

Alexander Fidora/Nicola Polloni (ed.): *Appropriation, interpretation and criticism.* Philosophical and theological exchanges between the Arabic, Hebrew and Latin intellectual traditions (Textes et études du Moyen Âge 88), Barcelona/Roma: Fédération Internationale des Instituts d'Études Médiévales, 2017, xi + 336 pp.

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<https://doi.org/10.1515/jtms-2018-0027>

This volume comprises eleven papers which illustrate the transcultural exchange of knowledge between Arabic, Hebrew and Latin traditions mainly during the Late Middle Ages, stretching to the seventeenth century, as in the case of the article by Aum Alexandre Shishmanian, which deals with the transmission of the *Liber de causis* into Armenian. Even though these papers, being examples of a process rather than of a specific matter, may not be bound by subject, they may be nevertheless grouped according to some broad trends found among nine of them. Thus, we find three essays (by Pessin, Polloni and Benedetto) that deal with the reception and interpretation of Ibn Gabirol's philosophy in the Latin West. Next we have two (by Fidora and Campanini) that are only loosely related by the fact that they both consider religious literature: the former dealing with the use that Albert the Great made of the Latin Talmud, and the latter with the phenomenological exegesis of the Qur'ān. The most frequent subject of the volume, with four chapters dedicated to it (by Scarpelli Cory, Crisciani, Zonta and Shishmanian) is the reception of the Aristotelian tradition, whether apocryphal – dealing with the *Liber de causis* and with the *Secretum secretorum*, or authentic – dealing with Averroes' commentaries on the *Metaphysics*. Next we shall present, in some detail, the contents of the chapters by Pessin, Polloni, Fidora, Scarpelli Cory, Crisciani and Zonta, and lastly we will briefly summarise the content of the remaining chapters.

The three chapters related to Ibn Gabirol, as said, deal with the reception of his philosophy in the Latin West. In the first (“Ibn Gabirol's Emanationism. On the Plotinian [v. Augustinian] Theology of ‘Divine ‘Irāda’”, p. 1–18), Sarah Pessin attempts to demonstrate that Ibn Gabirol's position regarding the creation of the universe has been misinterpreted among Western philosophers due to an interpretative confusion that arose from the translation of the Arabic term “irāda” ([divine] desire' according to Pessin) into the Latin “voluntas” in the *Fons vitae*, the Latin rendering of the Jewish philosopher's *Kitāb yanbū' al-ḥayā* ('Book of the source of life'), made by Johannes Hispanus and Dominicus

Gundissalinus in the mid-twelfth century. The confusion is, of course, not terminological, but conceptual: in translating “irāda” with “voluntas” it is implied that the Divine Will would be an absolute agent that holds the reality organised and united and that it is the transcendental cause of its being and its order, so Gabirolian metaphysics would be contradictory since they would simultaneously affirm that the creation is the will of the divinity, but that it also emanates from it, in an involuntary act. Thus Ibn Gabirol’s philosophy is portrayed ‘as holding a ‘Doctrine of Divine Will’ (p. 2) opposite to the theory of Plotinian emanation, which he holds elsewhere in his œuvre, as Pessin shows throughout her paper.

The second paper on Ibn Gabirol, written by Nicola Polloni, shows how Gabirol’s ontological theory of universal hylomorphism – i. e. the fact every entity, physical or not, is made up by matter and form – was transmitted to Gundissalinus’ original writings and then, through a progressive problematisation, was modified when merged with the metaphysical thought of authors such as Ibn Sīnā, Herman of Carinthia and Ibn Dāwud (“Toledan Ontologies. Gundissalinus, Ibn Daud, and the Problem of Gabirolian Hylomorphism”, p. 19–50). Firstly, we find that Gundissalinus shows a strong adherence to Gabirolian ontology in his *De unitate et uno* and *De anima* (p. 28 and 30): ‘in fact, chapter seven of ‘De anima’ is completely dedicated to demonstrating spiritual hylomorphism through the discussion exposed in the fourth book of the ‘Fons vitae’ (p. 29). However, Gundissalinus in his *De processione mundi* moves away from two Gabirolian doctrinal points – hypostatic cosmology, i. e. ‘the metaphysical principle by which the upper hypostasis is the matter and cause of the subsequent and contains, in a higher degree, what is manifested through the latter’ (p. 26), and circular functionality, i. e. the process ‘in which at every level of reality one and the same being is matter in one level, and form in the following level’ (p. 26) –, substituting them with the ontological thinking of Ibn Sīnā and Herman of Carinthia: ‘the ontology presented in ‘De processione’ can be read, in fact, as the result of a synthesis ... between Ibn Sīnā and Ibn Gabirol’s metaphysics’ (p. 33). As a third stage in the problematisation of Gabirolian ontology we find that, while Gundissalinus receives from Ibn Dāwud, probably from their ‘daily dialogue’ (p. 41), some ideas that sharply contradict Ibn Gabirol’s hylomorphism (p. 42 sq.), which probably resulted in ‘the abandonment of Ibn Gabirol’s circular functionality and the implied extrinsic and functional logical determination of matter and form’ (p. 44), he does not fully reject his theory, but rather tries to clarify the Gabirolian theory through Ibn Dāwud’s criticism of the Jewish scholar.

