

ON IDEAS IN MOTION IN BAGHDAD AND BEYOND*

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This miscellaneous volume, edited by Damien Janos, includes a short introduction, eleven essays in chronological order by John W. Watt, Alexander Treiger, Ute Pietruschka, Orsolya Varsányi, Damien Janos himself, Philippe Vallat, Gerhard Endress, Olga Lizzini, Carmela Baffioni, David Bennett with Robert Wisnovsky, and David Twetten, and a bibliography of studies entitled ‘Syriac and Arabic Christian philosophy and the Baghdad school’.

Despite its subtitle—*Philosophical and Theological Exchanges between Christians and Muslims in the Third/Ninth and Fourth/Tenth Centuries*—it focuses mainly on the philosophical rather than theological inter-cultural exchanges between Christians and Muslims in the ninth- and tenth-century Baghdad. This is confirmed by Janos’s words in the Introduction where he states that 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.

It is a matter of fact that in medieval Baghdad, Christians cooperated to put in place an ever-growing number of books, were protagonists of a prolific scribal activity, studied the same texts which, translated from Greek and Syriac into Arabic, were studied by Muslims, debated together with them on a set of shared philosophical questions, and elaborated with them ‘a universal language based on logic to transcend cultural and religious divides and differences’ (p. 2). But philosophical and theological cross-pollination does not mean in Baghdad the cancellation of any religious identity: logic and philosophy were at times

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instruments of inter-faith debate and apologetics. Hence this book explores the intellectual interactions, both peaceful and polemical, between Christians and Muslims, all heirs of the classical heritage, which was assimilated and adapted in accordance to their own needs.

Opening the volume, John W. Watt in his ‘The Syriac Aristotelian Tradition and 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 Greek texts to the subsequent Arab readership, but from that of their philosophical original approach and agenda. Probably because of the fact that he already dealt with the topic extensively elsewhere,¹ Watt omits to reconstruct the school and social contexts of the figures he analyses and his otherwise very fascinating account at times would require more information.

He begins with the analysis of the early, pre-Abbasid phase of Syriac philosophy and in particular from Sergius of Rēsh‘aynā, the Syriac scholar who was most influential on the later tradition. According to Watt, the main features of Sergius’s philosophical project are three.

First, he considers as the proper object of philosophical studies the whole Aristotelian school *corpus*.² Second, he thinks of Aristotelian philosophy as an

¹ John W. Watt, ‘From Sergius to Mattā: Aristotle and Pseudo-Dionysius in the Syriac Tradition’, in Josef Lössl and John W. Watt (eds), *Interpreting the Bible and Aristotle in Late Antiquity: The Alexandrian Commentary Tradition between Rome and Baghdad*, London–New York: Routledge, 2011, pp. 39–57.

² Unfortunately for us even if his intention was to comment on the entire *corpus*, only his *Commentaries on the Categories* are extant. Sergius is traditionally considered the author of two comments of different length to Aristotle’s *Categories*, which we distinguish with the help of the name of their dedicatee. One is addressed to a certain Philotheos and it is preserved in MS Berlin, Deutsche Staatsbibliothek, Syr. 88 (= Peterman 9). Its title is *Memrā Composed by Sargīs the Archiater of Rēš‘ainā on the Categories of Aristotle, the Philosopher*. Cf. Henri Hugonnard-Roche, ‘Les Catégories d’Aristote comme introduction à la philosophie, dans un commentaire syriaque de Sergius de Rēš‘ainā (d. 536)’, *Documenti e studi sulla tradizione filosofica medievale* 8 (1997), pp. 339–363; Sami Aydin (ed.), *Sergius of Reshaina: Introduction to Aristotle and his Categories, Addressed to Philotheos*, (Aristoteles Semitico-Latinus, 24), Leiden: Brill, 2016. The other, a bit longer than the previous one, is addressed, according to the manuscripts, to a certain Theodore, bishop of Karḫ Guddān near the future Sāmarrā, the dedicatee of other works by Sergius as, for example, his Syriac version of the *Περὶ κόσμου*. This second commentary is preserved in three different manuscripts. The most ancient one is MS London, British Library, Add. 14658. It is acephalous and it misses the preface and the first book of the treatise. In the other two manuscripts, MS Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Syr. 354 and MS Birmingham, Selly Oak Colleges Library, Mingana syr. 606, the commentary is respectively entitled *Treatise Composed by Sargīs the Archiater on the Aims of all Aristotle’s Writings* and *Treatise Composed by Sargīs the Archiater on the Aims of the Categories of Aristotle from Stagire According to his Lineage and Philosopher According to his Species*. Here, Sergius presents his work as the first commentary of a series of commentaries to all the writings of Aristotle that have not been preserved: ‘We will [...] speak as (well as) we can about the aim of each one of these treatises, beginning the chain with that *On categories*, which

elite activity for those who could read Aristotle in Greek: his primary task was that to present an exposition of Aristotle, not a translation.³

Third, his Aristotle is similar, but not identical to that of his Alexandrian teacher Ammonius Hermiae who states: ‘the purpose and obvious utility [which] the Aristotelian philosophy has for us [...] [is] to ascend to the common origin of all things and to be aware that this is the one goodness itself, incorporeal, indivisible, infinite, and of infinite potentiality’ (p. 9).⁴ Near the end of his *Commentary on the Categories*, Sergius stated clearly that without logic not only medicine and philosophy cannot be understood, but neither ‘can the true sense be uncovered of the divine Scriptures, wherein lies the hope of our salvation’.⁵ And in his *Memrā on the spiritual life*,⁶ which is prefaced to his translation of Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite, Sergius speaks about the true spiritual contemplation (*theoria*), which purifies the intellect and raises it to the height of the truth. This contemplation is divided into seven orders: the first ‘subsists by means of demonstrations and combinations of worded statements’ (i.e. the Logic of *Analytics* p. 10), while the last is the ‘finest flower’ which ‘touches the exalted radiance of the hidden divinity’, ‘the unfathomable radiance of Being’.⁷ Between the two we can recognize the other parts of Aristotelian *curriculum* and the doctrine of contemplation of Evagrius of Pontus. Sergius is close to his Alexandrian education, but also to the Christian intellectual tradition: the Aristotelian philosophy is ‘a part of a route by which intellect ascends to the

is about simple namings [or predications], and similarly treating each one of them [the *Organon* to the *Rhetoric*], in the same way. Then we will go on to his other treatises, those on the parts of practice, (then) physics and mathematics, and (then) the last ones which are called divine (Sergius, *In Cat.*, fol. 3r)’, see Janos (ed.), *Ideas in Motion in Baghdad and Beyond*, p. 9, n. 4. According to Henri Hugonnard-Roche, ‘Comme la cicogne au désert. Un prologue de Sergius de Rēš‘ainā à l’étude de la philosophie aristotélicienne en syriaque’, in Alain de Libera, Abdelali Elamrani-Jamal and Alain Gallonnier (eds), *Langages et philosophie. Hommage à Jean Jolivet*, (Études de philosophie médiévale, 74), Paris: Vrin, 1997, p. 167, this series of commentaries to all Aristotle’s writings probably had never been written.

