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ISLAMIC HISTORY, DOCTRINES AND SOURCES

التاريخ والعقائد والمصادر الإسلامية

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Articles

An Analysis of the Qurʾānic Job Narrative, Speech, and Bond to Muḥammad

Antonio Cuciniello

This article investigates the Qurʾānic portrayal of prophets as divinely appointed, morally exemplary figures entrusted with God's message. It focuses in particular on Job (Ayyūb), whose unwavering patience (*ṣabr*) under trial embodies the Qurʾān's emphasis on spiritual virtue over narrative detail. Unlike his biblical counterpart, the Qurʾānic Job remains steadfast in silent submission, attributing his suffering to Satan and exemplifying faith rewarded by divine mercy. His concise story thus conveys a powerful moral lesson. Framed within a typology connecting earlier prophets to Muḥammad, Job affirms the Prophet's legitimacy and endurance amid rejection. In contrast, Jonah is depicted as a warning against the consequences of impatience. Ultimately, this typological structure stresses the Qurʾān's ethical aims, presenting prophecy through shared moral struggle rather than historical sequence. Consequently, it offers a prophetic model based on perseverance, humility, and trust in God, core values at the heart of Islamic ethical and spiritual consciousness.

Keywords: Prophetology, Job, Qurʾān

1. Introduction

This study aims to shed light on the Qurʾānic understanding of prophecy by examining both narrative structure and prophetic speech in their dialogue with communities and with God. Concentrating on the figure of Job (Ayyūb), it explores how his story and language reflect a meaningful interplay between lived experience and verbal expression. Through an in-depth investigation of the Qurʾān's Arabic, it seeks to reconstruct Job's personal and theological profile, highlighting his moral stance and spiritual profundity. At the same time, it questions interpretive approaches that reduce prophetic figures to mere precursors or rhetorical affirmations of Muḥammad's mission,

while acknowledging their enduring relevance for him. The Qurʾān, in fact, presents each prophet as a “unique voice” within a unified divine purpose. Their diverse expressions, feelings, and encounters with God enrich the concept of prophecy and deepen its ethical dimension. Unlike other prophets, Job, though brief in speech, emerges as a striking embodiment of the Qurʾānic ideal, facing hardship with quiet resilience, spiritual clarity, and steadfast trust in divine mercy. This ideal reflects the core values upheld by the Qurʾān: faith in God, patience, humility, and moral integrity. In this light, Job stands as a compelling model of these virtues.

2. Qurʾānic Conception of Prophecy

According to the Qurʾānic text the prophets were elected by God from among humankind “in one line of descent” (Q 3:34).¹ They were entrusted with the mission of conveying God’s revelation, serving as guides to His path and warders against deviation.² Considering the following passage, “it is inconceivable that a prophet would ever dishonestly take something from the battle gains” (Q 3:161), prophets – being divinely chosen and guided – should hold moral virtues that make them immune to sin and wrongdoing. Therefore, they should be characterised by impeccability (*ʿiṣma*), not as an intrinsic quality, but as a divine gift. This concept does not negate their human nature, as seen in several well-known Qurʾānic narratives, such as when Moses asked God: “My Lord, show Yourself to me: let me see You!” (Q

¹ The translation of the Qurʾānic passages is taken from M.A.S. Abdel Haleem, *The Qurʾan: A New Translation*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2004.

² The divine election is frequently expressed using different Qurʾānic verbs: 1) *iṣṭafā*, indicating “divine election” and recurring when God chooses (*yastafī*) messengers from angels or human beings (Q 22:75; 27:59; 35:32). Furthermore, from the same root, in the *ḥadīṭ* collections, the different names and titles given to Muḥammad also include *al-nabī al-muṣṭafā*, “the chosen Prophet”, but also specific prophets and Qurʾānic characters such as Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, Saul, and Mary, Jesus’ mother (Q 2:130, 132, 247; 3:33, 42; 7:144); 2) *iğtabā*, with the same meaning of “divine election”, referring to generic prophets (Q 3:179; 6:86–87; 19:58), as well as to individual prophets like Adam, Abraham, Joseph, and Jonah (Q 12:6; 16:121; 20:122; 68:50); 3) *iḥtārā*, whence *yaḥtārū* or *iḥtiyār*, with the meaning of “choosing”, in relation to Moses and the children of Israel (Q 7:155; 20:13; 28:68; 44:32); 4) *iṣṭānaʿa* which is mentioned only with respect to Moses (Q 20:41).

