

***Prophetic Niche in the Virtuous City: The Concept of Hikmah in Early Islamic Thought***, by Hikmet Yaman (Islamic Philosophy, Theology and Science, Texts and Studies: 81) (Leiden & Boston: Brill, 2011), ix + 316 pp., ISBN: 978-90-04-18662-0, €121.00 / \$166.00 (hb)

The concept of *ḥikma*, which first appeared in pre-Islamic poetry, exists in every field of Islamic thought. It permeates the Qurʾān and its commentaries, lexicons and dictionaries of terms, law and its sources, mysticism, theology, and philosophy. Hikmet Yaman discusses this concept in all these domains, to the exclusion of law and theology, informing us that “it would be a more realistic project to address *ḥikmah* in *fiqh* and *kalām* literatures in separate detailed studies” (p. 1, n. 1). To my mind, the author’s explanation for omitting these two important domains of Islamic thought from his presentation seems somewhat opaque, and hence unconvincing. Besides, it weakens the general statement included in the title of the book.

The book is divided into four parts, each treating a separate sphere: lexicography, Qurʾānic exegesis, Sufism, and philosophy. Every part begins with an introduction which elucidates its aims and contents. It would have been preferable to open the discussion with ch. 3 (“Contemporary Western Scholarship on the Meaning of *Hikmah*”), because, in the light of the absence of a comprehensive study of *ḥikma*, this chapter justifies in a detailed manner the composition of the present volume.

No doubt this work is very informative; hence, it supplies the reader with various facets, such as epistemological and practical perspectives, of the topic discussed. Each discussion is based on a variety of primary sources.

The author employs two methodological devices that accompany each discussion. First, *ḥikma* is dealt with taking into consideration the context of its appearance, and second, Yaman incorporates into the study related concepts, such as knowledge (*ʿilm*) and the derivations of the root *ḥ.k.m*, such as “wise person (*ḥakīm*).” These two methods help the reader to locate *ḥikma* in its proper place in Islamic literature. However, sometimes, when the material on *ḥikma* is scanty, the discussion of related terms becomes the core of the study,

and in such situations, one wonders what benefit to the knowledge of *ḥikma* is gained from treating *‘ilm* and *‘aql* (intellect) (pp. 107-117 on al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī<sup>1</sup> (d. 728) and Ja‘far al-Šādiq (d. 765). The extreme case of this phenomenon is found in the discussion about the Sufi al-Junayd (d. 910), because there our concept is totally absent (pp. 147-149). Also, discussions about various philosophical issues in al-Kindī’s (d. 873) thought (pp. 229-235), though teaching us his views in a lucid way, contribute nothing to our understanding of the concept of *ḥikma* in al-Kindī, which is fully discussed in the first pages on *ḥikma* in al-Kindī (pp. 221-228).

Another subject I would expect to find in such a study is the possibility or impossibility of changes in the meanings of *ḥikma* in the periods and throughout the diverse regions discussed. The author presents the various senses of the term in a comprehensible manner, but does not refer to this question. An examination of the material according to this criterion would show either development of the term or absence thereof in its meanings. For example, are there any distinctions in the meanings of the root *ḥ.k.m.* and its derivatives in the Medinan as compared to the Meccan *sūras*?

In the following, some comments on specific issues are made. On page 33, the author distinguishes between the attributes of essence (*ṣifāt al-dhāt*) and the attributes of action (*ṣifāt al-fi‘l*), defining the first term as attributes which belong peculiarly to God, and the second as attributes that other beings share with God but in a different manner. The first definition is not complete, because, for example, the attribute Creator (*kbāliq*) belongs exclusively to God, but is not an essential attribute. The essential attributes are those which eternally exist in God, whereas the factual attributes refer to Him when He does a specific act, such as creation. Also, contrary to what the author says, the Mu‘tazilites used these two characteristics of the attributes.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> We do not know for certain who al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī was as a historical figure. Sufis tended to project on him their own views. Even the famous epistle on free will (*Risāla fi l-qadar*) attributed to him is suspected of being unauthentic. Michael Cook, *Early Muslim Dogma: A Source Critical Study* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 117-123.