³ Cf. the Introduction to Aydin (ed.), *Sergius of Reshaina: Introduction to Aristotle*, p. 51. According to Sami Aydin a significant fact speaks against Watt’s opinion that Sergius envisaged his commentary to be read together with the Greek version of the *Categories*. He writes: ‘Sergius’ text is thematically organised and various questions are briefly introduced and discussed in a way that the line of reasoning is comprehensible even independently from the text of Aristotle. The study of a source text obviously benefits from a lemmatic commentary and therefore, if Sergius intended his exposition to be used as a complement to the *Categories*, also he ought to have formed it in that way.’

⁴ Ammonius, *In Aristotelis Categoriae Commentarium*, ed. Adolf Busse, Berolini: Typ. et impr. Reimer, 1895, p. 6.9–12.

⁵ Sergius, *In Cat.*, fols 60r–61r, in Janos (ed.), *Ideas in Motion in Baghdad and Beyond*, p. 10, n. 7.

⁶ Polycarp Sherwood, ‘Mimro de Serge de Rešayna sur la vie spirituelle’, *L’Orient syrien* 4 (1960), pp. 433–457; 6 (1961), pp. 95–115, pp. 122–156.

⁷ Sherwood, ‘Mimro de Serge de Rešayna’, 6 (1961), pp. 122–123.

source of being' (p. 11), but while for his Alexandrian teachers the higher part was laid out by the 'divine Plato', for Sergius the higher part was the Bible interpreted by Evagrius of Pontus and Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite. According to Watt this replacement had a deep impact for subsequent Syriac and Syriac-Arabic Christianity. In this perspective Logic is a necessary instrument to the true understanding of Scriptures, not a tool for contemporary Christological controversies.

After the archiater Sergius and before the Abbasids, if there was any place where Aristotelian philosophy was taught, this was Qenneshre, the monastic school on the Euphrates. Almost all the well-known Syriac Aristotelian scholars of the seventh century were connected to this monastery.

From the marginal notes of the Arabic manuscript Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Ar. 2346 we know that Athanasius of Balad translated (partially or completely?) *Posterior Analytics*, *Topics*, and *Sophistical Refutations*. Athanasius also translated the *Isagoge* in 645. Jacob of Edessa made the revision of the previous anonymous translation of the *Categories*; George, Bishop of the Arab tribes translated the *Categories*, *On interpretation*, and the two books of the *Prior Analytics*. According to Watt it is evident that the seven-volume *Organon* was studied⁸ and it was studied in a sequence, which leads to apodeictics (this aim is explicitly stated in Severus Sebokht's introduction to his short work on the syllogisms of the *Prior Analytics*). From the extant translation and commentaries of George, it is clear that Aristotle was not only read, but commented upon also using some of the late-antique commentators. There is no indication for the common assumption that the prime purpose of the logical works was their use in Christological controversies.

There are no indications of translations of *Physics*, *De Caelo*, *De Generatione et Corruptione*, there are some quotations of the definition of 'nature' from *Metaphysics*, book *Delta*, in the *Hexaemeron* of Jacob of Edessa.⁹

The reading of Aristotle in Greek was softened even if the Syriac translations of that period mirrored the Greek texts and were hardly understandable without a teacher proficient in Greek. In addition, Athanasius translated and revised the previous translations of Gregory of Nazianzus and pseudo-Dionysus. Watt concludes:

⁸ Hence beyond *Prior Analytics* I.7: the critical discussion of this debated point is at pp. 13–14, n. 22. Cf. Henri Hugonnard Roche, 'Syriac Studies', *Studia Graeco-arabica* 3 (2013), pp. 233–244, in particular pp. 242–244.

⁹ Cf. Henri Hugonnard-Roche, 'Le corpus philosophique syriaque aux VI^e-VII^e siècles', in Cristina D'Ancona (ed.), *The Libraries of the Neoplatonists*, Leiden–Boston: Brill, 2007 (*Philosophia Antiqua*, 107), pp. 279–291.

As with Sergius, their interest in Aristotle may well have been founded on the conviction that he supplied Dionysius's 'philosophic and demonstrative' strand in double curriculum, the other being the ascetic and mystical which led to the contemplation of the divine' (p. 16).

On the figure of Timothy, the East Syrian patriarch from 780 to 823, who died one century after the death of George, the Bishop of the Arab tribes (d. 724) the last scholar associated to Qenneshre, I think that some remarks must be added. Watt considers him as a good example of the transmission of the West Syrian study of Aristotle, as exemplified at Qenneshre, to the East Syrians. Timothy was educated in the Monastery of Bashosh and was close to the Abbasid Caliph al-Mahdī and his family. From his letter 48 to Sergius, metropolitan of Elam and his old classmate, we know that he knew Athanasius of Balad's translations of the *Posterior Analytics* and *Topics*.¹⁰ Watt wonders why not Athanasius of Balad's translations of *Prior Analytics* and *Sophistical Refutations*. Probably Timothy knew even the *Poetic*: in his letter 19 he asks Sergius, metropolitan of Elam, to find him the two books of *Poetic*, because he had only the first one, as well as the commentaries on Logic by Olympiodorus, Stéphanus of Alexandria, Sergius of Rēsh'aynā and Alexander of Aphrodisias.¹¹ From the famous letter 43, which inform us about Timothy's translation of *Topics* from Syriac to Arabic, addressed to Pethion of Mar Gabriel in Mossul we know that he sought for commentaries or *scholia* on *Topics*, *Rhetoric*, *Poetic* and *Sophistical refutations*.¹² In letter 42, addressed to the students of the monastery of Mar Gabriel, he explains a passage from *Isagoge* (Porph., *Isag.*, pp. 10.22–11.1) and another from *Categories* (Arist., *Cat.* 5, 3b10–23), and we know that he had some interest in Physics: he knew *On generation and corruption*.¹³ We do not know if he knew all these texts in Greek, Syriac or both.

What motivated him to study Aristotelian philosophy? Watt writes: 'Polemical disputation with Christians of a rival confession is no more a satisfactory answer in Timothy's case than in that of the others' (p. 19). He did not mention inter-confessional polemics, in his letters where there are references to philosophical texts. And in the letters on Christological subjects there are no allusions too to

¹⁰ Cf. Martin Heimgartner, *Die Briefe 42-58 des Ostyrischen Patriarchen Timotheos I, Textedition*, (CSCO, 644; *Scriptores Syri*, 248), Louvain: Peeters, 2012, p. 90; Id., *Die Briefe 42-58 des Ostyrischen Patriarchen Timotheos I, Einleitung Übersetzung und Anmerkungen*, (CSCO, 645; *Scriptores Syri*, 249), Louvain: Peeters, 2012, p. 76.

¹¹ Cf. Vittorio Berti, 'Libri e biblioteche cristiane nell'Iraq dell'VIII secolo. Una testimonianza dell'Epistolario del patriarca siro-orientale Timoteo I (727-823)', in D'Ancona (ed.), *The Libraries of the Neoplatonists*, pp. 307–317.

¹² Heimgartner, *Die Briefe 42-58 ... Textedition*, pp. 67–68; Id., *Die Briefe 42-58 ... Einleitung Übersetzung und Anmerkungen*, p. 51.