7:143).³ Moreover, according to the Qur'ān, sin entails intentional disobedience to God's commandments, which is different from sinful acts committed out of ignorance and negligence, followed by sincere repentance. Indeed, "God only undertakes to accept repentance from those who do evil out of ignorance and soon afterwards repent: these are the ones God will forgive, He is all knowing, all wise" (Q 4:17). Likewise, "if any of you has foolishly done a bad deed, and afterwards repented and mended his ways, God is most forgiving and most merciful" (Q 6:54).⁴

Thanks to divine election, several prophets hold unique characteristics. For instance, Abraham, Isaac, Lot, Ishmael, Idrīs, Dū l-Kifl, Elijah, Jonah, John, and Jesus belonged to the righteous (*min al-ṣāliḥīn*). John is further characterised as "noble and chaste" (*ṣayyid wa-ḥaṣūr*) (Q 3:39),⁵ while Abraham and Idrīs are each called "a man of truth" (*ṣiddīq*) (Q 19:41, 56). Ishmael is praised as one who was "true to his promise" (*ṣādiq al-wa'd*) (Q 19:54). Abraham was also granted the distinctive honour of being taken by God "as a friend" (*ḥalīl*) (Q 4:125), earning him the title "Friend of God" (*ḥalīl Allāh*). Moses is described as "specially chosen" (*muḥlaṣ*) (Q 19:51), one whom God "brought close to Us in secret communion" (*qarrabnāhu naḡiyyan*) (Q 19:52), and to whom "He spoke directly" (*kallama taklīmān*) (Q 4:164), hence his identification as "the one who spoke with God directly" (*kalīm Allāh*). Despite these specific features, belief in all the prophets remains indispensable in Islam. At the Last Judgment, God will question people about their response to his messengers: "How did you respond to My messengers?" (Q 28:65).⁶ Although prophets were sent with clear signs (*āya*, pl. *āyāt*),⁷ with God's permission, they

³ See also Q 12:23 in relation to Joseph.

⁴ See W. Madelung, "Iṣma" s.v., in *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, ed. by P.J. Bearman *et al.*, vol. IV, *Iran-Kha*, Leiden, Brill, 1997, pp. 182–184; P.E. Walker, "Impeccability" s.v., in *Encyclopaedia of the Qur'ān*, ed. by J.D. McAuliffe, vol. II, *E-I*, Leiden, Brill, 2002, pp. 505–507.

⁵ See also Q 12:24.

⁶ See also Q 39:71.

⁷ The word *āya* is probably a loan word from Syriac or Aramaic (*āṭā*). Its plural form recurs almost 400 times, in addition to its cognate *bayyina* (pl. *bayyināt*) with about 60 occurrences. The Qur'ān mentions diverse signs which live in the earth (*dalā'il al-āfāq*) and in humankind (*dalā'il al-anfus*), granted by God as an act of his infinite benevolence for a people who reflect. See for instance Q 6:109; 10:24; 13:3; 29:50. The prophets themselves and their miracles are signs, as well as the punishment stories of unbelieving peoples by God's interventions, "a sign in this for anyone who fears the

were not always received with acceptance and obedience. Many were rejected simply because they were perceived as “only men” (Q 14:10).⁸ As the Qur’ān recounts: “We sent messengers among the various communities of old, but they mocked every single messenger that came to them” (Q 15:10–11) and “called him a liar” (Q 23:44).⁹ In particular, Muḥammad was denied by his contemporaries, who claimed that his revelation was just a medley of existing traditions and stories or “muddled dreams” (Q 21:5).¹⁰ He was accused of being a poet, a magician, and a madman,¹¹ labels that reflected persistent resistance to the divine message throughout prophetic history.

