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PETER ADAMSON AND RICHARD C. TAYLOR

1 Introduction

The history of philosophy in Arabic goes back almost as far as Islam itself. Philosophically interesting theological disputes were underway within two centuries of the founding of Islam in 622 C.E. At the same time some important scientific, medical, and philosophical texts from the Greek tradition were being studied and used in the Syriac tradition, with Aristotelian logic being employed in theological debates. By the third century of the Muslim calendar (the ninth century C.E.), a great translation movement centered in Baghdad was in full bloom. In response, Muslim, Christian, and Jewish philosophers writing in Arabic began to make important contributions to a tradition of philosophizing that continues alive to the present day. Debates and contests on logic, grammar, theology, and philosophy by Muslims, Christians, and Jews took place at the caliphal court. The structure and foundation of the cosmos, the natures of entities in the physical world, the relation of human beings to the transcendent divine, the principles of metaphysics, the nature of logic and the foundations of epistemology, and the pursuit of the good life in ethics – in sum, the traditional issues of philosophy, old wine, albeit in new skins – were debated with intensity, originality, and penetrating insight.

This was the beginning of what one might call the classical or formative period of philosophy in Arabic, which goes from the ninth to the twelfth centuries C.E. During this period, authors working in Arabic received and reinterpreted the philosophical inheritance of the Greeks, especially Aristotle. This process culminated at the end of the classical period with the massive body of commentaries on Aristotle by Averroes. But the formative period involves more than just the continuation of the Greek philosophical tradition. Most

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important for the later Islamic tradition was the towering achievement of Avicenna. He was one of many thinkers to grapple with the ideas put forward by the tradition of theology in Islam (*'ilm al-kalām*). Post-classical philosophy in Arabic would in turn be dominated by the need to respond both to Avicenna and to the *kalām* tradition. While Averroes' project of explicating and exploiting the works of Aristotle continued in Latin and Hebrew, other concerns drove the development of post-classical philosophical inquiry.

In fact interesting philosophical ideas have appeared in the Islamic world across a wide range of traditions and over a period of many centuries. There is much of philosophical interest not only in the obviously "philosophical" writings of authors like Avicenna, and in the complex tradition of *kalām*, but also in works on the principles of jurisprudence (*'uṣūl al-fiqh*), Qur'ānic commentary, the natural sciences, certain literary (*adab*) works that are relevant to ethics, contemporary political philosophy, and so on. It goes without saying that the present volume cannot hope to cover such a broad range of topics. For reasons made clear below, this *Companion* focuses on the formative, classical period of philosophy in Arabic, though we hope to convey a sense of the richness and complexity of the tradition as a whole. In the present volume we take account especially of three sorts of complexity that confront any student of the classical period: the nature of the philosophical corpus received in the Arabic-speaking world, the nature of Arabic philosophy in the classical period itself, and the classical period as a foundation for a continuous indigenous tradition of later philosophy.

THE GREEK INHERITANCE

One should not suppose that early Arabic philosophers, any more than scholastic Christian philosophers, worked primarily through a direct and independent reading of Aristotle. The most obvious reason is that the outstanding "Aristotelian" philosophers in Islam all had to read Aristotle in translation. This was made possible by the aforementioned translation movement in the eighth–tenth centuries C.E., which in a short space of time rendered a vast array of Greek scientific and philosophical works into Arabic. It was made possible by, among other things, the previous tradition of translation and intellectual endeavor in Syriac, the ideologically motivated support

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of the ʿAbbāsid caliphs, and, at a more mundane level, the invention of paper.[1] The translation movement was the single most important impetus and determinant for the Arabic philosophical tradition. It began to establish the technical vocabulary that would be used (including the word *falsafa* itself, which is a calque from the Greek *philosophia*) and, like the Latin translation movement centuries later, it set forth the challenge of interpreting a Greek tradition that included much more than just Aristotle. The authors of the classical period also read commentaries on Aristotle and independent works by Neoplatonists like Plotinus and Proclus, as well as Greek science (especially medicine, but including a wide range of sciences from physics to astrology).

We hope to draw attention to the decisive impact of the translation movement by calling this a companion to Arabic, and not Islamic, philosophy. It is *Arabic* philosophy because it is philosophy that begins with the rendering of Greek thought, in all its complexity, into the Arabic language. Note that it is not "Arab" philosophy: few of the figures dealt with here were ethnically Arabs, a notable exception being al-Kindī, who was called the "philosopher of the Arabs" precisely because he was unusual in this regard. Rather, philosophy spread with the Arabic language itself throughout the lands of the expanding Islamic empire.