¹³ Heimgartner, *Die Briefe 42-58 ... Textedition*, p. 16; Id., *Die Briefe 42-58 ... Einleitung Übersetzung und Anmerkungen*, p. 12.

philosophical logic—even if his Christological arguments are often in a syllogistic form.¹⁴ His sources are all biblical or patristic (he looked for these sources with the same effort he used to find philosophical sources). Dimitri Gutas¹⁵ suggested that his interest was inspired by a demand of translations for Muslim Arabic elites and his desire to integrate himself and his church with these elites.¹⁶

According to Watt instead Timothy's motivation was similar to that of his predecessors in the Syriac tradition. In four of his letters (16, 33, 37, 43) he declared his desire to have Dionysius in the translation of Athanasius or Phocas as he considered Aristotle's philosophy 'essential to "Dionysius's philosophic and demonstrative" strand in the "tradition of the theologians"'. If it is intriguing to see some persistence of Sergius's agenda in Timothy, I think it is necessary to investigate the differences more deeply, for example the total absence of any reference to Evagrius who is never mentioned or quoted by Timothy.¹⁷

Watt ends his contribution examining the shared interest in Aristotelian philosophy of Christians and Muslims scholars in the ninth century through the analysis of the East Syrian Ḥunayn ibn Ishāq, and then through the work of the Baghdad Aristotelians from the tenth century onwards.

In al-Fārābī's *Appearance of Philosophy in Islam* the appearance of the Aristotelianism of the ancient school of Alexandria is located in Baghdad thanks to the teaching of four East Syrian scholars. One of these scholars, al-Marwazī, the teacher of Abū Bishr Mattā ibn Yūnus, still wrote in Syriac.¹⁸ Even if it is true that the Baghdad Aristotelians from the tenth century resurrected in Arabic the

¹⁴ Cf. Sidney Harrison Griffith, 'The Syriac Letters of Patriarch Timothy I and the Birth of Christian Kalām in the Mu'tazilite Milieu of Baghdad and Basrah in Early Islamic Times', in Wout van Bekkum, Jan Willem Drijvers and Alexander Cornelis Klugkist (eds), *Syriac Polemics: Studies in Honour of Gerrit Jan Reinink*, Peeters: Leuven 2007, pp. 103–132.

¹⁵ Leonardo Tarán and Dimitri Gutas (eds), *Aristotle. Poetics*, Leiden–Boston: Brill, 2012, p. 87.

¹⁶ As Vittorio Berti, *Vita e studi di Timoteo I, patriarca cristiano di Baghdad*, Paris–Louvain: Association pour l'avancement des études iraniennes–Peeters, 2009, pp. 172–173, very well shows in his book devoted to Timothy I, the patriarch attempt was more articulated: 'Timoteo volle stare al centro del potere amministrativo del califfato e al cuore della nuova civiltà urbana islamica. Volle giocare la sua rappresentatività di capo di un'importante e radicata chiesa cristiana lì dove si organizzava la buona vita della 'Umma, vicino ai cenacoli intellettuali che determinavano le prospettive culturali di lungo corso del grande impero, cercando di ricavarci uno spazio di legittimità, lavorando per produrre la propria necessità sociale. Una scelta che segnala la piena presa di coscienza, se si può dire così, di essere minoranza, ma una minoranza che forse poteva rivendicare un preciso ruolo nel regno.'

¹⁷ Berti, *Vita e studi di Timoteo I*, p. 357.

¹⁸ Most of this story is quite legendary (cf. Dimitri Gutas, 'The "Alexandria to Baghdad" Complex of Narratives. A Contribution to the Study of Philosophical and Medical Historiography among the Arabs', *Documenti e studi sulla tradizione filosofica medievale* 10 (1999), pp. 155–193), but according to Watt 'with the appearance of four named teachers in Baghdad (in contrast to the nameless actors who preceded them), one of whom (Yūḥannā ibn Ḥaylān) he (i.e. al-Fārābī) identifies as his own teacher, we step from fantasy into reality' (p. 29, n. 84).

Aristotelian curriculum of the School of Alexandria, this idea has to be softened concerning the crowning Platonic curriculum. According to Watt there is still evidence of an interest in replacing Plato with pseudo-Dionysius for example in Ibn Zur'a (d. 1008). 'In a collection of responses to various questions that had been addressed to him, he explains why the names Father, Son and Spirit are employed instead of Intellect, Intelligizing and Intelligized (*Meth. Lambda 9*)' (p. 29): for veiling the divine realities from those who are unworthy, and, as Dionysius mentioned, for challenging the contemplatives who search for the truth.¹⁹

The perspective of a Christian philosophical agenda suggested by Watt is the backstage of the following three contributions by Alexander Treiger, Ute Pietruschka, and Orsolya Varsányi. Treiger in '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—Melkite or Maronite—²⁰ of 'Abd al-Masīḥ al-Ḥimṣī, the Christian translator of a selection of Plotinus's *Enneads* that forms the so-called *Theology of*

¹⁹ Watt states that al-Fārābī himself interpreted the terms of current Islamic religion as symbols for universally valid philosophical terms (p. 31) and he wonders whether al-Fārābī derives this idea from Abū Bishr Mattā ibn Yūnus's reading of the *Poetics* where Aristotle was teaching philosophers how to project poetic images of these realities for the benefit of the multitude. Could this reading of the *Poetics* depend on the fundamental harmony recognized by the Syrian scholars between pseudo-Dionysius and Aristotle and on pseudo-Dionysius's symbolic theology? Al-Fārābī in his *Philosophy of Aristotle* (cf. al-Fārābī, *Philosophy of Aristotle [Falsafat Aristūṭālīs wa-aḡzā' falsafati-hi wa-marātib aḡzā'i-hā wa-l-mawḍi' alladī min-hu ibtada'a wa-ilayhī intahā]*, ed. Muhsin Mahdi, [Committee on Research in Arabic Philosophy, 1], Beirut: Dār Maḡallat Šī'r, 1961, pp. 84.3–19, 85.4–6) states that the theoretical things which are evident in themselves to the legislator are established in the souls of the multitude through an image and that Aristotle 'gave an account of the art that enables man to project images of the things that became evident in certain demonstrations in the theoretical arts and to imitate them by means of their similitudes (*Poetics*)'. Al-Fārābī could read Abū Bishr Mattā ibn Yūnus's translation of the *Poetics*. 'Abd al-Laṭīf al-Baḡhdādī claimed to have seen a long commentary of seventy volumes devoted by Abū Bishr Mattā ibn Yūnus to the eight books of Logic, including the *Poetics*: cf. Nanne Peter Josse, *Between enigma and paradigm: The reception of Aristotle's Politica in the Near East*, in Vasileios Syros (ed.), *Well Begun is Only Half Done: Tracing Aristotle's Political Ideas in Medieval Arabic, Syriac, Byzantine, and Jewish Sources*, (Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies), Tempe: ACMRS, 2011, pp. 97–120, in particular pp. 104–105. With the texts available to us (we do not have Abū Bishr Mattā ibn Yūnus's commentary on the *Poetics*) it is definitely more economical to think that this is a farabian original idea, which he constantly expresses in his works.

