

APPROPRIATION, INTERPRETATION AND CRITICISM:

PHILOSOPHICAL AND THEOLOGICAL EXCHANGES BETWEEN THE ARABIC, HEBREW AND LATIN INTELLECTUAL TRADITIONS



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PREFACE

This volume gathers eleven studies on the intellectual exchanges during the Middle Ages among three cultures which existed side by side in the same geographical area, the vast space from the British Isles to the Sahara Desert, and from the Douro Valley to the Hindu Kush. These three cultures – which may not be reduced to their confession or ethnicity – are historically related to each other in many respects, both material (through trade, wars and marriages) and immaterial (the interdependence among their philosophical speculations and their religious narratives).

The studies presented here are dedicated to various aspects of transcultural interactions among exponents of the Arabic, Hebrew and Latin philosophical and theological traditions. While we do not want to downplay the fundamental role of the religious contexts, our preference for the linguistic denominations of these cultures aims at drawing attention to the conceptual medium, or rather media, which underlay and shaped the interactions and interplays among these traditions – interplays that were characterized by the contact of these three languages being used by people of different religious beliefs in their quest for knowledge: Spanish Jews writing in Arabic, Jews collaborating in the translation of Arabic texts into Latin through the vernacular, Western Muslims whose writings were read mainly by Jews and Christians in Hebrew and Latin, etc.

A salient example of the complexity of these cross-cultural exchanges is offered by the textual tradition of Ibn Gabirol's *Fons vitae*. In her contribution, Sarah PESSIN shows how a central notion of this work underwent significant semantic changes in the course of its translation from the lost Arabic original into Latin during the twelfth century. Thus, an analysis of the very few extant Arabic excerpts of the *Font of Life* leads the author to propose a new hermeneutics of Ibn Gabirol's theory of divine will based on the pseudo-Empedoclean concept of «al-irāda», rather than the Latin term «voluntas», well-grounded in the Augustinian discussion of will. In this light, the Latin *Fons vitae* could be seen as a fundamental misinterpretation of Ibn Gabirol, and yet it would determine the subsequent Latin reception and contemporary discussion of his philosophy.

The first Christian philosopher to be influenced by Ibn Gabirol's philosophy was Dominicus Gundissalinus, the Latin translator of the *Fons vitae*. The contribution by Nicola POLLONI shows how Gundissalinus received pivotal doctrines from Ibn Gabirol, especially regarding ontology and cosmology. Nevertheless, Gundissalinus' adherence to this metaphysical perspective was subject to a progressive problematization of some of the main features presented by Ibn Gabirol. In particular, this contribution analyses the impact that Avicenna's *Metaphysics*, al-Ghazālī's *Sum of Metaphysics* and Ibn Daud's *The Exalted Faith* had on Gundissalinus' ontology and his appropriation of universal hylomorphism.

Pedro MANTAS-ESPAÑA inquires into the role of Arabic philosophy for the classification of the sciences in the Latin West. His contribution revisits the systematization of the scientific knowledge proposed by three eminent Arabic philosophers – al-Kindī, al-Fārābī and Avicenna – pointing out the similarities and divergences among their classifications. After being translated into Latin, their epistemological accounts spread throughout Europe, with different outcomes. Beginning with Gundissalinus' synthesis in the *De divisione philosophiae*, Mantas-España discusses the emergence of a new *ordo scientiarum* in the Latin world, paying particular attention to the difficult integration of some disciplines, such as alchemy.

An intriguing case of cross-cultural exchange of alchemical knowledge from the Greek Late Antiquity through the Arabic world to the Latin West is studied by Vincenzo CARLOTTA, who focuses on two alchemical treatises, the pseudo-Cleopatrean *Dialogue of the Philosophers and Cleopatra* and Morienus' *Liber de compositione alchemiae*, translated by Robert of Chester. The textual comparison between these writings allows observation of important correspondences, which Carlotta examines, emphasising the intrinsic coherence of the alchemical tradition and its progressive development in the Arabic and Latin traditions.

Moving to the thirteenth century, Alexander FIDORA traces the influence of the Talmud in Albert of Cologne through the examination of several passages from Albert's commentaries on the *Sentences*, the *Ecclesiastical Hierarchy* and the Gospel of Saint Matthew. A comparison with the Latin Talmud translation from 1244/45 shows that Albert of Cologne had direct access to this text, being among the first Latin philosophers to use it. Fidora points out how Albert's quotations from the Talmud were directly linked to his criticism of a corporeal interpretation of the afterlife, a typical

pattern of the Christian-Jewish controversy to which Albert contributes. Yet Albert also developed innovative arguments which prefigure the work and strategies of his fellow Dominican, Ramon Martí.

