

***An Anthology of Philosophy in Persia, Volume 5: From the School of Shiraz to the Twentieth Century***, edited by S. H. Nasr and M. Aminrazavi (London: I. B. Tauris Publishers in association with The Institute of Ismaili Studies, 2015), xx + 544 pp., ISBN: 978-1-84885-750-6, \$69.95 (hb)

The volume under consideration is presented as the final element of the monumental series *An Anthology of Philosophy in Persia*, which started in 1999 with *From Zoroaster to ‘Umar Khayyām* (Vol. 1, Oxford University Press; republished in 2007 by I. B. Tauris), and continued with *Ismaili Thought in the Classical Age* (Vol. 2, Oxford University Press, 2001; Suheyl Academy, 2005; I. B. Tauris and The Institute of Ismaili Studies, 2008), *Philosophical Theology in the Middle Ages and Beyond* (Vol. 3, I. B. Tauris and The Institute of Ismaili Studies, 2010), and *From the School of Illumination to Philosophical Mysticism* (Vol. 4, I. B. Tauris and The Institute of Ismaili Studies, 2013). With the almost 600 pages of the present volume, a quarter of century of groundbreaking research and painstaking organizational efforts by the general editor, Seyyed Hossein Nasr, and his co-editor, Mehdi Aminrazavi, has come happily to an end. In bringing to completion this volume – and, with it, the colossal enterprise which it concludes – the two main editors have been assisted by a vast and qualified group of scholars, mainly but not exclusively Iranian, whose names are recorded in the List of Contributors (pp. xvii-xx) and who have mostly penned the English translations of the chosen texts.

The historical period covered by the volume under consideration is quite wide: it goes from the IX<sup>th</sup>/XV<sup>th</sup> century to the XIV<sup>th</sup>/XIX<sup>th</sup> century for “half a millennium” (p. 18), if we consider the authors taken into account (since Jalāl al-Dīn Dawānī, 830-908/1427-1502, to Mīrzā Abū l-Ḥasan Ṭabāṭabā’ī, 1238-1314/1822-1896), or even “six or seven centuries” (p. 3), if we extend the consideration to the schools to which the authors belonged. In any case, the twentieth century, mentioned in the title, falls mostly outside, rather than inside, the scope of investigation. For this reason, although the overall series is declared complete, the general editor in the introduction (p. 16) expresses the auspice of a future further volume, which might take into consideration the influence of Western thought on contemporary

Iranian philosophy (on this, see for instance Roman Seidel, “Early Translations of Modern European Philosophy: On the Significance of an under-researched Phenomenon for the Study of Modern Iranian Intellectual History,” in *Iran’s Constitutional Revolution of 1906 and Narratives of the Enlightenment*, ed. Ali Ansari [London: The Ginkgo Library, 2016]).

As with the preceding volumes of the series, the present volume displays a very harmonic architecture, made of a basic three-fold division into main historical segments, corresponding to the three prime philosophical schools active in Iran in the period under consideration, namely the “School of Shiraz” (XV-XVI c.) and the “School of Isfahan” (XVI-XVIII c.) under the Şafavid rulership, and the “School of Tehran” (XVIII-XIX c.) under the Qajar dynasty. Four authors of the first school are considered (the already mentioned Jalāl al-Dīn Dawānī; Şadr al-Dīn Dashtakī; Ghiyāth al-Dīn Manşūr Dashtakī; Shams al-Dīn Khafrī); nine of the second school (Mīr Dāmād; Mīr Findiriskī; Mullā Şadrā; ‘Abd al-Razzāq Lāhījī and Ḥasan ibn ‘Abd al-Razzāq Lāhījī; Sayyid Aḥmad ‘Alawī; Mullā Rajab ‘Alī Tabrīzī; Mullā Muḥsin Fayḍ Kāshānī; Qāḍī Sa‘īd Qummī; Muḥammad Şādiq Ardīstānī); and eight of the third school (Quṭb al-Dīn Nayrīzī; Mullā Ismā‘īl Khājū‘ī; Mullā ‘Alī Nūrī; Ḥājī Mullā Hādī Sabzawārī; Mullā ‘Abd Allāh Zunūzī; Āqā ‘Alī Mudarris Ṭīhrānī [Zunūzī]; Āqā Muḥammad Riḍā Qumshā‘ī; and the already mentioned Mīrzā Abū l-Ḥasan Ṭabāṭabā‘ī [Jilwah]). For each author a sample of significant texts is provided, ranging from one to three according to the importance of the figure and the extent of his philosophical production. The editors take good care in explaining the reasons of the selection they make, in terms of general periodization according to only three schools among the many existent, the choice of some authors to the exclusion of others in the vast horizon of scholars active in the period under consideration, and the focus on given works – and on specific texts in these works – within a philosophical production whose precise limits have still to be ascertained, but which can at once be deemed immense, both in the case of single authors and, *a fortiori*, on a larger scale (see General Introduction, pp. 15-16); their options should not be regarded, by their own admission, as normative, since they are necessarily governed by the amount of knowledge of the field in current scholarship, the availability of manuscripts and editions of works, and the ways of arrangement and exposition that are presently most suitable to

