

ISLAM

AL-RAHIM, A.H. — *The Creation of Philosophical Tradition. Biography and the Reception of Avicenna's Philosophy from the Eleventh to the Fourteenth Century A.D.* (Diskurse der Arabistik, 21). Verlag Otto Harrassowitz, Wiesbaden, 2018. (24 cm, XVIII, 218). ISBN 978-3-447-10333-6. € 42,-.

From the eleventh century onwards philosophy in the Islamic world was virtually synonymous with Avicennism. *The Creation of Philosophical Tradition* provides the answer to a series of questions: What was the philosophical, religious and scholastic context in which Avicenna's works were taught and studied, by whom and to which ends? What kind of people were primarily involved? Which of

Avicenna's books became the base texts for commentaries? (pp. 3-4). The Avicennan tradition consists of many different genres: commentaries, paraphrases, compendia, glosses, superglosses. The scholars belonged to different professions or schools, being philosophers, scientists, or theologians or combinations of these. They are described in different kinds of prosopographies and biobibliographies (these being a favourite Arabic and Persian genre); five major compendia of the lives of philosophers are listed. Another difference lay between the philosophical or ancient sciences and the religious ones. Among the Sunnī the Shāfi'ī are criticized for being too much in favour of the philosophical sciences, and therefore closer to the Shī'ī who aimed to reconcile philosophy (i.e. Avicennism) and religion.

The larger part of the book is devoted to the individual biographies of the followers of Avicenna. These are not reproductions of ancient Arabic biobibliographies, but rather use all the sources to compile for each scholar as full a biography as possible (a modern 'sīra'). Comprehensiveness is the leitmotif of the book. The bibliography contained within the footnotes is truly comprehensive in regard to scholarship in European languages, although it hardly includes studies in Arabic or Persian. The biographies not only collate all the extant sources and present all their variations, but also give lists of books mentioned in the sources followed by lists of extant books. Even the list of acknowledgements (pp. xi-xii) implies a huge network of scholars in Avicennan and transmission studies. Lines of master-pupil relations establish an *isnād* (chain of authority). *Isnāds* exist as much for Avicenna's medical works as for his philosophy. A topos is the 'meeting of great minds' along these chains of transmission (though sometimes the purported 'meeting' has to be questioned on chronological grounds). Mixed up with the philosophers and doctors were Sunnī jurisconsults, who, thanks to Avicenna himself, approached the 'same themes, problems and technical language of theology and ṣūfism' (p. 25). Logic and philosophy were widely studied together with jurisprudence in the *madrasas*. The biographical literature also attests to the presence of books in various *madrasa* libraries. Logic and dialectic became essential propaedeutics for Islamic jurisprudence by the thirteenth century. The studying of 'foreign sciences' (logic and philosophy) was problematic but not excluded from the curriculum. Both Sunnī and Shī'ī scholars belonged to the Avicennan tradition, in spite of being at odds with each other.

Fifteen scholars are dealt with in detail, five of whom are Avicenna's immediate disciples. A fuller list of philosophers, divided between 'mainstream Avicennism', 'illuminationist Avicennism' and 'traditional Peripatetics, theologians and mystics', opens the book on p. xvii. The treatment of Avicenna's immediate disciples includes, as is to be expected, what they have to say about Avicenna himself, so we have the bonus of fragments of a biography of the Shaikh Ra'īs ('the supreme master'). The combination of Avicenna and his immediate pupils marks the beginning of the creation of the Avicennist philosophical tradition. Among the post-Avicennan philosophers is al-Ghazālī, who now, unusually, stands alongside the other Avicennists, and gets no more coverage than the others. In the light of the enormous literature on Ghazālī, al-Rahim attempts something new, in asking the following questions: 'What influence did Ghazālī's appropriation or naturalization of Avicenna's philosophy exert on the later Avicennan and Ash'arī-Shāfi'ī traditions?

Which of his works advanced the study of Avicennan logic and philosophy within the Sunnī *madrasa* tradition? And what effect (outside the Maghrib) did Ghazālī have on Islamic intellectual history through, on the one hand, his apophatic critique of Peripateticism ... and, on the other, his appropriation of logic as a propaedeutic science for the discipline and the principles of Islamic jurisprudence?' (p. 69).

For an example of the coverage of each of the fifteen Avicennist philosophers I shall take al-Abharī (d. 1264-5). Al-Rahim gives his full names, legal school, and profession, his education, his travels for the sake of scholarship; these all being part of his biography. These are followed by anecdotes: when the Franks sent a list of philosophical questions to Syria in the time of the sultan al-Malik al-Kāmil (ruled 1218-38), the mathematical problems were passed on to Abharī, who solved them, but relied on Kamāladdīn ibn Yūnus, the famous Mosul scholar, to check them before they were sent back to al-Malik al-Kāmil. Abharī regarded logic as the basis of knowledge, and his brief summary of the Peripatetic Organon (the first four works of Aristotle's logical curriculum) – the *Īsāghūjī* – has been popular in Arabic schools to the present day (strangely, the author does not mention its translation into Latin by Tomasso Obicini, published in 1625). The works are mentioned according to categories and in narrative form. Then there is a list of works in alphabetical order, giving for each work the title, provenance and destination, alternative titles, description of contents, manuscripts and publication record (22 works are listed altogether for Abharī).

One hundred and forty-three pages are devoted to the narrative of the creation of the philosophical tradition. Such is the comprehensiveness of the work that exactly half that number is devoted to indexes: primary sources, secondary sources, a general index (with proper names, titles of books, technical terms, other subject words – like 'apprenticeships', 'blurring of distinctions', 'corporate identity', etc.) and a manuscript index. The entries on individual scholars repeat in their subsections almost all the information in the relevant sections of the book, but arranged in the form of lists rather than in narrative style.

This book will be indispensable for anyone studying the Avicennan tradition. It can be used primarily as a reference book for philosophers and their works. But it does also document, in an admirable way, the means by which philosophical tradition is established.

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