One of the most discussed doctrines in the thirteenth century was the plurality of substantial forms. The genesis of this idea is explored by Marienza BENEDETTO, who presents in the first place the origins of the doctrine of plurality of forms in Ibn Gabirol's *Fons vitae*. Against this background she then reviews in due detail the different attitudes of the Dominican and Franciscan traditions toward Gabirol's claims. On the one hand, Dominicans like Albert of Cologne and Thomas Aquinas strongly rejected the hypothesis of a plurality of substantial forms, as well as its doctrinal basis, i.e. Gabirol's universal hylomorphism. On the other hand, those Franciscans who explicitly referred to the *Fons vitae* in their discussions of substantial forms, such as Thomas of York and Roger Bacon, seem to have shared fundamental philosophical intuitions with the Jewish philosopher.

The contribution by Therese SCARPELLI CORY addresses a peculiarity of Thomas Aquinas' philosophical interests: the use he made of the *Liber de causis* to develop his theory of knowledge. Cory studies the influence that the *Liber's* proposition 15 had on Aquinas' doctrine of cognitive reflexivity, concentrating especially on his discussion of the soul's «reditio completa ad essentiam suam». From this perspective, the contribution examines the positions held by Aquinas throughout his works; it shows the crucial role played by the *Liber de causis* in explaining the soul's self-knowledge in Aquinas' early works, but also how this approach was later abandoned.

The influence of another pseudo-Aristotelian book, the *Secretum secretorum*, is examined by Chiara CRISCIANI in relation to three thinkers: Roger Bacon, Pietro Bono of Ferrara and Michele Savonarola. While these authors deal with the *Secretum* from different points of view and with various purposes, their interests meet in the convergence of the theoretical and practical dimensions of philosophy in a kind of transformative wisdom. In addition to the relevance which this text has had for the formulation of Bacon's, Bono's and Savonarola's doctrines, the *Secretum secretorum* also provided them with a model of cultural patronage, paradigmatically expressed by the relationship between Aristotle and Alexander.

With the chapter by Mauro ZONTA, the focus moves to the textual transmission of books translated into Hebrew. His contribution deals with

the circulation of Averroes' commentaries on Aristotle's *Metaphysics* in the Jewish tradition. In general, Averroes' works had a wider diffusion in their Hebrew translation than in their Arabic original, and are extant in numerous Hebrew manuscripts. The author reconstructs the history of the (multiple) translations of the *Epitome*, the *Long Commentary* and the *Middle Commentary* into Hebrew, offering a *recensio* of their manuscript witnesses as well as suggesting the reasons for their fortune in the Jewish world.

Coming back to the *Liber de causis*, Aum Alexandre SHISHMANIAN describes the intriguing circumstances that led to the translation of this key text into Armenian during the seventeenth century. The translator, Stephen of Poland, attempted to clarify and polish the text using the Neoplatonic sources he had at his disposal, following an original hermeneutical approach in his Armenian version of the *Liber de causis*. The contribution highlights the doctrinal and semantic peculiarities of the Armenian text in relation to the Latin text and its Arabic *Vorlage*.

The last contribution presented offers a discussion of the application of the phenomenological method to the Qur'ān. Considering different interpretations of the Qur'ānic text, Massimo CAMPANINI shows how a phenomenological reading, along with some hermeneutical assumptions, can be extremely useful for understanding the philosophical meaning of crucial doctrines presented in the Qur'ān. More specifically, in his contribution Campanini shows how phenomenological hermeneutics can be used for the interpretation of Qur'ānic ontological tenets and the relationship between God and creation.

This volume has its origins in the international conference «Idee, testi e autori arabi ed ebraici e la loro ricezione latina», organized by Nicola Polloni and held at the Collegio Ghislieri (Pavia) on 2-3 December 2014. On this occasion, many of the contributors to this volume discussed the multifaceted influence that Arabic and Hebrew philosophers and theologians have exerted on Latin authors during the Middle Ages. We would like to thank Andrea Belvedere, president of the Collegio Ghislieri, for his precious support to the organization of that meeting and the unrivalled hospitality of the Collegio. Moreover, we acknowledge the support of ERC-project no. 613694 of the European Research Council under the European Union's Seventh Framework Programme (FP7/2007-2013).

The editors of this volume very much hope that the publication of the papers read at the conference along with further articles, which were

commissioned for this book, will contribute to increasing the awareness of the importance of a decidedly transcultural approach to medieval philosophy and theology in offering new insights into the rich cross-cultural exchanges of knowledge among communities of learning and their intellectual traditions during the Middle Ages and beyond.

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