Related to this are two more reasons why it is sensible to call the tradition "Arabic" and not "Islamic" philosophy. First, many of those involved were in fact Christians or Jews. Some of the most important translators (above all Ḥunayn b. Isḥāq and his son) were Christians, as were such philosophers as Abū Bishr Mattā and Yaḥyā b. ʿAdī, who along with the Muslim al-Fārābī were pivotal figures in the Baghdad Peripatetic movement of the tenth century C.E. The intertwining of the Jewish and Islamic philosophical traditions begins with ninth–tenth century philosophers like Isaac Israeli and Saadia Gaon, and is evident in the work of the famous Maimonides (see chapter 16).

Second, certain philosophers of the formative period, like al-Kindī, al-Fārābī, and Averroes, were interested primarily in coming to grips with the texts made available in the translation movement, rather than with putting forward a properly "Islamic" philosophy. This is not to minimize the importance of Islam for any of the figures dealt with in this volume: even the Aristotelian commentator *par excellence* Averroes, who was after all a judge and expert on Islamic

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law, dealt explicitly with the relationship between *falsafa* and Islam. And once Avicenna's philosophy becomes absorbed into the Islamic *kalām* tradition, we can point to many self-consciously "Islamic" philosophers. Still the term "Arabic" philosophy identifies a philosophical tradition that has its origins in the translation movement.[2] It is important to pay attention to the motives and procedures of this movement – which texts were translated, and why? How were they altered in translation? – rather than assuming the relatively straightforward access to the Greek tradition we now take for granted. Some sense of this complex and often rather technical set of issues is conveyed below (chapters 2 and 3).

THE CLASSICAL PERIOD

Arabic philosophy in the formative classical period was not exclusively, or even always primarily, "Aristotelian." We can certainly identify a dominantly Peripatetic tradition within the classical period. It began in the tenth century C.E. with the school of the aforementioned Abū Bishr Mattā in Baghdad, and al-Fārābī was its first great representative. This tradition tended to see the practice of philosophy as the task of explicating the works of Aristotle, and thus reflected the Greek commentary tradition, especially the commentaries produced by the Neoplatonic school at Alexandria. Al-Fārābī imitated them in writing his own commentaries on Aristotle. His lead was followed by the philosophers in Muslim Spain, or Andalusia (see chapter 8), and the Arabic Peripatetic tradition reaches its apex in the work of Averroes (chapter 9).

Yet the Greek inheritance included not only Aristotle and his commentators, but also original works by Neoplatonists. In fact it is impossible to draw a firm line between the impact of Aristotelianism and the impact of Neoplatonism on Arabic philosophy. It is customary to mention in this regard the so-called *Theology of Aristotle*, which is in fact an interpretive paraphrase of the *Enneads* of Plotinus. But even more important was the already well-established Neoplatonism of the Aristotelian tradition itself: with the exception of Alexander of Aphrodisias, all the important Greek commentators on Aristotle were Neoplatonists. Neoplatonism was thus a major force in Arabic philosophy, and we have accordingly emphasized it

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in the present volume. Chapters below show that the philosophical curriculum inherited by the Arabic tradition was itself an artifact of Neoplatonism (chapter 2), as well as how al-Fārābī made use of this curriculum (chapter 4). A chapter on al-Kindī emphasizes the influence of the Neoplatonists in early Arabic thought (chapter 3), while its later manifestations are made clear in the chapters on the Ismā'īlīs, Avicenna, Suhrawardī, and on Ibn 'Arabī and Mulla Ṣadrā (chapters 5, 6, 10, 11).

A third important strand of the classical tradition is the impact of *kalām* on Arabic philosophical works. This too begins already with al-Kindī. And even those philosophers (al-Fārābī and Averroes) who were dismissive of *kalām* as, at best, a rhetorical or dialectical version of *falsafa*, felt the need to respond to *kalām* authors. They were provoked by the independent ideas of the *mutakallimūn*: an example of the productive interchange between *falsafa* and *kalām* can be found here regarding physics (chapter 14). And they were provoked by direct attacks on the philosophical tradition from the *kalām* viewpoint. In this regard the outstanding figure is al-Ghazālī, still one of the great theological authorities in Islam, and of particular interest to us for both his adoption and his critique of philosophical ideas (chapter 7). If not for space restrictions, one could certainly have expanded this volume to include other authors who were critical of the *falsafa* tradition, such as Ibn Taymiyya. Several additional chapters would perhaps have been needed to do any justice to the philosophical significance of *kalām* in its own right.[3] But some of the main themes, for example the problems of divine attributes and human freedom, are explored here in discussing the reaction of philosophers to *mutakallimūn*.