Moreover, the Qur’ān affirms that God “appointed adversaries from the wicked, for every prophet” (Q 25:31),¹² and as a result, all prophets suffered opposition and persecution. As recorded in the Qur’ān, hostile communities threatened them, saying: “We shall expel you from our land unless you return to our religion” (Q 14:13). Yet, the prophets responded with patience: “We shall certainly bear steadfastly whatever harm you do to us” (Q 14:12). This pattern of rejection is consistently echoed in the narratives of earlier messengers. For example, the people of Tamūd “called the messengers liars” (Q 26:141),¹³ a charge similarly repeated throughout Sura al-Šu’arā’ (Q 26)¹⁴ in the stories of various prophets whose peoples rebelled against God and rejected His messengers using nearly identical words. The

punishment of the Hereafter” (Q 11:103; see also for instance Q 15:75–77; 27:52). See Faḥr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, *al-Tafsīr al-kabīr (Maḥāṭib al-ḡayb)*, ed. by M.M.D. ‘Abd al-Ḥamīd, vol. XXV, Beirut, Dār al-Fikr, 1981, p. 111; E.W. Lane, *An Arabic-English Lexicon*, vol. I, Cambridge, Islamic Text Society, 1984, p. 135; A. Jeffery, *Foreign Vocabulary of the Qur’ān*, Baroda, Oriental Institute, 1938, pp. 72–73; B. Abrahamov, “Signs” s.v., in *Encyclopaedia of the Qur’ān*, vol. V, Si–Z, 2006, pp. 2–11; W.M. Watt, *Bell’s Introduction to the Qur’ān*, Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, 1970, pp. 121–127; F. Rahman, *Major Themes of the Qur’ān*, Chicago, Bibliotheca Islamica, 1980, pp. 47–53.

⁸ See also for example Q 16:43; 17:94; 25:20; 36:15; 64:6.

⁹ See also among others Q 2:87; 22:42; 35:25.

¹⁰ See also Q 12:44.

¹¹ See for instance Q 21:5; 37:15; 36; 52:30; 69:41.

¹² See also Q 6:112; 16:63; 22:52.

¹³ See also Q 15:80; 91:14.

¹⁴ The sura relates accounts of Noah (Q 26:117), Hūd (Q 26:139), Lot (Q 26:160), and Šu’ayb (Q 26:176); see S.H. Griffith, “The ‘Sunna of Our Messengers’: The Qur’ān’s Paradigm for Messengers and Prophets; a Reading of Sūrat ash- Šu’arā’ (26)”, in *Qur’ānic Studies Today*, ed. by A. Neuwirth and M. Sells, Abingdon-New York, Routledge, 2016, pp. 207–227.

Prophet experienced this same rejection,¹⁵ but God consoled him and instructed him to suffer patiently,¹⁶ just as earlier prophets – and especially Job, who exemplified steadfastness amid suffering – had done.¹⁷ Like him, all previous envoys were met with denial and hostility by those who disbelieved.¹⁸

In some cases, prophets were even killed by their own people. The Qur'ān recounts: “So how is it that, whenever a messenger brings you something you do not like, you become arrogant, calling some impostors and killing others?” (Q 2:87).¹⁹ That was the destiny of several Israelite prophets.²⁰ However, they were assured that divine justice would prevail, as God “punished the evildoers” (Q 30:47) with an “agonizing torment” (Q 3:21). In fact, the Qur'ān provides numerous accounts of nations that disobeyed their prophets and were consequently punished by God, underscoring the recurring Qur'ānic theme of divine retribution against communities that arrogantly rejected God's messengers: “We destroyed whole generations when they did evil – their messengers brought them clear signs but they refused to believe. This is how We repay the guilty” (Q 10:13); “Whenever We sent a prophet to a town, We afflicted its [disbelieving] people with suffering and hardships, so that they might humble themselves [before God]” (Q 7:94).²¹

The collective catastrophe that befell communities rejecting their prophets represent both the direct result of their opposition to God's message and the manifestation of divine support and the promise to his messengers. As the Qur'ān affirms: “So do not think [Prophet] that God will break His promise to His messengers: He is mighty and capable of retribution” (Q 14:47). In the face of hostility, the envoys, urgently aware of their need for divine protection, were often saved along with their close followers, as it is written: “In the end We shall save Our messengers and the believers. We take it upon Ourselves to save the believers” (Q 10:103).²² Frequently, after rejecting the clear

¹⁵ See Q 6:33; 15:97.

