

An Anthology of Philosophy in Persia, Vol. 4: From the School of Illumination to Philosophical Mysticism, edited by Seyyed Hossein Nasr and Mehdi Aminrazavi (London & New York: I. B. Tauris in association with The Institute of Ismaili Studies, 2012), xix + 532 pp., ISBN: 978-1-84885-749-0, £39.50 (hb)

This book is the fourth volume of a massive anthology, dealing roughly with the period from the 13th to the 16th century. This late medieval period is receiving more and more attention lately, and so this anthology is timely. While previously Nasr and Aminrazavi had stated they would be able to complete their project in four volumes, they now write that a fifth part will follow, mostly to cover areas that had to be left out in this volume due to space limitations (p. 1). They limit their fourth volume to around 500 pages, just like the previous volumes.

To do justice to a volume as large and varied as this in a review is challenging. However, after careful examination, I have concluded that by restricting our attention to those parts that will be of benefit to advanced undergraduate students and upwards, the material becomes more manageable, as we may safely leave out half of the book. I shall not deny that this half may be of interest to the general public, for whom, Nasr seems to imply (p. 8), this volume may primarily be intended. However, here I will review the book strictly on its merits for academic use.

First of all, of the 24 translations, 6 are reprints, amounting to 108 pages. All of them are still readily available, for reasonable prices, so perhaps those interested in these texts will do better to get the books where the passages are from, to read them in their full context. Further, an excerpt from a letter by ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt Hamadānī is said to be “translated for this volume” (p. 412) by Omid Safi, yet it already appeared in his *The Politics of Knowledge in Premodern Islam* (2006), pp. 175-176. A passage from the ‘Commentary upon Guidance through wisdom’ (*Sharḥ Hidāyat al-ḥikma*), is said to be “translated for this volume” (p. 269) by Nicholas Heer, yet it has been available on his institutional website for many years (<https://digital.lib.washington.edu/researchworks/handle/1773/4887>). Additionally, two passages have already been translated into English. One is a passage from Dawānī’s ‘The Jalālian Ethics’ (*Akblāq-i Jalālī*) on the virtues for

rulers. First translated by W. F. Thompson (*Practical Philosophy of the Mubammadan People*, 1839, p. 377 ff.), it now receives a fresh translation by Carl Ernst. Why exactly it needed to be retranslated is not mentioned; in fact, no reference is made to Thompson's translation. In the original translation, Thompson makes the comment that this chapter is based on *Akblāq-i Nāṣirī* (by Naṣīr al-Dīn Ṭūsī), with only small additions (p. 377, n. 1). This seems to me a rather important comment, but it is not mentioned by the translator or the editors, which gives the false impression it is entirely Dawānī's. The second passage that has already been translated comes from Aḥmad Ghazālī's 'Auspices of Divine Lovers' (*Sawāniḥ al-ʿushshāq*). The translator, Joseph Lumbard, mentions the earlier translation by N. Pourjavady, to which he is "deeply indebted" (p. 375 n. 1), but it is again not made clear why this passage deserved a fresh translation.

That leaves us with 14 newly translated passages. Of these, two were already available in French. Majid Fakhry's translation of a passage from Mullā Ṣadrā's 'Glosses upon the Commentary of the Philosophy of Illumination' (*Ta'liqāt 'alā Sharḥ Ḥikmat al-isbrāq*) was translated by H. Corbin in *Le Livre de la Sagesse Orientale* (1986, p. 646 ff.). Omid Safi provides a passage from 'Ayn al-Quḍāt Hamadānī's 'Dispositions' (*Tambīdāt*), which can be found in C. Tortel's *Les Tentations Métaphysiques* (1992). Safi long ago announced his intention to publish a full translation of Hamadānī's *Tambīdāt*, which, were it ever to see the light, would downgrade the inclusion of the passage in this anthology to yet one more reprint.

Lastly, and then we will continue on a more positive note, the little introductions at the beginning of each chapter may safely be skipped. Serious students will find no new information in them, and are better off reading entries from e.g. M. M. Sharif's *A History of Muslim Philosophy*, M. Fakhry's *A History of Islamic Philosophy*, or the *Encyclopaedia of Islam*. It is even hard to believe that these introductions could work for the general public, as they are stylistically rather poor, as though the first draft went straight to press without an editor having looked at them.

In total, not counting the passages available in French, this amounts to 249 pages, almost half of the book. If we do count the passages available in French this even becomes 282 pages, well more than half of the book. This means of course that still the other half consists of new translations that may be of interest to students and

scholars. A large part of this, 5 passages covering 97 pages, comes from the pen of Majid Fakhry. Especially his two translations on the concept of knowledge will be of interest to many. He has translated a general discussion on the concept of knowledge by Ibn Abī Jumhūr, and one more specifically about the two key notions, *taṣawwur* (conception) and *taṣdīq* (consent) by Quṭb al-Dīn Rāzī. These passages are interesting perhaps not so much for the private opinions of the authors, but because they discuss a variety of opinions, which gives the reader an excellent primer in the breadth and depth of the medieval discourse on epistemology. Fakhry's translation of some of the later chapters in Naṣīr al-Dīn Ṭūsī's *Sharḥ al-Ishārāt*, complements well Inati's translation of the same chapters from Ibn Sīnā's *al-Ishārāt (Ibn Sīnā and Mysticism*, pp. 81 ff.). Fakhry further translates a passage from Shahrazūrī, about some Greek philosophers, which gives an insight into the level of knowledge of Greek philosophy in the late 13th century. Lastly, as mentioned before, Fakhry translates a passage from Mullā Ṣadrā's glosses on Quṭb al-Dīn Shīrāzī's commentary on Suhrawardī's *Ḥikmat al-isbrāq*, which is a key passage in Mullā Ṣadrā's thinking on eschatology.