All these factors are important for understanding the most important achievement of the classical period: the self-consciously original system of Avicenna, the greatest philosopher in this tradition. In recognition of this we have here devoted a double-length chapter to his thought (chapter 6). It shows that Avicenna needs to be understood in the context of the classical period as we have described it: he is heir to the Neoplatonic tradition in his understanding of Aristotle, and engages directly with problematics from the *kalām* tradition as well. Indeed, one way of viewing Arabic philosophy is as the tradition that leads up to and stems from the work of Avicenna. Like Kant in

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the German tradition or Plato and Aristotle in the Greek tradition, Avicenna significantly influenced everything that came after him in the Arabic tradition.

THE POST-AVICENNIAN TRADITION

Admittedly, defining the Arabic philosophical tradition in this way has the disadvantage that it tends to obscure those aspects of earlier Arabic philosophy that Avicenna pointedly ignored.[4] It is however a very useful way to understand later Arabic philosophy. From the time of Avicenna's death in the eleventh century, all philosophical work of note in Arabic responded to him, often critically. We have already alluded to the critiques leveled from the *kalām* point of view. Equally, Averroes criticized him from an Aristotelian point of view, though Avicenna was a major influence for other Andalusians like Ibn Ṭufayl (see chapter 8). An important development of the late classical period was yet another critique and adaptation of Avicenna: the idiosyncratic thought of Suhrawardī, which inaugurated the tradition known as Illuminationism (chapter 10).

The systems of Avicenna and Suhrawardī, an ongoing tradition of *kalām*, and the mysticism of figures like Ibn 'Arabī provided the major impetus to thinkers of the post-classical era. At this point the translation movement was no longer the immediate spur to philosophical reflection; this was rather provided by indigenous Muslim authors. The post-classical era presents us with a forbidding corpus of philosophical work, much of it unedited and unstudied by Western scholars. In the present volume it has been possible only to scratch the surface of this corpus, focusing on a few aspects of the later tradition that are relatively accessible, that is, supported by further secondary literature and some editions and translations. We hope that, by devoting some attention to these later developments, we may encourage the reader to inquire further into this period. It has been remarked that the "Golden Age" of Arabic philosophy could be said to begin only in the *post*-Avicennian era, with a vast number of thinkers who commented or at least drew on Avicenna's works.[5] A companion to Arabic philosophy might look much different once this material is more fully understood. For now, we have devoted particular attention to the reception of Avicenna. Emphasis is placed on Avicenna's inheritance as well as his sources (chapter 6). Another

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chapter takes up the contentious issue of whether the strand of later Avicennism represented by the great Persian thinker Mulla Ṣadrā can really be called "philosophical," given the mystical aspects of Ṣadrā's system (chapter 11). It shows that we can understand mysticism as the practical complement of Ṣadrā's quite technical and theoretical metaphysical reflections. The last chapter takes our historical narrative down to the present, tracing the themes of later Arabic and Persian philosophy from their roots in Illuminationism and Ṣadrā's version of the Avicennian system (chapter 19). Together, chapters 10, 11, and 19 make the case that the later Illuminationist tradition, which is often treated as dominated by mysticism and symbolic allegory, actually has rational, philosophical analysis at its core.

This, then, is a rough guide to the historical coverage we aim to provide in this *Companion*.[6] Though such a historical summary is needed to orient the reader, it must be said that our aims here remain first and foremost philosophical. That is, we want the reader to come away not just with a grasp of how this tradition developed, but above all with an appreciation of the main ideas that were put forward in the course of that development. Of course many of these are canvassed in the chapters devoted to particular thinkers. But in order to press the point home we have included five chapters on general areas of philosophy ordered according to the late ancient philosophical syllabus, which came down to the Arabic tradition (cf. chapters 2 and 4): Logic, Ethics,[7] Natural Philosophy or Physics, Psychology, and Metaphysics.[8] While some repetition with earlier chapters has been unavoidable, these thematic chapters explore certain topics not dealt with elsewhere (see especially the chapters on logic and physics) and put other topics in a broader context tracing philosophical developments through the tradition. Many of the themes raised will be familiar to students of Christian and Jewish medieval philosophy. This is, of course, not accidental, since as already mentioned Christian and Jewish philosophers in the Middle Ages were thoroughly engaged with the Arabic tradition. The impact of Arabic philosophy on scholastic Latin philosophy is an enormous topic in its own right, one that has been explored to some extent in other *Companions*.[9] Chapter 18 explains the historical background of this influence, detailing the transmission of Arabic philosophical work into Latin, just as chapter 2 explains the transmission of Greek philosophy into Arabic.

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Arabic philosophy is of course far too complex to be explored comprehensively in a volume of this size. While the foregoing gives our rationale for the focus and scope of the volume, we are not dogmatic: it is easy to think of philosophers in this tradition who would have merited a chapter of their own in this volume, and easy to think of ways of expanding the scope both historically and thematically. However, in the first instance our goal here is not to be thorough. It is rather to invite readers to the study of Arabic philosophy, giving them a basic grounding in some of the main figures and themes, but also a sense of what is most philosophically intriguing about this tradition.