¹⁶ See Q 5:41; 10:65; 16:127; 20:130; 27:70; 31:23; 36:76; 73:10.

¹⁷ See Q 21:83–84; 38:41–44.

¹⁸ See Q 6:34; 14:12.

¹⁹ See also, for example, Q 2:61, 91; 3:112, 181, 183; 4:155; 5:70.

²⁰ See Q 2:61, 91; 3:21, 112, 181; 4:155.

²¹ See also Q 3:184; 10:74; 14:9; 35:25; 40:22.

²² See also Q 12:110; 30:47.

signs brought to them, disbelieving communities would challenge their prophets by demanding a sign of their own choice: “‘If only God would speak to us!’ or ‘If only a miraculous sign would come to us!’” (Q 2:118).²³ The Qur’ān, however, reproaches them, “Do you wish to demand of your messenger something similar to what was demanded of Moses? Whoever exchanges faith for disbelief has strayed far from the right path” (Q 2:108). This context highlights a defining feature of prophetic missions: they were sent “bearing good news and warning” (Q 4:165),²⁴ to give glad tidings to the faithful and to warn the obstinate disbelievers, as in “those who disbelieve and deny Our messages shall be the inhabitants of the Fire, and there they will remain” (Q 2:39), unless they repent. Thus, God’s messengers did not only offered warnings but also announced divine mercy.²⁵ Nevertheless, prophets cannot change the fate of unbelievers.²⁶ Their mission is not measured by outward success or failure; their duty is solely to deliver God’s message clearly and unambiguously.²⁷ The Qur’ān reminds that God is ever-watchful,²⁸ and on the Day of Judgment, both believers and unbelievers will realise that the messengers spoke the truth regarding destinies in paradise or hell.²⁹ On that day, prophets will act as witnesses over their communities.³⁰ Consequently, the prophets functioned as models to be followed, since God gave a guide (*hād*) to every people.³¹

Despite the distinctive traits and privileges mentioned, each prophet remains fundamentally a servant of God (*‘abd*, pl. *‘ibād*, *‘abid*; also *‘ābid*, pl. *‘ābidūn*). As such, they do not claim authority over others, and people are not meant to serve them; rather, only God is to be served. In fact: “No person to whom God had given the Scripture, wisdom, and prophethood would ever say to people, ‘Be my servants, not God’s’” (Q 3:79). Moreover, divine election does not provide everyone with knowledge of the unseen (*ḡayb*), which remains exclusively

²³ See also Q 21:5.

²⁴ See also Q 33:45; 48:8.

²⁵ See Q 4:165; 6:4; 18:56.

²⁶ See Q 9:80, 113.

²⁷ See Q 16:35.

²⁸ See Q 58:6; 85:9.

²⁹ See Q 7:43, 53; 36:52.

³⁰ See Q 4:41; 7:6–7; 16:84, 89.

³¹ See Q 13:7; 26:208.

in God's knowledge: "He is the One who knows what is hidden" (Q 72:26). However, this privilege may be selectively disclosed, as God "does not disclose it except to a messenger of His choosing" (Q 72:27). As a result, God "would not show you [people] what is hidden; God chooses as His messengers whoever He will" (Q 3:179). Muḥammad, for example, is said to share with God several accounts that were part of what was beyond his knowledge. Indeed, the Qur'ān reads: "We revealed them to you. Neither you nor your people knew them before now, so be patient: the future belongs to those who are aware of God" (Q 11:49).³²

In conclusion, prophets in the Qur'ān are divinely chosen human beings who serve as moral exemplars, faithful messengers, and witness to the truth, distinguished by their unwavering submission to God and their divinely guided mission.

3. Qur'ānic Prophetic Accounts

Most Qur'ānic accounts of the prophets, particularly those with a biblical parallel, are marked by a distinctive narrative style. Despite comprising some of the most narrative-rich sections of the Qur'ān,³³ these stories differ significantly from their biblical versions. They are typically characterised by an elliptic, formulaic style, along with narrative omissions and fragmentations.³⁴ In some cases, prophetic episodes

³² See Q 3:44; 12:102.

