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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

M. Zonta, *Il Commento medio di Averroè alla Metafisica di Aristotele nella tradizione ebraica. Edizione delle versioni ebraiche medievali di Zerahyah Hen e di Qalonymos ben Qalonymos con introduzione storica e filologica*, I-II, T. 3, Pavia U.P. Pavia 2011 (Editoria scientifica), vol. I, 1-149 + IX pp., vol. II t. 1, 1-174 + IV pp., vol. II t. 2, 175-351 + IV pp.

It is with deep sorrow that we record the demise of Mauro Zonta, one of the leading figures of the History of Medieval Hebrew Thought in our generation. Born in Pavia in 1968, he obtained his M.A. in Classical Literature in 1991 at the University of his native city. Since the beginning of his scholarly activity Zonta showed his prodigious capacities in reading and analysing Medieval Hebrew philosophical works. This he did first by translating into Italian the Hebrew dictionary of philosophical terms that features at the beginning of Falaquera's *Opinions of the Philosophers*,¹ as well as in a seminal article on the Hebrew translation of Themistius' paraphrase of the *De Caelo*.²

In 1995 Zonta got his Ph.D. in Hebrew Studies at the University of Turin, under the guidance of Bruno Chiesa and Giuliano Tamani. He soon began to display his skills in Classics and Oriental Studies in his PhD thesis, published in the book reviewed here: a complete study of Averroes' *Middle Commentary* on Aristotle's *Metaphysics* as transmitted in the two Hebrew versions of Zerahya Hen, towards the end of the 13th century, and of Qalonymos ben Qalonymos, in the first decades of the 14th century. Together with two subsequent books,³ the study of the Hebrew versions of Averroes' *Middle Commentary* on the *Metaphysics* marked the start of his teaching career. He also carried on a survey of the manuscripts of the Hebrew translations, commentaries, and *compendia* of the *Corpus Aristotelicum* held in Italian libraries. In 1998 Zonta was appointed Associate Professor of History of Medieval Hebrew Philosophy at the University of Rome "La Sapienza". Above all, we owe Mauro Zonta the first complete Italian translation of the Judaeo-Arabic version of Maimonides' *Guide of the Perplexed*.⁴ In recent times the study of Medieval Hebrew Philosophy in Italy has experienced a powerful flowering on account to a large extent of Zonta's own books, translations, and countless contributions.

The book reviewed here is, in his own words (vol. 1, p. IX) an up-to-date and revised version of his PhD thesis mentioned above, in two volumes. Volume one is a historico-philological introduction to the editions of the Arabic-into-Hebrew versions of Averroes' *Middle Commentary* on Aristotle's *Metaphysics* by Zerahya Hen and Qalonymos ben Qalonymos, with three appendices, among which an Italian translation with commentary of the first two books of Averroes' commentary (pp. 80-121). Volume two, in two tomes, includes the critical edition of Zerahya's version, faced with a provisional edition of Qalonymos'. Even taking into account that only one of the two translations is edited properly speaking, namely that of Zerahya, it is beyond doubt that this work is ground-breaking.

¹ Silvio Zamorani Editore, Torino 1992.

² "Hebraica Veritas: Temistio, Parafrasi del *De Coelo*. Tradizione e critica del testo", *Atheneum* 82 (1994), pp. 403-28.

³ *La filosofia antica nel Medioevo ebraico* (Paideia, Brescia 1996) [selected reviews: G. Tamani, *Annali di Ca' Foscari* 35.3 s.or. 27 (1996), pp. 507-11; J. Habbi, *Orientalia Christiana Periodica* 62 (1996), pp. 473-4; R. Brague, *Archives de Philosophie* 61 (1998), *Bullettin de philosophie médiévale* II, pp. 25-7; V. Mauro, *Studi Medievali*, s. III, a. 39 (1998), pp. 509-10; C. Baffioni, *Annali dell'Istituto Universitario Orientale* 57 (1997), pp. 587-8; P. Morpurgo, *Rassegna mensile di Israel* 64 (1998), pp. 171-4; A.L. Ivry, *The Jewish Quarterly Review* 90 (1999), pp. 207-8]; and *Aristoteles Hebraicus*, Supernova, Venezia 1997, co-edited with G. Tamani [selected reviews: L. Lanza, *Studi medievali*, s. III, 40 (1999), pp. 490-1; J.-P. Rothschild, *Revue des Études Juives* 158 (1999), 513-15; O. Leaman, *Journal of Semitic Studies* 45 (2000), pp. 198-9].