²⁰ Treiger himself suggests caution in his conclusion: 'Of course, one can easily imagine alternative scenarios—for example, that al-Ḥimṣī received his Neoplatonic instruction in pagan circles in Ḥarrān, or that he derived his Origenism (and Neoplatonism) and/or his Greek manuscript of the *Enneads* from Egypt rather than Syria or Palestine, or that he was, after all, a Jacobite scholar who, quite exceptionally, sought out the Syriac Dionysius's Greek Neoplatonic sources. I have to admit that, in the last analysis, all these alternative scenarios are possible and not disprovable' (p. 73).

Aristotle. ‘Abd al-Masīḥ al-Ḥimṣī was native of Emesa, the Syrian city of Homs. Al-Mas‘ūdī (d. 956) recognizes that the majority of Maronites in his time lived ‘in Homs and in regions subordinate to it, such as Hama, Shayzar and Ma‘arrat al-Nu‘mān’ (p. 58, n. 52). While Maronites seem to have been particularly present and strong in rural areas and monasteries (especially of course in Mar Maron), Jacobites had their own bishop in Homs. Treiger suggests that it is most likely that in a monastic milieu al-Ḥimṣī would have been exposed to Christian Neoplatonic texts. He disfavours the idea of a Jacobite monastery because the Jacobite scholars do not seem to have been involved in direct Graeco-Arabic translations and their knowledge of Plotinus was mediated by Dionysian *corpus* first in Greek and then in Syriac translation. If al-Ḥimṣī was not a Jacobite, he must have been a Chalcedonian. If he was a Melkite, he received his monastic training in Palestine, because Chalcedonian monasteries in Syria would have been predominantly Maronite. In the eighth and ninth centuries the Greek-speaking monks in Palestine were trained as translators—the Palestinian multilingual translation movement must be studied—and were still familiar with Origenist texts and Neoplatonic ideas (cf. the Palestinian treatise of eighth/ninth century entitled *Noetic paradise*, p. 65). If he was a Maronite, it would have been easy for him to gain access to the library of the monastery of Mar Maron, a place where—given this monastery’s likely Origenist proclivities which Treiger stresses—a Greek manuscript of the *Enneads* could also possibly be found. The contribution ends with a desideratum: new research in the ‘intellectual geography of Middle Eastern Christianity in late antiquity and early Islamic period’ (p. 74) to gain better knowledge of the Christian translators’ crucial role in the formation of Arabic and Islamic philosophical tradition.

In her ‘Some Observations about the Transmission of Popular Philosophy in Egyptian Monasteries after the Islamic Conquest’ (pp. 81–108), Ute Pietruschka presents a vivid picture on the transmission of ‘popular philosophy’ (in Brock’s terminology) in Egyptian Monasteries where the Coptic literature, immediately before and afterwards the Islamic Conquest, was preserved. The Copto-Arabic and Ethiopic literature blossomed benefiting from Syriac manuscripts and thus preserving old translations: several examples are taken from the collections of gnomologies.

Orsolya 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 ninth-century Arabic Christian authors such as ‘Ammār al-Baṣrī (d. c. 840), a Nestorian theologian, the Melkite Theodore Abū Qurra (d. c. 820–825), and the Jacobite Ḥabīb ibn Ḥidma Abū Rā’iṭa al-Takrītī (d. probably soon after 830). ‘Ammār al-Baṣrī came from Baṣra an important Nestorian centre of the age. His *The book of the proof* (*Kitāb al-Burhān* where *burhān* [‘proof’] means dialectical demonstration) and *The book of the*

questions and Answers (*Kitāb al-Masā'il wa-l-ağwiba*) are considered the most sophisticated texts of early Arabic Christian theology. The former is written in the form of hypothetical questions and answers that could be exchanged between (Nestorian) Christians and Muslim adversaries and concentrates on controversial issues such as the authenticity of the Bible, the question of the Trinity, the Incarnation, the sacraments, etc. It is divided into four sections each containing respectively 28, 14, 9 and 51 pairs of questions and answers. In the latter text intellect (*'aql*) is used in different contexts and with different meanings, which are: 1. a spiritual faculty or potency of the soul contrasted to bodily faculties whose tasks include the deliberate origination of bodily actions and the conceptualization of forms. Intellect assumes in this way an ethical value because 'it can be a means of choice (*iḥtiyār*) as an essential prerequisite of free will' (p. 114); 2. a quality of a good person together with ability (*al-istiṭā'a*), and free will; 3. a part of human disposition created by God in men's nature; 4. a distinction between rational and non-rational beings, which is not a substantial *differentia* (as life and inner speech), but which is the cause of effects as mercy, compassion, justice, gentleness, generosity and grace 'that appear especially on behalf of rational and deliberate substances'.²¹ 'Ammār al-Baṣrī's definition of intellect is philosophical with theological influences. The author describes the complementarity of intellect and Scriptures in theological reasoning: the role of the intellect is that to grasp the signs of divine generosity, but it needs scriptural evidence in matter of faith. In addition, 'Ammār al-Baṣrī also advocates the complementarity of intellect and the senses as a way of cognition, which begins from the physical evidence of bodily forms.

The Melkite Theodore Abū Qurra was probably native in Edessa around 750 and he seems to have been a monk in the Monastery of Mar Saba in the Judean desert. Later on, he became Bishop of Ḥarrān. He was the first Christian author to write his theological works in Arabic. He uses intellect in the *Treatise on the existence of the creator and the true religion* (*Maymar fī wuḡūd al-ḥāliq wa-l-dīn al-qawīm*) as a criterion to distinguish the true—that of the Christians—from the false religions without the help of the Scriptures. He begins his treatise with the description of the sources of knowledge and he distinguishes between the external senses and the interior intellect. Intellect, through the senses, knows parts of the world's elements and the bodily forms which are perceived by the senses; it knows a very large thing which cannot be perceivable from its conceivable parts; and, similarly, it even knows things that are not seen from their traces and actions, as that the world is created by a Creator. In addition, intellect can recognize God's action on the basis of the resemblance of His

²¹ 'Ammār al-Baṣrī, *Kitāb al-Masā'il*, ed. Michael Hayek, Beirut: Dār al-Mašriq, 1977, p. 158, see Janos (ed.), *Ideas in Motion in Baghdad and Beyond*, p. 118.

attributes to human virtues: thus, God is described as an intelligent and rational substance. Theodore Abū Qurra introduces an allegory to describe intellect and its role in recognizing the true religion: intellect appears as a doctor that God gave to humankind to know Him and distinguish what is right, licit, beautiful, and beneficial from what is wrong, illicit, and detestable. Man does not depend on revelation alone, but can rely on intellect. Man's way of cognition includes two steps: the first one is intellectual reasoning, in the course of which one may arrive at specific results, the second is the comparison of the intellectual results with the revealed books; agreement shows which one to choose.

Abū Rā'īṭa al-Takrītī was the Jacobite Bishop of Takrīt or Nisibis in the beginning of ninth century and his native language was Syriac. In his *Treatise on the ascertaining of the Christian faith and the Holy Trinity* (*Risāla fī itbāt al-dīn al-naṣrānī wa itbāt al-ṭālūt al-muqaddas*) one could expect a similar approach to that of Theodore, while on the contrary the author recognizes that intellect has limits and it cannot understand and validate the object of faith being it a theological question and not a philosophical one. God helps man in his quest for a true religion by giving signs and making miracles happen which go beyond reason.