³³ In general, the proportion of all the Qur'ānic narratives is very large: 1,453 verses, or about a quarter of the total number of verses (approximately 6,000), while 1,700 relate to eschatological themes. See Ġ.D. al-Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān fī 'ulūm al-Qur'ān*, ed. by M.A.F. Ibrāhīm, vol. I, Cairo, al-Hay'a al-Miṣriyya, 1967, p. 232; F. Sherif, *A Guide to the Contents of the Qur'ān*, London, Ithaca Press, 1985, p. 46; E. Platti, "Les thèmes du Coran: Le commentaire de Mawḍūḍī", in *En hommage au père Jacques Jomier, o.p.*, ed. by M.-T. Urvoy, Paris, Cerf, 2002, pp. 171–184, here 174. They consist of stories about prophets (25 of them fall into this category; see al-Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān*, vol. III, 1967, p. 67), sages, historical, mythical, historico-mythical, or stereotyped figures of ancient times. See R. Tottoli, "Narrative Literature", in *The Blackwell Companion to the Qur'ān*, ed. by A. Rippin, Oxford, Blackwell Publishing, 2006, pp. 467–480; C. Gilliot, "Narratives" s.v., in *Encyclopaedia of the Qur'ān*, vol. III, J–O, 2003, pp. 517–526, esp. 517.

³⁴ Elliptical versions of several stories are found, for example, in Q 21:74–91. This specific pericope reports the stories of Lot, David and Solomon, Job, Jonah, Zechariah, and Mary. For a discussion of how the Qur'ān reinterprets biblical figures within an Ar-

appear as independent units embedded within suras that are otherwise not narrative in nature.³⁵ In other instances, entire suras are structured around a core narrative³⁶ or composed wholly of prophetic stories. Conversely, certain passages contain only brief narrative references, condensed into a few concise verses or conveyed through allusive readings.³⁷ Lastly, a number of verses show only a simple enumeration of prophets and key events associated with them.³⁸ As a consequence, these narrative sections are not always easy to follow or piece together into complete, continuous stories.³⁹ Instead, the Qurʾān emphasises more on the moral and theological lessons of the prophets rather than several other details. The prophets and their experiences are thus depicted primarily as ethical paradigms, instead of being portrayed through historical narratives.⁴⁰ In fact, one of the key features of the prophetic accounts is their recurring structure, which consistently impacts on both the reader and the listener. Their specific use of dual oppositional

abic-Islamic framework, see S.H. Griffith, *The Bible in Arabic: The Scriptures of the "People of the Book" in the Language of Islam*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2013.

³⁵ For instance, see Q 14:35–41 (Abraham), Q 38:71–85 (Adam), Q 40:23–56 (Moses), Q 89:6–12 (ʿĀd, Ṭamūd, and the Pharaoh).

³⁶ See, for example, Q 7 which contains six stories: Noah (Q 7:59–64), Hūd (Q 7:65–72), Ṣāliḥ (Q 7:73–79), Lot (Q 7:80–84), Ṣuʿayb (Q 7:85–93), and Moses (Q 7:103–157); Q 54 with five stories: Noah (Q 54:9–17), Hūd (Q 54:18–22), Ṣāliḥ (Q 54:23–32), Lot (Q 54:33–40), and the Pharaoh (Q 54:41–42). Q 20 has two stories about Moses (Q 20:9–99) and Adam (Q 20:115–128); while Q 26:10–189 narrates seven stories: Moses (Q 26:10–68), Abraham (Q 26:69–104), Noah (Q 26:105–122), Hūd (Q 26:123–140), Ṣāliḥ (Q 26:141–159), Lot (Q 26:160–175), and Ṣuʿayb (Q 26:176–189). See Gilliot, "Narratives", pp. 518–522.

³⁷ See, for instance, Q 17:61–65 (Adam), Q 17:101–104 (Moses and the Pharaoh), Q 53:50–54 (ʿĀd, Ṭamūd, Noah, "the ruined cities"), Q 69:4–12 (Ṭamūd, ʿĀd, Pharaoh, "the ruined cities", *al-muʿtafikāt*, and Noah), Q 85:1–7 ("the makers of the trench"), Q 85:17–20 (the Pharaoh and Ṭamūd).