⁴ Utet, Torino 2003 [selected reviews: S.J. Sierra, *Annali di storia dell'esegesi* 20 (2003), pp. 571-3; R. Gatti, *Eidos* 2.1 (2003), pp. 115-16; M. Campanini, *Rivista di storia della filosofia* 59 (2004), pp. 829-32; S. Di Donato, *Revue des Études Juives* 164 (2005), pp. 553-8; M. Perani, *Materia giudaica* 12.1-2 (2007), pp. 315-17].

Zonta has granted access to Averroes' lost *Middle Commentary* on the *Metaphysics* in both the Hebrew versions, that were the work of translators active in different times and places. It is especially sad that Zonta's critical edition with the English translation of Qalonymos' version, planned for the series 'Averroes Hebraicus', was still in preparation. Among the many studies he initiated, this will remain the most regrettably unpublished.

The translation of Aristotle's *Metaphysics* into Arabic was momentous for the intellectual elite of the Arabic-speaking world, from the time of its earliest translation done on the demand of al-Kindī in early 'Abbāsīd times to later periods. In the Muslim West, Averroes (d. 1198 A. D.) wrote on the *Metaphysics* all the three kinds of 'commentary'⁵ that he had decided to devote to the five key texts of Aristotle's system: the *Posterior Analytics*, *Physics*, *De Caelo*, *De Anima*, and indeed the *Metaphysics*.⁶ As is well known, we owe our knowledge of the Arabic *Metaphysics*, in itself lost to us, to Averroes' *Tafsīr Mā ba'd al-ṭabī'a*. Thanks to this commentary where the lemmata are quoted *in extenso*, one can read the Arabic version of the *Metaphysics* almost in its entirety: only books *Kappa*, *Mu*, and *Nu* are missing from Averroes' commentary. One of his latest works, the commentary has come down to us in the MS Leiden, Universiteitsbibliotheek, Or. 2074 (cod. arab. 1692), and has been edited between 1938 and 1952 by the Jesuite Father Maurice Bouyges.⁷ The sort of Averroes' *Middle Commentary* was different. This paraphrase⁸ was written by Averroes in 1174, but later

⁵ On the three kinds of 'commentary' to Aristotle's works see *Averroës. Middle Commentary on Aristotle's De Anima. A Critical Edition of the Arabic text with English Translation, Notes, and Introduction* by A.L. Ivry, Brigham Young U.P., Provo, Utah 2002, pp. XIII-XIV: "These formats are commonly distinguished in English as the 'long', 'middle', and 'short' commentaries. Beyond indicating their sizes relatively to one another, these designations do little to explain the distinctive nature of each kind of commentary for all three types of compositions. The short commentaries, also called epitomes, are particularly unsuited for what is traditionally considered as 'commentary', since these are often more like summaries of the field as well as synopses of the text in question. In these epitomes, Averroës draws on post-Aristotelian ideas as heavily as on Aristotle's own views, thematizing the subject without necessarily following the order of Aristotle's own presentation and freely offering his own views of the issues discussed. This awareness of the post-Aristotelian tradition is also evident in Averroës' long commentaries. These appropriately named works reproduce every word of Aristotle's own text and comment at considerable length on nearly every sentence in them. (...) Averroës' approach in his middle commentaries differs from that of both the short and long commentaries (...) Aristotle's text is again featured, but not in its entirety. (...) Moreover, Averroës goes to great length to disentangle Aristotle from his commentators. He refrains for the most part from discussing the views of the commentators, which are given in the corresponding long commentary, and refrains as well from explicitly presenting his own responses to these views. Instead, he concentrates on presenting Aristotle's text, shorn to a large extent of the embellishments, entailments, and problems with which the long commentary abounds and to which the short commentary often refers".