The editor of the volume Damien 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. 135–177). Some features of the cosmology of the Nestorian Abū Bišr Mattā ibn Yūnus can be derived from the notes (*ta'ālīq*) on Aristotle's *Physics* which survive in the manuscript Leiden, Bibliotheek der Rijksuniversiteit, Or. 583, and which cover books II.3, III.2, plus parts of books V and VII of the Greek text.

After a short overview of Abū Bišr Mattā's contribution to Syriac and Arabic Aristotelism, Janos contextualizes his commentary on *Physics* in the philosophical culture of his time to better understand his original doctrinal approach, in particular to the concepts of causality, creation, and nature.

Abū Bišr Mattā was one of the most important Arabic Christian thinkers between the ninth and tenth centuries, a leading teacher figure in the Aristotelian circle of Baghdad of his age. He was educated in the Monastery of Mār Mārī located about ninety kilometres from Baghdad. He translated from Syriac into Arabic parts of *On the heavens*, *On generation and corruption*, *Meteorology*, *Posterior Analytics*, *Metaphysics Lambda* often accompanied by the commentaries of Alexander of Aphrodisias and Themistius. He wrote original commentaries such as the one on *Physics*. In addition, we have some of his notes on the *Organon* and Porphyry's *Isagoge*. Most of his personal writings unfortunately are lost. What kind of causality does Abū Bišr Mattā ascribe to God and nature respectively in the production of material beings? What is the relationship between these two kinds of causality?

In his commentary on book II, Abū Bišr Mattā states that the task of physics is the study of the four causes—the material, formal, efficient, and final causes; mathematics, whose objects are without motion, matter and extra-mental existence focuses only on the formal cause; while metaphysics studies the unmoved efficient cause explicitly identified with God the Creator—whether we are dealing with eternal creation or creation in time is not explicitly stated—, the First Principle of human intellection—insofar He is the highest object of theoretical contemplation—, and the primary final cause that moves the entire world as an object of love. In this way God inspires the constant motions of the heavens, which in turn, through their own motions, influence the cycle of generation and corruption in the sublunary world.

According to Abū Bišr Mattā, the celestial bodies, such as the Sun, are characterized by the formal cause, but do not possess matter strictly speaking, such as the sublunary matter, which receive different and even contradictory forms. They have a kind of substrate that holds their form, probably the potentiality of orbs and planets to receive form, to move circularly, and to be perceivable from earth. This doctrinal position is interesting because it seems to show a continuous exegetical trend on the subject of celestial matter from Alexander of Aphrodisias to Abū Bišr Mattā and al-Fārābī, who seems to follow the same position in his mature works.

Since Brown and Genequand's essays (respectively dated 1973 and 1984) some unidentified Neoplatonic sources have been recognized to explain Abū Bišr Mattā's theory of nature.²² According to Abū Bišr Mattā, nature is a teleological 'principle of motion and rest that is internal to physical things and responsible for bringing about their actualization' (p. 149). Abū Bišr Mattā often resorts to the analogy of the craftsman to describe how nature works: nature induces motion and applies form to an already existing material substrate to reach a given end. But, departing from Aristotle, he seems to ascribe a certain degree of rationality to nature and calls it an agent defining it as 'active nature' (*al-ṭabī'a al-fa'āla*): nature which is disseminated throughout all generated things has 'an innate efficiency or power to effect change as a principle distinct from matter, form, and soul' (p. 149). The most interesting example of 'active nature' which Abū Bišr Mattā uses five times is that of the animal semen: how does 'the semen gradually develop to become a living and ensouled organism?' (p. 151).

²² According to H. Vivian B. Brown, 'Avicenna and the Christian Philosophers in Baghdad', in Samuel M. Stern, Albert H. Hourani and Vivian Brown (eds), *Islamic Philosophy and the Classical Tradition: Essays to Richard Walzer*, Oxford–Columbia: Cassirer–University of South Carolina Press, 1972, pp. 35–48, these unidentified Neoplatonic sources suggest the autonomy and efficiency of nature, while according to Charles Genequand, 'Quelques aspects de l'idée de nature, d'Aristote à al-Ghazālī', *Revue de théologie et de philosophie* 116 (1984), pp. 105–129, they serve limit nature as a mere instrument of the soul.

This nature is present in the semen that is emitted. When the semen has established itself in the womb, [nature] converts [*tuqallibuhū*] it into a form and then into another form, so that the first form disappears, and then into another form still until the soul appears. [Nature] then stops its motion, but remains existing after this as an organizing and generating [principle] [*mudabbira wamuwallida*]. This nature does not act by way of similarity [*'alā sabīl al-tashbīh*]. That is to say that it creates [*tukawwinu*] bone from non-bone [in the body]. As for the nature that proceeds by similarity, it is the nature that is present inside man, decomposing his nutrition by breaking it down into blood, flesh, and bone. This form that exists between the beginning [of the activity] of the semen and the appearance of the entire soul is like matter for the existence of the soul, because it is necessary for the existence of the soul and came about for its sake.²³

This example clearly shows ‘the autonomy of nature and of its priority over soul during the early existence of the embryo’ (p. 152) in its process of actualization into a human being. Hence the substantial form of a human being is the end that moves that teleological principle, which nature is, in the semen. Form, nature, soul are distinct concepts which carry on different operations.

Does active nature also operate at the level of superlunary bodies? Abū Bišr Mattā states that ‘this nature is disseminated throughout all natural things on account of the Creator’,²⁴ and he also states that

the generable and corruptible body’s coming into contact with the heavenly body, [the heavenly body] affects it through this nature, and that [heavenly] body [is affected by] another [heavenly] body and the other by the motion of [i.e. caused by] the Creator.²⁵

Hence the provident Creator produces this active nature in the heavenly bodies and through the intermediary of the heavenly bodies in the sublunary world.

According to Janos, the Arabic Plotinus and Proclus are not those unidentified Neoplatonic sources evoked by Brown and Genequand in order to explain Abū Bišr Mattā’s theory of nature because in the Arabic Plotinus and Proclus nature is always en-souled: soul is ‘the exterior cause for the existence of nature and the internal cause for its activity’ (p. 155). Abū Bišr Mattā’s original theory of nature

²³ Aristūṭālīs, *Al-Ṭabī'a, Tarǧamat Ishāq ibn Hunayn ma'a šurūḥ Ibn al-Samḥ wa-Ibn 'Adī wa-Mattā ibn Yūnus wa-Abī l-Faraǧ ibn al-Ṭayyib*, ed. 'Abdurrahmān Badawī, al-Qāhira: al-Dār al-qawmiyya li-l-Ṭibā'a wa-l-Našr, 1964–1965, vol. I, p. 151.7–15, Janos’s translation in *Ideas in Motion in Baghdad and Beyond*, p. 151.

²⁴ Aristūṭālīs, *Al-Ṭabī'a*, vol. I, p. 147.19, Janos’s translation in *Ideas in Motion in Baghdad and Beyond*, p. 143.