³⁸ See Q 4:163–165; 6:83–87; 9:70; 22:42–45; 25:38; 38:12–14; 50:12–14.

³⁹ R. Tottoli, *Biblical Prophets in the Qurʾān and Muslim Literature*, Abingdon-New York, Routledge, 2002, pp. 17–18.

⁴⁰ See F.M. Donner, *Narratives of Islamic Origins: The Beginnings of Islamic Historical Writing*, Princeton, Darwin Press, 1998, pp. 76–85. The lack of specific narrative features could suggest a certain knowledge by the first listeners of the Qurʾān of biblical traditions, through Jewish and Christian interpretations, in some circles where Muḥammad shared his revelations. See *Bible and Qurʾān: Essays in Scriptural Intertextuality*, ed. by J.C. Reeves, Atlanta, Society of Biblical Literature, 2003; *New Perspectives on the Qurʾān: The Qurʾān in its Historical Context 2*, ed. by G.S. Reynolds, Abingdon-New York, Routledge, 2011; *Behind the Story: Ethical Readings of Qurʾānic Narratives*, ed. by S. Rashwani, Leiden, Brill, 2024.

form (for instance, good vs evil; believers vs unbelievers; messenger/prophet vs Pharaoh; good cities vs subverted/destroyed cities) serves to prompt a moral or theological decision from the audience.⁴¹

Although some stories (like those of Moses and Jesus) could be seen as reported in detail, all of them (except for Joseph's in Q 12) are spread across the Qur'ān in different contexts.⁴² Specific narrative elements often reappear in multiple suras, sometimes with a few variations or additions to the plot.⁴³ This means that the Qur'ānic presentation of prophetic episodes is dispersed and not arranged in a continuous or chronological order, unlike the more linear style found in biblical prophetic accounts.⁴⁴ This structure reflects the unique composition of the Qur'ān, which is shaped by the context of its gradual revelation to Muḥammad, through the angel Gabriel, as affirmed in: "The disbelievers also say, 'Why was the Qur'an not sent down to him all at once?' We sent it in this way to strengthen your heart [Prophet]; We gave it to you in gradual revelation" (Q 25:32) and "it is a recitation that We have revealed in parts, so that you can recite it to people at intervals; We have sent it down little by little" (Q 17:106).⁴⁵

⁴¹ See C. Gilliot, "De l'impossible censure du récit légendaire: Adab et tafsīr: deux voies pour édifier l'ethos de l'homo islamicus", *Israel Oriental Studies* 19 (1999), pp. 49–96. The importance of the Qur'ānic narratives of the prophets, along with the will to follow their actions, gave rise to the literary genre of *qīṣaṣ al-anbiyā'* in Arabic Islamic literature, since the end of the 1st/6th century. See R.G. Khoury, *Les légendes prophétiques dans l'Islam: Depuis le I^{er} jusqu'au III^e siècle de l'Hégire*, Wiesbaden, Harrassowitz, 1978; W.M. Brinner, "Prophets and Prophecy in the Islamic and Jewish Traditions", in *Studies in Islamic and Judaic Traditions*, ed. by W.M. Brinner and S.D. Ricks, Atlanta, Scholars Press, 1986, pp. 63–82; R. Tottoli, "The Qīṣaṣ al-anbiyā' of Ibn Muṭarrif al-Ṭarafī (454/1062): Stories of the prophets from al-Andalus", *Al-Qantara* 19/1 (1998), pp. 131–160; Tottoli, *Biblical Prophets in the Qur'ān*, pp. 42, 138–164; al-Ṭarafī, *Qīṣaṣ al-anbiyā'*; ET: *The Stories of the Prophets of Ibn Muṭarrif al-Ṭarafī*, ed. by R. Tottoli, Berlin, Klaus Schawz Verlag, 2003; M. Klar, "Stories of the Prophets", in *The Blackwell Companion to the Qur'ān*, pp. 339–349.