⁶ As G. Endress has it, "Le projet d'Averroës conduisit au renouveau du genre du commentaire, élaboré selon le procédé des anciens et développé en plusieurs étapes. Il fut abordé dans la ligne modeste des épitomés d'al-Farābī et d'al-Ġazālī, reçus et lus dans l'Andalousie par ceux qui maintenaient l'herméneutique rationnelle dans le discours religieux. Il fut révisé à l'occasion du tournant radical provoqué par la critique de Ġazālī (...); Ibn Rušd jugea corrompu l'aristotélisme d'Ibn Sīnā, qui avait succombé aux attaques d'al-Gazālī. Enfin, dernière étape du projet et résultat d'un cheminement personnel et d'une longue lutte spirituelle, la série des cinq Grands Commentaires firent du texte d'Aristote et de son explication littérale le fondement du savoir": see G. Endress, "Le projet d'Averroës", in *Averroës and the Aristotelian Tradition. Sources, Constitution and Reception of the Philosophy of Ibn Rušd (1126-1198)*. Proceedings of the Fourth Symposium Averroicum (Cologne 1996) ed. by G. Endress and J.A. Aertsen with the assistance of K. Braun, Brill, Leiden [etc.] 1999 (Islamic Philosophy, Theology and Science. Texts and Studies, 31), pp. 4-31, here p. 8.

⁷ In the series *Bibliotheca Arabica Scholasticorum* (Série arabe, V.I, V.II, VI, VII) – available online at <http://learnin-groads.cfs.unipi.it/bibliotheca-arabica-scholasticorum-online> (consulted July 2017).

⁸ Also to the *Middle Commentary* on the *Metaphysics* applies what Ivry says (see above n. 5) apropos the *Middle Commentary* on the *De Anima*: "Averroës highlights certain sentences from an Aristotelian passage, quoting some of them but paraphrasing more, summarizing the text" (p. XIV).

on he revised his work; the Arabic original is lost to us, but two medieval Arabic-into-Hebrew versions survive: one by Zeraḥya Ḥen, made in Rome in 1284, and another by Qalonymos ben Qalonymos, probably made in Arles in 1317. Despite the great importance of this text for the history of medieval philosophy, both of these Hebrew versions remained unpublished until Zonta's edition. Above all he deserves the perennial gratitude of those working in the field for having edited such an interesting piece of the Graeco-Arabic legacy first in Muslim Spain, and then in the learned Jewish communities of Rome and Provence.

Chapters 1 to 3 of Volume I (pp. 1-45) contain a detailed study of the history of the tradition of the two extant Hebrew versions of Averroes' *Middle Commentary* on the *Metaphysics*. An in-depth Introduction sums up and reworks several of Zonta's own previous contributions devoted to the topic.⁹ Chapter 4 (pp. 45-64) counts as the philological introduction and includes the description of the manuscripts. As for Zeraḥya's translation (pp. 45-54), two of the five preserved manuscripts are of the highest value for Zonta: the MS Torino, Biblioteca Nazionale Universitaria, A.II.13 (*olim* Peyron 33),¹⁰ dated 1284, and the MS Cambridge, Cambridge University Library, *Add.* 173, dated 1289. The first is the most ancient dated manuscript of this translation, copied in all likelihood during the lifetime of Zeraḥya himself (pp. 45-7), and counts for Zonta as the starting point of the entire manuscript tradition (p. 48). Since it was seriously damaged during the fire of the Turin library in 1904, the basic source of the edition of Zeraḥya's translation is the Cambridge manuscript, which Zonta considers to be a direct copy of the former (pp. 49-50). As I have said before, the critical edition of Zeraḥya's translation and the provisional edition of Qalonymos' one are facing in this volume (pp. 53-64). The former translation survives in twenty manuscripts; the text published here is established on the basis of two of them: Ms. Milano, Biblioteca Ambrosiana D 85 sup. (*olim* Bernheimer 73) undated (XV cent.), and Parma, Biblioteca Palatina parmense 2613 (*olim* De Rossi 1308) dated 1346, the most ancient dated manuscript of this work.¹¹ Chapter 5 is devoted to Zeraḥya's terminology and translation technique (pp. 64-73). Zonta offers here the first systematic study of Zeraḥya's philosophical vocabulary, and explores the technicalities of his Arabic-into-Hebrew translation. A comparison could perhaps be done of Zonta's impressive analysis with the annotations that Samuel Landauer, in the first years of the 20th century, listed in the critical apparatus of his edition of Zeraḥya's version of the *Paraphrase* of the *De Caelo* by Themistius.¹² Chapter 6 concludes the philological introduction and provides the criteria of the edition.¹³ Volume two includes the about seven hundred page editions of the two mentioned