²⁵ Aristūṭālīs, *Al-Ṭabī'a*, vol. I, p. 151.5–7, Jon McGinnis and David C. Reisman, *Classical Arabic Philosophy: An Anthology of Sources*, Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 2007, pp. 125–126.

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*. In the last part of the treatise Alexander describes a celestial nature and power that 'are the cause of the unity and order of the world' (as a teleological principle), which 'pervade the whole world, and hold its parts together'.²⁶ He states: 'the nature penetrating all parts of the world is a divine power',²⁷ which is transmitted by the celestial bodies to the sublunary beings. In addition, Alexander considers nature the principle 'underpinning the development of the embryo before the existence of the soul' (p. 162): the operations of nature cease when the soul emerges in the embryo. Finally, to fully understand Abū Bišr Mattā's account of the efficiency of nature we have to also consider Philoponus's *Commentary on Physics*, parts of which are transmitted by manuscript Leiden, Bibliotheek der Rijksuniversiteit, Or. 583, which also transmitted Abū Bišr Mattā's commentary. Janos observes that Abū Bišr Mattā and Philoponus share a similar language of creation and efficient causation to qualify the activity of nature and they adopted 'a common strategy, inherited from Aristotle but amplified in their works, to rely on analogies between nature and the human crafts in order to stress its efficiency' (pp. 165–167).

Janos ends his contribution introducing examples of parallel doctrines to Mattā's concept of active nature in other philosophers who were either his contemporaries or flourished shortly after—Isaac Israeli (d. 955) and al-ʿĀmirī (d. 992)—and a critical remark by Avicenna to an unnamed commentator for adding doctrinal accretions to Aristotle's concept of nature. From Janos's accurate and insightful analysis Abū Bišr Mattā appears to be less a mere transmitter of ancient philosophical learning than an active protagonist of the tenth century philosophical debate in Arabic.

The magisterial contribution by Gerhard Endress—'Theology as a Rational Science: Aristotelian Philosophy, the Christian Trinity and Islamic Monotheism in the Thought of Yaḥyā ibn ʿAdī' (pp. 221–252)—is the first of four papers devoted to another protagonist of the tenth-century Arabic philosophical debate, the Nestorian Christian Yaḥyā ibn ʿAdī (d. 974),²⁸ by Endress himself, Olga Lizzini, David Bennett with Robert Wisnovsky and Carmela Baffioni.

Yaḥyā ibn ʿAdī was a leading figure of the open society of tenth-century Baghdad where, as Endress observes, courts, observatories, hospitals, libraries and book markets were the stages of philosophical and theological exchanges. A mosaic of traditions included Arabs, Iranians, Muslims, Christians, Jews, Sabians

²⁶ Charles Genequand (ed.), *Alexander of Aphrodisias on the Cosmos*, Leiden: Brill, 2001, pp. 112–113.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 114–115.

²⁸ Gerhard Endress, *The Works of Yaḥyā ibn ʿAdī. An Analytical Inventory*, Wiesbaden: Dr. L. Reichert Verlag, 1977.

moved on these stages all in search of scholarly and social pre-eminence. Lizzini writes:

Fourth-/tenth-century Baghdad was not only a centre of understanding and cooperation, but also of criticism and debate. Nonetheless, Muslim, Christian and Jewish scholars spoke the common language of Greek science and Aristotelian logic. And the significance of this interaction of languages, religions, and points of view is clearly perceptible in Yaḥyā, who could be defined as a characteristic figure of the climate of communication of his period' (p. 257).

Endress presents Yaḥyā ibn 'Adī's philosophical project which, following the teaching of Mattā, considers the Aristotelian science of demonstration, with its criticism of non-demonstrative procedures, as the universal criteria of rational discourse. On this basis Yaḥyā ibn 'Adī founded his epistemology and on which he arrived at 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* (*Al-Maqāla fī l-tawḥīd*), which is also at the core of Lizzini's contribution 'What Does Tawḥīd Mean? Yaḥyā ibn 'Adī's Treatise on the Affirmation of the Unity of God between Philosophy and Theology' (pp. 253–280). 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). But Endress and Lizzini agree that to consider this treatise only among Yaḥyā ibn 'Adī's apologetic and polemical writings is reductive.

The distinction of the two meanings of the label 'unity', namely 'oneness' and 'uniqueness' lies at the core of the short treatise, in which Yaḥyā ibn 'Adī follows two different approaches: first he enumerates the various meanings of the term 'one'; second he 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). In Lizzini's contribution there is an appendix with a very useful and rich *divisio textus* (pp. 271–280) and she suggests some of the possible theological and philosophical sources, which inspired Yaḥyā ibn 'Adī in his analysis.

Yaḥyā ibn 'Adī addresses the following question 'if and in what respect plurality (of attributes) may be predicated of the Creator' (p. 232). On the model of *Metaphysics Delta 6* he states that One, the first cause, is one, neither as a genus, nor as a species, nor by virtue of some relation, nor as a continuous or indivisible

being. One is one *qua* substance and it has a plurality only in virtue of the constituent parts of its definition, i.e., the attributes that may be predicated of the divine essence. These attributes are three and they are deduced from His creation, i.e., from his activity: generosity, power and wisdom.

All created beings are brought into existence from non-existence through the power of Creator; the spontaneous and voluntary act of creation reveals His generosity. 'His wisdom, finally, is manifest in the order and perfection of His work' (p. 233). Yaḥyā ibn 'Adī uses these cardinal attributes of the Triune God, which trace back to pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite and before to Proclus's primary divine triad, in his own doctrine of hypostases: 'the hypostases are not individuals partaking in a homogeneous substance, and constituted by composition with specific differentiae' (p. 235). The divine substance is one; the hypostases are essential attributes describing this sole substance 'in its eternal essence as being good ("Father"), wise ("Son") and mighty ("Spirit")' (p. 235). Yaḥyā ibn 'Adī in his other philosophical and polemical works interprets the First Cause, God, as First Intellect (Father, *'aql*) who thinks itself (Holy Spirit, *ma'qul*) and equals its thinking (Son, *'āqil*): 'these three aspects are inseparable in the One, because the Intellect is inseparable from its knowing and from the object of its knowledge, separable only in the approach of logical distinction' (p. 235).

In order 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 Ash'arite contemporaries. Yaḥyā ibn 'Adī wants to establish the *contingentia futura* against those who, invoking the prescience and omnipotence of God and the universal validity of the principle of non-contradiction, deny potentiality and future contingency. Yaḥyā ibn 'Adī's adversaries maintain that God knows everything eternally. 'Since the object of knowledge is coextensive with the knower *qua* knower' (p. 238), it must be unchanging because there is no change in the knower. Everything He knows to exist cannot become non-existent. 'There is no potentiality *in rerum natura*' (p. 238). Yaḥyā ibn 'Adī maintains that this argument works if we consider God's prescience the cause of necessity, but it is not a *causa materialis*, or *formalis*, or *efficiens*, or *finalis*, or *instrumentalis*, or *exemplaris* for the things to be of necessity. In addition, he states that 'the knowledge of the essence of a thing is different from the knowledge of the essence of the thing existent' (p. 239). Hence there is no change in the knower in virtue of coming-to-be of the object known. The possible has neither eternal existence nor eternal non-existence.