In his article regarding Albert the Great’s use of the Talmud, Alexander Fidora examines the source of Albert’s knowledge of the Jewish text and the

usage he made of it (“Albert the Great and the Latin Talmud”, p. 121–136). The author starts by recognising that previous scholarship dismissed the possibility that Albert was acquainted directly with the Talmud and rather suggested that his knowledge of it came through the writings by Maimonides, Nicholas Donin and Odo of Châteauroux. Fidora, on the other hand, sets out to demonstrate that Albert most probably read the *Extractiones de Talmud*, ‘a large collection of Latin translations of almost two thousand passages extracted from the Babylonian Talmud around 1244–1245’,¹ by analysing the three passages in which Albert makes reference to such texts: in his commentary on the Sentences, in his commentary on Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite’s *Ecclesiastical Hierarchy*, and again in his commentary on the Gospel of St. Matthew. In fact, as Fidora contends, ‘Albert seems to have been the first to quote the Latin translation of the Talmud in the works that he composed during the late 1240s in Paris and Cologne’ (p. 133). Regarding his usage of the Talmud, he appeals to the text with the intention of criticising ‘the apparently corporeal or carnal discourse of the Talmud Thus, Albert tacitly maintains that the Talmud itself yields – from within – the potential to refute Jewish interpretations and to prove Christian claims’ (p. 133).

The chapter by Therese Scarpelli Cory analyses the influence of proposition 15 of the *Liber de causis* in Thomas Aquinas’ theory of cognition (“‘Reditio completa, reditio incompleta’. Aquinas and the ‘Liber de causis’, prop. 15, on Reflexivity and Incorporeality”, p. 185–230). Being one of the longest chapters of the book, it is divided in four parts: the first one deals both with the reception of the *Liber de causis* in the Latin West and Aquinas’ motivation to compose his *Super librum de causis expositio*, a commentary on the *Liber* written between 1272 and 1273; the second part examines how Aquinas interpreted proposition 15 which reads “Omnis sciens scit essentiam suam, ergo est rediens ad essentiam suam reditione completa” – ‘Every knower knows his essence; therefore he is returning to his essence with a complete return’ (p. 192 sq.) – based on a comparison of his *Super librum* with previous works where he treated such proposition; the third part analyses how Aquinas applied the principles of proposition 15 to his cognitive theory; and the fourth is merely a brief section of concluding remarks. Aside from its first part, the paper is entirely concerned with how Aquinas read the concept of “reditio completa” – ‘complete return’ (sc. ‘of the knower to itself in the act of knowing’, p. 194–197), mentioned by proposition 15 and how he used it to develop his own concept of “reditio

1 ULISSE CECINI: “The ‘Extractiones de Talmud’ and their relationship to the Hebrew Talmud manuscripts of the Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale of Florence (MS Magl. coll. II.I.7, 8 and 9)”, in *Sefarad* 77 (2017) 91–115, here 92.

incompleta” – ‘the incomplete return’, here defined as a sense for how intellect cognizes its own act of cognition without cognizing the nature of that act, which refers to a cognitive phenomenon (an operational return), rather than some ontological property (a substantial return) (p. 215).

Chiara Crisciani (“Il ‘*Secretum secretorum*’ in Occidente. Tre casi”, p. 231–260) examines the reception of the *Secretum secretorum* in the Latin West by analysing the way in which Pietro Bono da Ferrara, Roger Bacon and Michele Savonarola used it for their work. The range of interests sparked by this work – which may be best defined as a *speculum principis* purportedly written by Aristotle for Alexander the Great’s education – in this period is clearly exemplified by the distinct approach that each author took towards the book. Pietro, on the one hand, uses it in his ‘long treatise on the legitimacy of alchemy, the ‘*Pretiosa Margarita Novella*’ (p. 236), written between 1323 and 1330, due to its alchemical content, for it transmits a version of the *Tabula smaragdina*. Crisciani nevertheless focuses on the fact that Pietro inadvertently deals with the authenticity of Aristotle’s works by comparing the Philosopher’s opposing opinions on alchemy between the spurious *Secretum* and the *Meteorologica*. Roger Bacon, on the other hand, was interested in the contents of the whole *Secretum* and even prepared an annotated edition of the text with a prologue.² Perhaps the most valuable pieces of information, as it may be expected, come from the glosses, which mostly deal with epistemological and theological subjects and seek to portray Aristotle as a philosopher-prophet, who, having read the Old Testament, transmits, in the form of the *Secretum*, a ‘providential ... text’ (p. 248), which ultimately may lead to the salvation of all of Christianity. Yet a third approach may be attested to Michele Savonarola’s use of the *Secretum*, which he, as a supporter of the House of Este and the rule of Borso d’Este (1413–1471), takes at face value as a *speculum principis*, intended for courtly instruction.