⁹ *La filosofia antica nel medioevo ebraico* see above n. 3, in part. pp. 238ff.; ii) "Il commento medio di Averroè alla *Metafisica* nella tradizione ebraica: alcuni problemi testuali" (in C. Baffioni, *Averroes and the Aristotelian Heritage*, Guida, Napoli 2004, pp. 189-99); iii) "A case of Author's Variant Readings and the Textual History of Averroes' *Middle Commentary* on Aristotle's *Metaphysics*", in O. Weijers - J. Hamesse, *Écriture et réécriture des textes philosophiques médiévaux*, Brepols, Turnhout 2006, pp. 465-83; iv) "The Revision of Qalonymos ben Qalonymos's Medieval Hebrew Version of Averroes' *Middle Commentary* on Aristotle's *Metaphysics*", *Documenti e studi sulla tradizione filosofia medievale* 21 (2010), pp. 457-73.

¹⁰ Zonta's different statements concerning the identity of the scribe of this ms testify his modesty, being ready, if need be, to revise his own opinions.

¹¹ For Book VI only, these mss. are compared with the ms. Harvard, Houghton Library, Hebrew 41.

¹² Themistii in *libros Aristotelis De Caelo paraphrasis hebraice et latine*, ed. S. Landauer, Reimer, Berlin 1902 (CAGV.4).

¹³ In the critical apparatus of the edition of Zeraḥya's translation are registered two lines of variant reading, including those of Zeraḥya's translation, and those of Qalonymos ben Qalonymos's one as found in the two manuscripts take into consideration by the A. in his edition of the text. On this point see the review by Y. Halper, *Philosophy East and West* 63.1 (2013), pp. 96-9, who remarks also other points (such as passages written in Hebrew in

Hebrew translations. Textual discrepancies between the two translations are noted in the apparatus of Zerahya's translation.

Zonta's edition of Averroes' *Middle Commentary* on the *Metaphysics* was published in 2011 and since then this monumental work has gained firm footing in the scholarship of the field. There is nothing that I can add to its high value: this painstaking research has put at our disposal a crucial text whose role in Averroes' thought was accessible before only to the admittedly few who were capable of reading the Hebrew manuscripts that preserved it for centuries. Let me emphasize once again that Averroes' *Middle Commentary* on the *Metaphysics* is not only lost in its Arabic original, but has not been translated into Latin either.¹⁴ My description of Zonta's work is meant to sadly celebrate his tireless work and lasting contribution for generations to come.

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reverse order, or holdovers for earlier publications – *ibid.*, pp. 98-9). Nevertheless, these do not detract the usefulness of Zonta's book.

¹⁴ Cf. G. Endress, "Averrois Opera. A Bibliography of Editions and Contributions to the Text", in *Averroes and the Aristotelian Tradition* (above, n. 6), pp. 339-81, here p. 364.