

Argumentation et dialectique en Islam: Formes et séquences de la munāzara, by Abdessamad Belhaj (Louvain-la-Neuve: Presse Universitaire de Louvain, 2010), 178 pp., ISBN 978-287463-242-6, €20,50

The book under review fits within the literature on the history of dialectics and the art of disputation in the Islamic civilization, as reflected by the title *Argumentation et dialectique en Islam*. As the author Abdessamad Belhaj affirms in his introduction, the scope of this work is to undertake a reconstruction of the development of the *‘ilm al-jadal* and the art of *munāzara* as argumentative processes in both *fiqh* and *kalām* traditions. Belhaj states that his project is to draw the historical development of *jadal* and *munāzara* by taking into account the gaps of the major secondary literature. Put differently, this filling-in-the-gaps project seeks to provide a tableau of the way the notions of *jadal* and *munāzara* have been used and developed in different milieus of the classical Islamic world.

The book is divided into four chapters preceded by an introduction and followed by a short conclusion and a glossary of key terms. The introduction provides a general overview of the secondary literature recently produced on the topics related to the literary genre of *jadal*, *munāzara*, and *ādāb al-baḥṭh*. The first chapter deals essentially with the definitions of *munāzara* as well as with the key terms that define the art of disputation in the Islamic civilization such as *jadal*, *mujādala*, *kbilāf*, etc. Belhaj establishes the definitions of these key terms by analyzing different primary sources, starting from al-Jāḥiẓ (d. ca. 868) until Ismā‘īl al-Kalanbāwī (d. 1791) and by referring to their discussion by Muslim dialecticians. The second chapter is devoted to the actualization of the argumentative processes and its evolution in different contexts; Belhaj analyzes a series of primary sources in which the forms or patterns of disputation arise, such as the Qur’ān, the ḥadīth, the literary genres, the theological literature, and, finally, the juridical context. The third chapter is focused on determining the various origins of the discipline of the *‘ilm al-jadal*, the science of dialectic. Belhaj’s final chapter is devoted to an overview of the elements that characterize the mature science of disputation and argumentation, a literary genre called *adab al-baḥṭh*.

This short book attains the merit of gathering together a large amount of secondary sources. Belhaj plunges into the secondary literature that takes into account one or many perspectives of the concept of argumentation and disputation in the Islamic thought. He brings to this body of work an *état des lieux* and a valid critique to complement his project of reconstructing the evolution of the art of *munāzara* and *jadal*. The great effort the author makes in accounting for the evolution of both *jadal* and *munāzara*'s statuses throughout the eras is reflected in the breadth of primary sources he collects for the project.

Nevertheless, Belhaj's choice of primary sources does not provide an accurate sense of the evolution of *jadal* within the *kalām* tradition. He prides himself on taking al-Jāhiz's *al-Masā'il wa-l-jawābāt fī l-ma'rifa*, drawing heavily upon the authority of H. Daiber, as an example of the usage of dialectic tools in the *kalām* literature. Of note is Belhaj's lack of attention to the *al-Masā'il fī l-khilāf bayna l-Baṣriyyīn wa-l-Baghdādiyyīn* by the Bahshamite Abū Rashīd al-Nīsābūrī (d. after 1024), a masterpiece of Mu'tazilī dialectics which reveals the authentic dialectical sequences of the tradition. An analysis of this work, for example, would provide an otherwise absent authoritative supplement to the scope of his project. Belhaj's discussions of the case studies within the *fiqh* tradition are subject to the same textual limitations. He rightly points out the importance of the notion of *ikhtilāf* and draws necessary attention to the figure of al-Shāfi'ī; however in so doing he relies heavily upon secondary sources rather than acquainting the reader with al-Shāfi'ī's own writings. This decision is particularly detrimental to his purpose of accounting for the development of the dialectical traditions when considering the presence of more indispensable works of al-Shāfi'ī, the most significant of which remain the *Kitāb al-umm* and in particular the treatise contained in it under the title of *Ikhtilāfāt al-Irāqiyyīn*. Belhaj thus sacrifices an account of the proto-model usage of *jadal* in the *fiqh* tradition in favor of an extensive criticism of the shortcomings of Makdisi's thesis on al-Shāfi'ī, thus calling into question the extent to which his work fills the gaps within the literature rather than merely reaffirming them.

Perhaps due to the sheer historical breadth of sources Belhaj admirably attempts to account for, "Argumentation et Dialectique en Islam" sacrifices considerable depth in addressing the content and

implications of these works. Admittedly those with a previous knowledge of the secondary sources presented in the Introduction may find Belhaj accurately presents the development of the *‘ilm al-jadal* and the art of *munāẓara* throughout the centuries they account for. However a closer reading reveals that a crucial attention to primary sources is not provided. As a result both those looking to build upon, as well as to expand their understanding of the field are left with a fragmented sense of the development of the flourishing *ars disputandi* in Islamic thought.

Many typos are present, here the most relevant: p. 35 “... de leurs conséquences :fanatisme...” instead of (hereafter =) “de leurs conséquences : fanatisme”; p. 51 “Il a critiqué ; comme S. Lucas...” = “il a critiqué, comme Lucas...”; p. 54 “m’āḥid” = “ma’ḥid;” p. 66 “Baalbaki” is spelled differently than the footnote (n. 206) “Ba’lbakkī;” p. 67 “V century” is not consistent with the Christian/Hijra format used throughout the book; p. 91 “... les deux methodes sont été employées” = “ont été employées;” p. 97 “... par les théologiens sont soient dialectiques, soit rhétoriques ...” = “sont soit dialectique, soit ...;” p. 100 “Ĝtant donné” = “Etant donné;” p. 102 n. 324 is on the next page; p. 108 “fanqala” should be italicized; p. 114 “que’elle” = “qu’elle;” p. 121 “al-‘amīdī” = “al-‘Amīdī;” p. 124 “yağūz” = “yağūz;” p. 128 “lafḍī” instead of “lafzī;” p. 129 “māni” = “māni;” p. 140 “... en tant qu’ensemble des deux premisses est assurée par <missing word?> ...” = “... par <invalidation> ...;” p. 141 “... dont les les tâches ...” = “dont les tâches ...”

Giovanni Carrera

McGill University, Montreal, Quebec-Canada