<sup>2</sup> W. Montgomery Watt, *The Formative Period of Islamic Thought* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2009 [rep.]), 286 ff.; J.R.T.M. Peters, *God’s Created Speech: A Study in the Speculative Thought of the Mu‘tazilī Qāḍī l-Quḍāt Abū l-Ḥasan ‘Abd al-Jabbār ibn Aḥmad al-Hamadḥānī* (Leiden: Brill, 1976), 248 ff.

In the light of the fact that later commentators such as al-Qurṭubī (d. 1272) and Ibn Kathīr (d. 1372) are mentioned in the discussion, the absence of Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī (d. 1210) is conspicuous. His amalgamation of many spheres of Islamic thought, like philosophy, theology, Sufism, etc., and his unique method of arranging the exegetical material in a question-answer form make his commentary very interesting. For example, he connects Qurʾān 4:113 (“God has sent down the Scripture and Wisdom [*al-kitāb wa-l-ḥikma*] to you,” trans. Abdel Haleem) with the concept of *ʿiṣma* (infallibility), claiming that God bestowed on Muḥammad the Book and Wisdom to protect him from sins and errors.

Another question one may raise in this context is the supposed connection between the commentator’s ideology and his explanation of *ḥikma*. In other words, the context to be examined is not only the immediate context of the Qurʾānic text, but also the general cultural environment of the exegete which can influence his understanding of this term.

The author devotes some space (pp. 259-266) to the much debated question of the meaning of the concept *al-ḥikma al-mashriqiyya* (eastern philosophy or illuminationist philosophy), which is also the title of Ibn Sīnā’s book that only part of which is extant. Contrary to Gutas’ claim that *al-Ḥikma al-mashriqiyya* indicates oriental philosophy, a philosophy of the East, and that the difference between this book and Ibn Sīnā’s *al-Shifāʾ* is only a matter of style, Yaman opines that this book deals with another kind of philosophy critical of the Peripatetic philosophers and is somewhat inclined toward mysticism.<sup>3</sup> Yaman does not address all the arguments Gutas advanced in his aforementioned article, especially his detailed comparison between *al-Shifāʾ* and *al-Ḥikma al-mashriqiyya*, which was carried out on the basis previously unexplored manuscripts of this work. For example, see the part on the soul in *al-Ḥikma al-mashriqiyya*, which closely follows *al-Shifāʾ*.<sup>4</sup> To my mind, till now, Gutas’ thesis in this article remains unshakeable.

Here some minor comments are noted: On page 102 the term

<sup>3</sup> Dimitri Gutas, “Avicenna’s Eastern (“Oriental”) Philosophy: Nature, Contents, Transmission,” *Arabic Sciences and Philosophy* 10/2 (2000), 159-180, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1017/S0957423900000072>

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 172.

*mukāshafa* is rendered “intellectual reflection,” but on page 105 it is altered to “unveiling,” which is the correct translation of the term. The term *taqwā* is translated as “God’s consciousness” (p. 140), instead of the usual translation “fear of God.” On page 226, the phrase *ahl al-ghurbah ‘an al-ḥaqq* is understood as “strangers to the truth.” The verb *gharaba ‘an* means “he distanced himself from,” hence I would prefer to translate this phrase as “those who distanced themselves from the truth.”

I would add to the discussion two treatises written by al-Muḥāsibī (d. 857) – *Kitāb mā’iyyat al-‘aql wa-ma‘nāb*<sup>5</sup> and *Kitāb fahm al-Qur’ān wa-ma‘ānīb*,<sup>5</sup> – which are relevant to the treatment of *ḥikma*. Another important addition is al-Ghazālī’s *Kitāb al-ḥikma fī makhlūqāt Allāh*, which deals with the natural sciences.<sup>6</sup>

Notwithstanding these comments, the present volume fills a gap in our understanding of the concept of *ḥikma* and its cognate terms and hence constitutes a significant contribution to the research on this important term which conveys various meanings in its many appearances in Islamic thought. The numerous primary sources consulted in this work prove the highly significant place assigned to *ḥikma* by Muslim scholars of early Islam.

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<sup>5</sup> (ed. Ḥusayn al-Quwwatī; Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 1982).

<sup>6</sup> Hava Lazarus-Yafeh, *Studies in al-Ghazzali* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1975), 30, 452.