provide a basic orientation in an immense historical and doctrinal field. The volume has the evident merit of providing a plain and accessible English translation of a sample of texts capable of conveying, singularly taken, a concrete idea of the doctrinal concerns and theoretical motives lurking behind the single authors' production, and, cumulatively taken, a clear glimpse of the main features and trends of the period under consideration, in terms of continuity with previous historical stages and capacity of original speculation. The readers familiar with Arabic and Persian will find the translation surely helpful, whereas those who do not read these languages will be granted access, by means of it, to a treasure of knowledge otherwise remote. The properly anthological section is complemented by a series of devices that help to keep the content within a unified setting: a wide-ranging General introduction and a detailed Prolegomenon at the beginning; specific introductions to the single main periods and authors in the course of the volume; and a Select Bibliography and a comprehensive Index of names, works, and places, at the end.

A detailed analysis of each entry surpasses the boundaries of the present review: only future research, relying on the preliminary information that this volume conveys, will be able in the next decades to test the soundness of the historical and doctrinal account provided, and the correctness of the translations presented, adjusting and complementing with additional data, where necessary, the systematic and detailed picture that the volume brings forth. Moreover, each entry has its own profile, in terms of quantity of texts translated and amount of additional information provided. Some significant examples of the richness of the volume under consideration and of its value, however, can be given. Let us take, for instance, the section on Sayyid Aḥmad 'Alawī (died between 1054/1644 and 1060/1650), which is structurally pivotal, in so far as it represents the middle element of the second section of the volume, devoted to the School of Isfahan (pp. 261-282). 'Alawī is an interesting figure not only as one of the protagonists of the philosophical scenario *stricto sensu*, but also in a more general, transcultural and interreligious, perspective: the specific introduction to him mentions the work he composed in response to Pietro Della Valle's anti-Islamic polemic, as well as his illuminationist commentary on the Gospels (p. 262). Another commentary of his, regarding the philosophical masterpiece of Avicenna (Ibn Sīnā, d. 438/1037), *Kitāb*

*al-shifā'* (*Book of the Cure*, or: *of the Healing*), is selected in the anthological section to represent, alone, 'Alawī's thought. The translation, by M. Fakhry, regards two excerpts of 'Alawī's voluminous commentary on the *Ilābiyyāt* (*Science of Divine Things*, or *Metaphysics*) of Avicenna's *al-Shifā'*, entitled *Miftāḥ al-Shifā'* (*The Key of the Shifā'*). The two excerpts of 'Alawī's commentary have been translated one after the other, without any break of continuity between the end of the first and the beginning of the second (on p. 276, lin. 8), and in the reverse order, since the first concerns *Ilābiyyāt* IX and the second *Ilābiyyāt* VIII. The translation conveys a wealth of doctrinal and historical information, that gives a vivid idea of the *forma mentis* of the author. The two excerpts deal with two fundamental topics of Avicenna's metaphysics, in which the Shaykh al-Ra'īs's teaching comes into close contact, and somehow into conflict, with traditional Islamic belief: eschatology (i.e. the doctrine of the survival of the human being in the afterlife) in treatise IX, and God's type of knowledge (i.e. the discussion of the issue of whether, being pure intellect, He can know sensible particulars) in treatise VIII. On these two topics Avicenna held very peculiar positions, in so far as in the *Ilābiyyāt* of *al-Shifā'* he excluded bodily resurrection from the range of topics having philosophical relevance, and admitted for God a knowledge of the sensible particulars that could take place only in an universal way; these positions do not look compatible *prima facie* with standard Muslim faith about corporeal rewards and punishments in the afterlife, and about divine omniscience, and for this reason they were denounced – together with Avicenna's doctrine of the world's pre-eternity – as heterodox by al-Ghazālī in the *Tabāfut al-falāsifa* (the *Incoherence of the Philosophers*). It is therefore the commentator's task to rescue Avicenna from the charge of unbelief on these topics.