The chapter by the late Mauro Zonta examines the role of the Hebrew versions of Averroes’ commentaries on the *Metaphysics* for reconstructing the incomplete, or altogether lost, Arabic originals (“Averroes’ Interpretations of Aristotle’s ‘Metaphysics’ and Their Different Receptions in the Hebrew Philosophical Tradition”, p. 261–278). Averroes wrote three commentaries on the *Metaphysics*: an *Epitome*, focused on book Delta, which is the best known version of this work in the Arabic-Islamic sphere (with 17 remaining Arabic manuscripts) and was translated into Latin through the Hebrew version; a *Middle Commentary*, which dealt with the whole *Metaphysics* (minus the book

2 Ed. ROBERT STEELE: *Opera hactenus inedita Rogeri Baconi* 5: *Secretum secretorum cum glossis et notulis. Tractatus brevis et utilis ad declarandum quedam obscure dicta Fratris Rogeri*, Oxford 1920, 25–172.

Alpha meizon) and of which there are no extant Arabic or Latin versions, but which was widely disseminated in its Hebrew version; and the *Long Commentary*, extant in only one Arabic manuscript, which was translated into Latin in the thirteenth century and into Hebrew in the fourteenth century and covers the whole contents of the *Metaphysics*. The Hebrew tradition of the *Middle Commentary* is perhaps the most valuable of them all, preserved in 28 manuscripts of two translations into Hebrew. As for the *Epitome*, Zonta demonstrates that the reconstruction of the Arabic text by Arzen only considered the Arabic manuscripts and the Latin translation, but ignored the fact that the latter had been made from the Hebrew versions, of which 12 manuscripts are preserved. Zonta also shows that books 9 and 10 of *The Opinions of Philosophers* (ca. 1270) by Ibn Falaquera reproduce fragments of the *Epitome*. Regarding the *Long Commentary*, both the Hebrew and Latin versions of the text (extant in 16 and 77 manuscripts respectively) are relevant to the reconstruction of the Arabic text, extant in a single manuscript.

The chapter by Pedro Mantas-España (“Interpreting the New Sciences. Beyond the Completion of the Traditional Liberal Arts Curriculum”, p. 51–92) describes how the interest on the classification of sciences exhibited by al-Kindī, al-Fārābī, and Ibn Sīnā influenced and modified the Latin curriculum – as shown by Gundissalinus’ *De divisione philosophiae* – by helping to integrate them into the previous Liberal Arts classification.

Vincenzo Carlotta in his chapter (“La morte e la resurrezione dei corpi nel ‘Dialogo dei filosofi e di Cleopatra’ e nel ‘Liber de compositione alchemiae di Morieno’”, p. 93–120) analyses a singular case of transmission and evolution of the alchemical tradition from the Greek language, through Arabic, into Latin: that which appears in the Greek *Dialogue of the Philosophers and Cleopatra* as well as in the Latin translation of the *Liber de compositione alchemiae* or *Liber Morieni*, but also in two Arabic texts found in the *Kitāb al-Fihrist* (‘The Book of the Catalogue’) by Ibn an-Nadīm, the *Book of Mary the Copt with the Sages when they met Her* and the *Book of Cleopatra, the Queen*.

Marienza Benedetto in her paper about Ibn Gabirol (“Alle origini della controversia medievale sulla pluralità delle forme sostanziali. Il ‘Fons vitae’ di Avicbron”, p. 137–184) returns to the subject of Gabirolian hylomorphism as she attempts to explain the origins of the doctrine of the plurality of forms in his *Fons vitae* and analyses the way in which his theory was received by Dominicans and Franciscans.

In his chapter on the translation of the *Liber de causis* into Armenian in the seventeenth century, Aum Alexandre Shishmanian explores the circumstances in which this translation was made and, by means of a comparison between the Armenian and Latin texts, how its translator, Étienne of Poland, appealed to

Latin Neoplatonic works in order to solve problems in the Latin text arising from the translation from Arabic into Latin (“Bagdad, Paris, Lemberg, Etchmiadzin [Arménie], la trajectoire inattendue du ‘Livre des causes’”, p. 279–302).

The chapter by Massimo Campanini focuses on how reading the Qur’ān from a perspective of phenomenological hermeneutics allows for a better understanding of its ontological content (“Filosofia e Corano. Un percorso ermeneutico tra ontologia e fenomenologia”, p. 303–323).

The articles contained in this volume account for the broad intercultural exchange of ideas between various spheres during the Late Middle Ages, stretching into the Early Modern Period, and represent a clear example of the wide range of subjects that may be analysed from the perspective of cultural appropriation between Greek, Latin, Arabic, Hebrew and even Armenian languages.³

³ I wish to thank Edgar Daniel Maldonado Juárez (El Colegio de México) for his help reading the chapters by Polloni and Zonta.