asrār* and its Latin version feature "un mélange, étrange à nos yeux modernes, de réflexions philosophiques, de développements scientifiques, tantôt très obscurs tantôt très concrets, et de conseils pratiques, pour une vision finalement très pragmatique du pouvoir, dont la finalité essentielle est la recherche de la toute-puissance et de la gloire" (p. 8). Since its translation into Latin first by John of Seville (first half of the 12<sup>th</sup> century) and then by Philip of Tripoli (first half of the 13<sup>th</sup> century), this text has been widespread, as attested by more than 150 Latin manuscripts (p. 15). The focus of the present collection of essays is on the later transmission: "Notre choix a été de consacrer le présent volume aux traductions et aux adaptations en langues vernaculaires du *Sirr al-asrār*, et les analyses réunies élargissent le champ linguistique aux domaines allemand, anglais, écossais, tchèque, italien et espagnol (...). Pour le monde slave, elles renouvellent la réflexion sur l'influence littéraire et politique de l'adaptation russe du *Secret des secrets*" (pp. 21-22).

S. Williams, "Two Independent Textual Traditions? The Pseudo-Aristotelian *Secret of Secrets* and the Alexander Legend" (pp. 27-54) challenges G. Cary's claim in his 1956 book on *The Medieval Alexander* that the *Secretum secretorum* was relatively unimportant on the creation of the medieval legend of Alexander. Williams collects several data from a number of manuscripts and from authors of the 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> centuries, coming to the conclusion that Cary's statement is true only in part: "The *Secret of Secrets* was effectively unavailable during the crucial first stage of the Alexander's Legend's development in Western Europe – the twelfth and