This is precisely the goal that 'Alawī pursues in his glosses and, towards this aim, one can admire his remarkable effort in the translated pages of providing a consistent view of Avicenna's standpoint in the *Ilābiyyāt*, at different levels. First of all, 'Alawī shows that Avicenna's account of these topics in the *Ilābiyyāt* is congruous with the positions expressed on the same issues in the other parts of *al-Shifā'*, as the commentator's references to the part on Natural Philosophy in the first excerpt, and to the part on Psychology in the second excerpt attest. Secondly, coherence is sought between *al-Shifā'* and other relevant works of the Avicennian

corpus, like the *Risālah aḍḥawiyyah fī l-ma‘ād* (the so-called *Treatise on Destination*) on the first issue, and the *Kitāb al-ṣbārāt wa-l-tanbīhāt* (*Book of Pointers and Reminders*) on the second, of which long passages are quoted. Finally, Avicenna’s position is situated in a historical hermeneutical perspective, which starts with Jalāl al-Dīn Dawānī, the initiator of the School of Shiraz, passes retrospectively through Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī and Shihāb al-Dīn al-Suhrawardī, and arrives to the first disciples of Avicenna, like Bahmanyār and Lawkarī (all of whom are explicitly quoted); in this way, ‘Alawī attests, on the one hand, the continuity of Avicennism across different times and schools of thought, but he also signals, on the other, the interplay between Avicenna’s philosophy and Islamic *kalām*, and the illuminationist accretions that Avicennism underwent during its history. ‘Alawī’s historical excursus, however, does not stop with Avicenna, but continues backward before him, with references to the Ikhwān al-Ṣafā’, Abū l-Ḥasan al-‘Āmirī, and al-Fārābī among Arabic authors, and to Plotinus, Plato, and Anaximenes among the Greeks, thus evidencing the tendency towards a rediscovery of the philosophical authorities of the past, typical of the Ṣafavid renaissance (on this, see R. Pourjavady, S. Schmidtke, “An Eastern Renaissance? Greek Philosophy under the Safavids [16<sup>th</sup>-18<sup>th</sup> centuries AD]”, *Intellectual History of the Islamicate World* 3 (2015), 248-290). By enlarging progressively, the context of Avicenna’s commented texts – first to the entire *al-Shifā’*, then to Avicenna’s *oeuvre*, and finally to the receptors and sources of his thought – ‘Alawī is able to complement, refine, and correct their content and to bring them gradually into line with Islamic orthodoxy. ‘Alawī’s work is surely a commentary, but much more than a plain exegesis: it seriously takes into account the text of Avicenna commented upon, in order to explain it, but it also encompasses a whole series of references to other works and authors, so as to provide, on each issue discussed, a specimen of the development of Islamic philosophy, from its roots in Greek philosophy until the author’s times. On all these accounts, from the translated pages one can guess that Seyyed Hossein Nasr, in the specific introduction to the section on Sayyid Aḥmad ‘Alawī, is perfectly entitled to state that his commentary is “the most important ever written on Ibn Sīnā’s magnum opus” (p. 261).

Moreover, as he quotes the texts of the *Ilābiyyāt* that he picks up as lemmata of his commentary, ‘Alawī resorts to a manuscript tradition of the work that is decidedly better than the one on which

current printings are based: in this regard, ‘Alawī’s quotations allow to emend the faulty readings still widespread in standard editions. Just to take one example: the passage of *Ilāhiyyāt* IX.7, corresponding to p. 423.4 of the Cairo edition, quoted twice as lemma by ‘Alawī (see pp. 264, 273), clearly includes the term *maqbul* (“taken”), in spite of the reading *manqūl* (“transmitted”, “conveyed”) adopted by the Cairo edition; along with the most numerous and reliable manuscripts of the *Ilāhiyyāt* (see A. Bertolacci, *The Reception of Aristotle’s Metaphysics in Avicenna’s Kitāb al-Šifā’: A Milestone of Western Metaphysical Thought* [Leiden & Boston: Brill, 2006], 550), ‘Alawī’s lemma corroborates the evidence that prompts to replace the current translation “It must be known that, [as regards] the return [i.e. the destiny of the human being in the afterlife], there is [to begin with] that which is conveyed by (*manqūl min*) the religious law” (see Avicenna, *The Metaphysics of The Healing*, a parallel English-Arabic text translated, introduced, and annotated by M. E. Marmura [Provo: Brigham Young University Press, 2005], 347.29-30), with the translation “It must be known that, [as regards] the return, there is [to begin with] that which is taken from (*maqbul min*) the religious law.”