NOTES

1 See Gutas [58].
2 For this way of defining the tradition, see D. Gutas, "The Study of Arabic Philosophy in the Twentieth Century," *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 29 (2002), 5–25.
3 Useful studies of *kalām* for those interested in its philosophical significance include the following: B. Abrahamov, *Islamic Theology: Traditionalism and Rationalism* (Edinburgh: 1998); R. M. Frank, "Remarks on the Early Development of the Kalam," *Atti del terzo congresso di studi arabi e islamici* (Napoli: 1967), 315–29; R. M. Frank, "The Science of Kalām," *Arabic Sciences and Philosophy* 2 (1992), 7–37; D. Gimaret, *Théories de l'acte humain en théologie musulmane* (Paris: J. Vrin, 1980); van Ess [44]; Wolfson [48].
4 These include the Neoplatonism of the Ismāʿīlīs, and of al-ʿĀmirī and the school of al-Sijistānī (for citations on this see below, chapter 3 n. 33), in addition to such unorthodox thinkers as Abū Bakr al-Rāzī, whose unique system had little influence on the later tradition (for bibliography on al-Rāzī see below, chapter 13 n. 8).
5 See Gutas, "The Study of Arabic Philosophy," and also Gutas [94]. For an even more daunting assessment of the number of later philosophical works, see Wisnovsky [261].
6 Two overviews of the Arabic tradition have appeared recently in other *Companions*: see Druart [13] and Kraemer [27].
7 Our understanding that metaphysical and epistemological principles are foundational in Arabic philosophy for ethical and political ideas is not shared by all contributors to this volume. A different methodological approach inspired by the thought of Leo Strauss is central to the writings of a number of colleagues, among them Muhsin Mahdi and Charles

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Butterworth, who have contributed editions, translations, and books and articles of analysis to the field. Chapter 13 by Charles Butterworth follows that approach. For other work in this vein, see the bibliographical citations at the end of the volume under "Ethics and Politics."

8 See for instance Ammonius, *Commentary on the Categories*, 5.31–6.22. Ethics is actually a propaedeutic science in the late ancient curriculum, but Ammonius states that logic is to be studied first, because Aristotle uses it in the course of developing his arguments in the *Ethics*. Psychology is for Aristotle a part of natural philosophy, though it was often treated as a bridge between physics and metaphysics. We separate it off because of its distinctive importance in the Arabic tradition. See further L. G. Westerink, "The Alexandrian Commentators and the Introductions to their Commentaries," in *Aristotle Transformed: The Ancient Commentators and their Influence*, ed. R. Sorabji (London: 1990), 325–48. For versions of the curriculum in the Arabic tradition see below, chapters 2 and 4, Gutas [56], and Rosenthal [39], 52–73.

9 See especially D. Burrell, "Aquinas and Islamic and Jewish Thinkers," in *The Cambridge Companion to Aquinas*, ed. N. Kretzmann and E. Stump (Cambridge: 1993), 60–84, and also the *Companions* to Duns Scotus and Medieval Philosophy.

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CRISTINA D'ANCONA

2 Greek into Arabic: Neoplatonism in translation

SALIENT FEATURES OF LATE ANCIENT PHILOSOPHY

Plotinus: a new reading of Plato

During the imperial age, in many centers of the Roman world, philosophy was taught in close connection to the doctrines of the great philosophers of the past: Plato, Aristotle, Epicurus, Zeno. Not only in Rome, Athens, Alexandria, but also in Pergamon, Smyrna, Apamea, Tarsus, Ege, Aphrodisias in the east of the empire, Naples and Marseille in the west, a "school" of philosophy disseminated either Platonism, Aristotelianism, Stoicism, or Epicureanism. Against this background, the thought of Plotinus represented a turning point in the history of philosophical ideas which was to play a decisive role in the creation of *falsafa* and to influence indirectly philosophy in the Middle Ages, in both Latin and Arabic.

Coming from Alexandria, where he studied Platonism under the guidance of Ammonius Saccas, Plotinus arrived in Rome (244 C.E.) and opened a school. From his explicit claims, as well as the content of his treatises, we know that he was a Platonist and taught Platonism, but also took into account the doctrines of the other philosophers, especially Aristotle. As we learn from the biography that Porphyry prefaced to the edition of Plotinus' works, in the daily meetings of the school the treatises of Aristotle, accompanied by their commentaries – especially those by Alexander of Aphrodisias – were read before Plotinus presented his lecture. This was nothing new: it was customary among the Platonists of that age to compare Plato and Aristotle, either in the hope of showing that they did not disagree on the basic issues or with the aim of arguing that Aristotle's

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