Second, Endress gives as examples of logical procedures against *kalām* Yaḥyā ibn 'Adī's refutation of the human acquisition of acts originated by God (*iktisāb*), a doctrine that according to Yaḥyā ibn 'Adī leads to contradictions. If the acquisition of the act by man is an act, mediating between God's creation of the act and its execution by the *muktasib*, as an act, in its turn, it must be created by

God and again acquired by man, and so on in a *recessus ad infinitum*. On the contrary if both the act and its acquisition were created by God without any mediation of the individual agent all acts would be of all men because there would be nothing to determine one man for acquiring a particular act.

Third, Endress discusses Yaḥyā ibn ‘Adī’s critique of atomism based on Aristotle’s *Physics* which is preserved in three treatises edited by him in 1984²⁹ and in a fourth one survived in MS Tehran, Madrasa-yi Marwī 19,³⁰ and edited and translated for the first time by David Bennett and Robert Wisnovsky in this volume (‘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 also has theological implications: atomism was a solution proposed by the Muslim theologian 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 (successive), get into contact (contiguous), or unite (continuum). Indivisibles have no parts and no extremities that can join, thus it is impossible that they give rise to continuous magnitudes as the bodies evidently are. In the first treatise, entitled *Explaining that every continuum can be divided into divisible parts; it is impossible that it be divided into indivisible parts* (cf. Aristotle, *Physics* VI.1, 231b16), Yaḥyā ibn ‘Adī explains Aristotle’s proof: everything which undergoes a process must be divisible:

‘part of that which is in movement or change must be at the starting point, and part at the goal, for as a whole cannot be in both or in neither. Thus a continuous magnitude moving along a straight line is divided into divisible parts in virtue of its procession by any place given on that line’ (p. 244).

In the second treatise, entitled *Every continuum can be divided into things divisible ad infinitum*, Yaḥyā ibn ‘Adī gives Aristotle’s definition of successive, contiguous and continuous and the verbatim translation of Proclus’s first five propositions from *Elements of Physics* which Yaḥyā ibn ‘Adī’s quotes anonymously. Then he refers to Euclid’s *Elements* book I where Euclid describes a method to divide a line in two halves and he takes this to presuppose that every line can be divided into two halves (Euclid does not state this axiom). Since every line can be divided into halves, a line cannot be composed of indivisible points, otherwise odd points would have to be divisible. In the third treatise, entitled *On the indivisible part*, he

²⁹ Gerhard Endress, ‘Yaḥyā ibn ‘Adī’s Critique of Atomism. Three Treatises on the Indivisible Part’, *Zeitschrift für Geschichte der arabisch-islamischen Wissenschaften* 1 (1984), pp. 155–179.

³⁰ In this manuscript, among the 53 treatises by Yaḥyā ibn ‘Adī that it contains, there are 25 that scholars thought had been lost: cf. Robert Wisnovsky, ‘New Philosophical Texts of Yaḥyā ibn ‘Adī: A Supplement to Endress’ Analytical Inventory’, in Felicitas Opwis and David Reisman (eds), *Islamic Philosophy, Science, Culture, and Religion: Studies in Honor of Dimitri Gutas*, Leiden: Brill, pp. 307–326.

presents the ‘mustard seed argument’, a Islamic theological argument: if infinite division of the continuous bodies were possible, a small mustard seed could be divided into so many parts that it covered the whole of the celestial sphere because it would have as many infinite parts as the sky. In the fourth treatise, entitled *A Treatise debunking the fraud of those who profess the composition of bodies out of indivisible parts, with respect to their arguments concerning the contact between a sphere and a flat surface at a particular point and its movement thereupon* (*Maqalā fī taziyf tadrīs al-qā’ilīn bi-tarkīb al-aḡsām min aḡzā’ lā tataḡazza’ bi-ḥtiḡāḡihim bi-mulāqāt al-kura al-basīṭ al-musaṭṭah ‘alā nuḡtatihi wa-ḡarakatihā ‘alayhi*), Yaḡyā ibn ‘Adī ‘adds the “sphere-touching-the plane” critique to the anti-atomist repertoire at hand in tenth century Baghdad’ (p. 299). The advocates of atomism argue that it is evident to the senses that if a sphere is moved on a plane, the two figures have in common only a point: the sphere touches the plane only on the indivisible point. And, since there can be a local continuous movement of the sphere rolling across the plane, the sphere will touch the plane continuously, indivisible point after indivisible point and the indivisible points of contact of the sphere with the plane will be the finite measure of this plane exhausting it completely. The conclusion is the following: all that is divisible into a finite number cannot be infinitely divided. This contradicts Aristotle’s theory of the composition of continuous magnitudes on which, as mentioned above, Yaḡyā ibn ‘Adī insists. Yaḡyā ibn ‘Adī states that from

their assumption that parts are indivisible, it necessarily follows that parts cannot be combined with other parts except in a straight line. So it is therefore necessary that there cannot be a circular form. Yet it is clear that the sphere is a circular form. Yet it is necessary on account of their assumption that there is absolutely not a sphere. And if there is no sphere, it is not possible for a sphere to move upon a surface, or upon anything else. Thus, their assertion that the sphere touches the surface when it is moving upon the surface is nonsense. It was on this that their argument was based. Thus we judge their argument false, and demonstrate its falsity, on the basis of their own method and principles (p. 308).

In addition, the sphere rolls across the plane along the points of an imagined coplanar line without exhausting the plane. The ‘sphere-touching-the plane’ argument was analysed by Avicenna and Faḡr al-Dīn al-Rāzī. As Endress says in his conclusion, ‘his way of formalizing intricate problems in the shape of elaborate syllogisms was to become a hallmark of the Arabic Aristotle, even though the name of Ibn ‘Adī the teacher was obliterated, and outshone by those who stood on his shoulders’ (p. 247).

Carmela Baffioni’s chapter ‘Movement as “Discrete”: Yaḡyā ibn ‘Adī as a Source for the Ikhwān al-Ṣafā’?’ (pp. 281–297) sheds light on the unusual representation 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 five 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 Ikhwān al-Ṣafā' departed from Aristotle probably under the influence of Ibrāhīm al-Nazzām (d. 835–845) a Mu'tazilite theologian and poet, and she wonders whether the Iḥwān al-Ṣafā' could had been influenced by the much later Yaḥyā ibn 'Adī, with his idea of 'instant' in motion. Even if Baffioni is cautious and concludes 'it is more likely that Yaḥyā ibn 'Adī's and the Ikhwān al-Ṣafā's works reflect the discussions in progress in the tenth century about capital issues such as motion, space, and time' (p. 296).