On the other hand, one should not seek absolute precision of detail or complete circumstantial information, in this work as in any other anthology of this size. To remain within the section on Sayyid Aḥmad ‘Alawī, some inaccuracies surface here and there. To being with, as already mentioned, the two excerpts of ‘Alawī’s commentary have been translated as if they belonged to one and the same section of the commentary, and as if they faced a single topic, whereas in fact they are distinct textual units and deal with two distinct themes. The bibliographical reference provided at the beginning of the translation (*Sbarḥ al-Šifā’* [Tehran 1384SH/2006], 12-29, 87-117) – which abbreviates S. J. Ashtiyani, H. Corbin (eds.), *Anthologie des philosophes iraniens depuis le XVII<sup>e</sup> siècle jusqu’à nos jours. Tomes I-IV. Textes choisis et présentés par Sayyed Jalaloddin Ashtiyani. Introduction analytique par Henry Corbin* (Tehran-Paris, 1350-1358SH/1971-1979; repr., 1384SH/2006, vol. II, Tehran-Paris 1354SH/1975), 12-29, 87-96 (instead of pp. 87-117) – in the final bibliography is not related to Sayyid Aḥmad ‘Alawī in any way, and it is recorded according to a different date (1350-1358SH/1971-1979, years of the original publication, instead of 1384SH/2006, year of the reprint). Secondly, a more detailed *apparatus fontium* in the footnotes would have helped the reader to identify authors, works,

and passages quoted by ‘Alawī in the commentary; as far as Avicenna is concerned, for example, only the direct consultation of the original texts of ‘Alawī’s commentary and of Avicenna’s work reveals that ‘Alawī’s glosses regard *Ilābiyyāt* IX.7, p. 423.4-12 of Cairo edition, in the first excerpt, and *Ilābiyyāt* VIII.6, p. 358.1-2, 10-11, 14-15, and VIII.7, p. 362.18, in the second. Finally, the translation shows other minor peculiarities: for instance, the passage of *Ilābiyyāt* IX.7, p. 423.4, mentioned above and quoted twice by ‘Alawī, is translated as “Some aspects of resurrection are *admitted by* religious law” on p. 264, and “It should be known that resurrection is of two types: that which is *acceptable to* the religious law” on p. 273 (where in both cases the reading is correctly *maqbul min*). Likewise, the translator renders the passage “His statement ‘In the Book of the Soul’ until the end” – i.e. ‘Alawī’s quotation of a lemma occurring in *Ilābiyyāt* VIII.7, p. 362.18 – as “The statement in *De Anima* ...” (p. 280), as if ‘Alawī were referring to a passage of Avicenna’s *De Anima*, rather than citing a retrospective reference to the *De Anima* made by Avicenna himself in *Ilābiyyāt* VIII.7 (see *ibid.*, n. 1).

The volume under consideration is a depository of invaluable information on the period taken into account, capable of providing a solid general orientation in a still largely unexplored field and of spreading a basic acquaintance of this segment of the history of philosophy in the Islamic world also among a non-specialized audience. The importance of this period has not escaped contemporary historians of *falsafah*, and recent studies have aptly emphasized the relevance of the schools of Shiraz, Isfahan, and Tehran (see, for instance, D. Gutas, “The Heritage of Avicenna: The Golden Age of Arabic Philosophy, 1000-ca. 1350”, in *Avicenna and His Heritage. Proceedings of the International Colloquium “Avicenna and his Heritage”, Leuven-Louvain-la-Neuve, 8-11 September 1999*, ed. J. Janssens and D. De Smet [Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2002], 81-97 [pp. 82, 97], and P. Adamson, *Philosophy in the Islamic World* [“A History of Philosophy Without any Gaps”, vol. 3] [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016], Part III, Chapters 41, 52-55, 62). The present volume, with its huge extent, comprehensive scope, and articulated structure, has the undoubtable merit of establishing these three schools as an autonomous field of investigation, worth of specific and systematic attention, and of showing concretely that, far from ending with Averroes and from being restricted to its so-called “golden age” in the VI-VIII<sup>th</sup>/XII-XIV<sup>th</sup> centuries, post-Avicennian

philosophy in the Islamic world, in one of its branches, has flourished in Iran until at least the beginning of the twentieth century, thus determined an age of its development that is not less “golden” than the previous one. Stimulated and supported by the results of the research contained in the present volume, the reader will be able to refine and update at his wish the knowledge of specific authors, phases, and theories of the period under investigation, on the basis of the historical, doctrinal, and bibliographical information provided in this book.

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