It seems that this anthology came slightly too early, as Fakhry had to work from lithographs for the passages from Ibn Abī Jumhūr and Mullā Ṣadrā, while both of them have recently appeared as editions. I have inspected Fakhry's translation of Mullā Ṣadrā closely and found some 26 instances where Fakhry's translation is problematic, when compared to the new edition (ed. S. M. Musawi, 2013, pp. 508 ff.). In some cases, it is obvious that Fakhry read a word that is close but not correct. For example, on p. 161, l. 19 Fakhry translates "snakes (?)," indicating he is not sure himself. He probably read *ḥayyāt*, but the new edition reads *ḥummayāt*, that is, "fevers," which makes more sense contextually (a full list is available from this reviewer). I have not compared the translation of Ibn Abī Jumhūr's passage on knowledge, but already a cursory look into the new edition reveals that this passage is partly based on texts by Shahrazūrī and 'Alī Qūshjī. This is not pointed out by the translator or the editors. Another text that suffers from using an old edition is the translation by Carl Ernst of a passage from Dawānī's *Shawākil al-ḥūr*, a commentary on Suhrawardī's *Hayākil al-nūr*. Ernst used the old edition from Madras (1953), but he would have been saved from at least some mistakes had he made use of Tūysirkānī's edition (*Thalāth rasā'il*, 1991; in 2010 the Madras edition was reprinted, repeating its mistakes). In a

footnote he refers to the Persian version of Suhrawardī's *Hayākil al-nūr* (Suhrawardī, *Majmū'a*, v. 3, p. 98 ff.) and Corbin's translation in *L'Archange Empourpré* (p. 54 ff.), but he seems not to have looked at these texts closely, as he would have noticed some incongruencies. In particular, I am referring to Ernst's italicization at the bottom of p. 91 and top of p. 92, which would make the reader believe this is a sentence from Suhrawardī's text, while it is not. His translation is problematic for other reasons as well. Whence stems the subheading on p. 91 ("Chapter one...")? Not even the Madras edition has this. He translates *ḥādith* with 'contingent' rather than 'temporal thing,' which is problematic as 'contingent' is usually used to translate the Arabic *mumkin*. He translates *irtifā' al-māni'* as "invalidating prohibition," which makes little sense in this context. One should rather read it as meaning the taking away of something that disallowed it [from existing] (lit. 'lifting of a blockade'). *Li-imtinā' takballuf al-ma'lūl 'an al-'illa al-tāmma* he translates as "because of the impossibility of the lack of an effect for a complete cause," but this, to me, does not capture the meaning completely. "Because it is impossible that the effect would hold out after [the cause has come to be] a complete cause" would perhaps be a better rendering. All these issues are from the first page of Ernst's translation and should be sufficient to show the problematic nature of this translation.

This leaves 7 other translations, done by various scholars. Alma Giese translated passages from three treatises on knowledge (only the first is fully translated) of which the attribution to Ghazālī is doubtful (cf. Badawi, *Mu'allafāt al-Ghazālī*, 1977, pp. 268, 269, and 449). Neither Giese nor the editors mention the doubtful attribution to Ghazālī, and neither do they explain why exactly they chose these three treatises, nor in fact why they translated passages from all three treatises. Though the passages make for interesting reading, they are not exactly representative of that for which Ghazālī is best known. Since the content is close to what appears in *al-Maḡṣad al-asnā* (fully translated by Burrell and Daher as *Al-Ghazali on the Ninety-Nine Beautiful Names of God*, 1995), the reader is perhaps better off studying the *Maḡṣad*.

The style of the other 6 translations varies greatly; some translators, like İ. Kalın (a selection from Kātībī's *Ḥikmat al-'ayn*) and W. Chittick (a passage from Qūnawī's *al-Nuṣūṣ*) include many notes and give the Arabic terms often between brackets. These will be useful to

many. M. Aminrazavi (a passage from Quṭb al-Dīn Shīrāzī's *Durrat al-tāj*) adopts a more straightforward style with no such notes or terms. In between these two styles are the final three passages, from Āmulī (translated by L. P. Peerwani), Ibn Turkah (translated by J. Lumbard), and Lāhijī (translated by M. H. Faghfoory). The choice of these 6 texts seems justified and the quality of the translations appears to be in order, though I will leave a more in-depth review to others who have more experience with what Nasr and Aminrazavi call 'philosophical sufism.'

In conclusion, for use by the serious student or researcher, one has to raise some red flags with regard to this anthology. In particular the attribution of texts to authors as genuine and original to them deserves more discussion. It is especially useful in case, for example, one wishes to read the original text of one of the selected passages and has the translation on the side (regrettably, not all passages have a proper reference). This volume brings us no less than 14 passages translated for the first time into English. This, in itself, is no small feat and merits recognition.

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