There are only two papers that do not concern the Arabic Christian tradition and one is Philippe 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, Marwan Rashed collected from the *Advanced investigations into theology (Maṭālib al-'āliya min al-'ilm al-ilāhī)*, 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.³¹ These fragments are taken from Abū Bakr al-Rāzī's *Divine science (Al-'ilm al-ilāhī)* and from one of the epistles that he wrote in his long controversy with Abū l-Qāsim al-Balḥī, known as Ka'bī, a Mu'tazilite theologian who died in 933. Vallat collects new textual evidence (a set of nineteen 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 Koranic 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.³² God's pure goodness is in contrast to Koranic God's omnipotence. The Omnipotent God of Koran can only be violent in some way. And violence is destructive of reason, which is based on God's goodness. Hence 'between reason and violence, a choice must be made. One cannot retain both' (p. 179).

³¹ Marwan Rashed, 'Abū Bakr al-Rāzī et le kalām', *Mélanges de l'Institut Dominicain d'Études Orientales du Caire* 24 (2000), pp. 39–54; Id., 'Abū Bakr al-Rāzī et la prophétie', *Mélanges de l'Institut Dominicain d'Études Orientales du Caire* 27 (2008), pp. 169–181.

³² Rashed, 'Abū Bakr al-Rāzī et le kalām', pp. 39–54; Rashed, 'Abū Bakr al-Rāzī et la prophétie', pp. 169–181, offered a contrary account and maintains that Abū Bakr al-Rāzī believed that Koran and its prophecy were acceptable because they agree with reason. Of a different opinion, similar to that of Vallat, is Sarah Stroumsa, *Freethinkers of Medieval Islam: Ibn al-Rāwandī, Abū Bakr al-Rāzī, and their Impact on Islamic Thought*, Leiden: Brill, 1999.

According to Abū Bakr's theory the world is produced out of an interaction between God and four eternal principles: soul, matter, space and time.

'Matter is endowed with a kind of residual causality that not only precludes its coming perfectly informed by the Soul, but also its being perfectly ordered by God. For the en-souled beings resulting from the fall of the Soul into Matter, the latter's residual causality is visible in the suffering and afflictions inherent to their en-mattered condition' (p. 186).

God is in no way responsible for the evil, which arise from human en-mattered existence. The merciful God did not attempt to forbid the Soul to join with Matter, but let her do so because Soul will learn through experience the evil of its conjunction with Matter.

The individuated souls can experience the goodness of God by becoming aware that they do not belong here below. Reason is the only instrument of salvation because the merciful 'God does not charge his creatures with a burden beyond their force' (p. 190). Reason can reach a judgement for all the acts that ought to be performed or not for the sake of human salvation. Reason is sufficient to acquire the knowledge of God, of what is obligatory, permissible and forbidden. Hence the mission of prophets has no utility. If the criterion thanks to which man assesses a univocal conception of God's goodness is not reason, there is no interreligious debate at all and the only one result is scepticism.

The Creator then poured forth upon the Soul's substance the light of Reason in order that the Soul, thanks to the faculty of the light of Reason and thanks to the reiterated experiences of the grievous states of the world, shall learn that there is no intrinsic utility at all in her connection with such a matter, and that, on the contrary, her connection with it amounts to opening the door to afflictions and dreads. When then she becomes aware of these spiritual facts [*ma'ānī*] and it appears to her that her greater felicity consists of returning toward the world that is hers, and in delighting in the knowledge of the Creator and in entering the assembly of the holy and immaculate spirits, this desire and inclination toward matter will then leave her. And when she is separated from the body, she will abide in these perpetual joys³³ (p. 199).

Abū Bakr espoused the view of a universal revelation (*ilhām*) through the dispensation of reason to all human beings and to all living beings including animals. 'Universal revelation is God's bestowing the light of reason on the fallen Soul. It is a proof of God's pure benevolence' (p. 205). What is contrary to reason is contrary to God's nature given that God cannot act against his own gift. The

³³ Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, *Al-Maṭālib al-'āliya fī 'ilm al-ilāhī*, ed. Hejazi Al-Saqa, Beirut: Dār al-Kitāb al-'Arabī, 1987, vol. IV, pp. 415.16–416.1.

merciful God inspires his servants with the knowledge of what is profitable for them. He does not give preference to some over others; thus there is no discord between them and any violence.

Such is a much better way to protect them than making some of them the Imams of the others, for in this latter case every religious community declares his Imam truthful and the Imam of the others mendacious, then they come to blows, then some of them gain a reputation by stabbing the others so affliction becomes general and by dint of injustices and fights, they bring about their own ruin. Too many men have already lost their life in this manner, as we all can notice it (p. 206).

Abū Bakr's most convincing praise of reason is in his *Spiritual Physics*,³⁴ which Vallat compares with the Ḥarrānian Thābit ibn Qurra's praise of Hellenic intellectual heathenism partly preserved in its Syriac original by Ibn al-'Ibrī.³⁵ The two texts present striking similarities not only in the rhetorical epideictic style but also in contents (cf. p. 209). This text shows that 'God's gift of reason to all human beings has historically been manifested and adduced by all the achievements of Hellenic intellectuality down the ages' (p. 210). Abū Bakr goes even further making reason the instrument of human knowledge of God and in doing so opens the debate between religious Hellenism and revealed religions. This debate deserves further inquiries, which however must be kept away from the deforming lens of certain contemporary ideological readings according to which paganism would be hospitable and peaceful with respect to monotheisms.³⁶

The last contribution, David 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. Mullā Ṣadrā is the only postclassical author considered except for some cursory references to 'Abd al-

³⁴ Arthur J. Arberry, *The Spiritual Physics of Rhazes*, London: John Murray, 1950.

³⁵ Cf. David Pingree, 'The Sabians of Harran and the Classical Tradition', *International Journal of the Classical Tradition* 9/1 (2002), pp. 8–35.

³⁶ Jan Assmann, *Non avrai altro Dio. Il monoteismo e il linguaggio della violenza*, Bologna: Il Mulino, 2007. According to the author, monotheism has been a promoter of a new form of violence, unknown to the polytheistic religions, since monotheism has directly invoked the divine will. In particular, while with polytheism every divinity of a religion was 'translatable' by its characteristics in the deity of another religion, with monotheism the religion of the other became the affirmation of a non-truth, the 'enemy of God', 'the most important generator of extraneousness and hatred'. Monotheisms institutionalized violence (cf. the figures of the martyr and the fanatic who kills for God). Assmann seems to believe that religion is a condition of human existence, not a factual fact in time and space (the existence of conceptions that we would define as religious in every human society).

Laṭīf al-Baghdādī. 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 Neoplatonic curriculum. Ammonius and Simplicius were the first to transform the prime mover into a demiurgic 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 Soul and moves the en-souled 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 a creator of a cosmos possessing a first moment in time. According to the second, God is an *onto-poietik* first cause. Twetten's outline of the history of Arabic classical cosmology describes as

'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 sixth to the tenth centuries in the development of Arabic Islamic thought. On the example of Endress's studies on Yaḥyā ibn 'Adī, which in a sense inaugurated this line of research, *Ideas in Motion in Baghdad and Beyond* restores the dignity of the Christian Arabic philosophical tradition by reading its protagonists as true intellectuals, who were moved by their own agenda, rather than as translation professionals. This re-reading, in turn, is useful in framing better Muslim philosophers such as al-Fārābī and Avicenna. This volume shows that it is still time of analysis of the prosopography and contexts of many Christian and Muslim authors and of both direct and indirect tradition of their writings rather than syntheses.