⁴² A single story is the focus of only a few suras: Q 71 ("Noah"), Q 12 ("Joseph"), Q 28, ("The Story": tells of Moses, Aaron and Hāmān, adding an account on Korah).

⁴³ See the story of Šālīḥ reported in Q 27:45–53, which varies almost completely from the one given by the Qur'ān in other suras. See also Q 7:73–79; 11:61–68; 26:141–159; 27:45–53; 54:23–31; 91:11–15.

⁴⁴ An overview of major versions of the chronological re-arrangement of the suras in comparison to their actual numbered order in the Qur'ān may be found in Watt, *Bell's Introduction to the Qur'ān*, pp. 205–213; *New Perspectives on the Qur'ān*.

⁴⁵ According to Q 97:1–5, the Qur'ān was sent down on *laylat al-qadr*, "the night of the destiny/revelation/divine determination"; see also Q 44:3. See Abū Ga'far Muḥam-

Another defining feature of Qurʾānic narrative style, particularly in relation to the stories of the prophets, is its minimal concern with chronological sequence. Instead, the emphasis is placed on the moral and spiritual significance of each story. These narratives are presented as divine signs and serve as a reminder for listeners.⁴⁶ The Qurʾān itself gives evidence of this trait, for instance, at the end of “the best of stories” (*aḥsan al-qaṣaṣ*) (Q 12:3), namely the account of Joseph: “There is a lesson in the stories of such people for those who understand. This revelation is no fabrication: it is a confirmation of the truth of what was sent before it; an explanation of everything; a guide and a blessing for those who believe” (Q 12:111).

Furthermore, the Qurʾān makes clear that it does not recount the stories of all the prophets God sent down. The number of envoys mentioned is therefore not exhaustive. As it is stated: “We have sent other messengers before you – some We have mentioned to you [Muḥammad] and some We have not” (Q 40:78); “to other messengers We have already mentioned to you [Muḥammad], and also to some We have not” (Q 4:164). Some exegetes have explained this selectivity by noting that various envoys were either too numerous or insufficiently distinct to be mentioned individually. According to some traditions, the total number of prophets sent throughout history is said to be 124,000,⁴⁷ underscoring the Qurʾān focus on purpose and guidance over comprehensive enumeration.

Twenty-five Qurʾānic messengers are explicitly quoted by name, though there is some scholarly debate regarding the precise identity of a few among them. In addition to these, the Qurʾān also alludes

mad ibn ʿarīr al-Ṭabarī, *Ġāmiʿ al-bayān ʿan taʾwīl fī al-Qurʾān*, vol. XXV, al-Qāhira, Dār al-Ḥadīṭ, 1987, p. 64. This night is generally identified by Islamic tradition as the twenty-seventh day of the month of Ramaḍān; see Q 2:185. The Qurʾān was then revealed by Gabriel to Muḥammad over a period of twenty or twenty-three years. See al-Ṭabarī, *Ġāmiʿ al-bayān*, vol. XXX, p. 166; A. Guillaume, *The Life of Muḥammad: A Translation of Ibn Iṣḥāq's Sirat rasūl Allāh*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1955; repr., Karachi, Oxford University Press, 1967, pp. 111–112.

⁴⁶ See H. Schwarzbach, *Biblical and Extra-Biblical Legends in Islamic Folk-Literature*, Walldorf-Hessen, Verlag für Orientkunde Dr. H. Vorndran, 1982; H.T. Norris, “*Qīṣaṣ* Elements in the Qurʾān”, in *Arabic Literature to the End of the Umayyad Period*, ed. by A.F.L. Beeston et al., Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1983, pp. 246–259; Watt, *Bell's introduction to the Qurʾān*, pp. 124–125.

⁴⁷ See ʿAbd Allāh ibn ʿUmar al-Bayḍāwī, *Anwār al-tanzīl wa-asrār al-taʾwīl*, ed. by M.ʿA.R. al-Marʾaṣī, vol. II, Beirut, Dār Iḥyāʾ al-Turāṭ al-ʿArabī, 1988, p. 346.

to other envoys without mentioning their names directly.⁴⁸ However, later Muslim exegetes identified some of these unnamed figures based on contextual clues, prophetic traditions, and exegetical texts.⁴⁹

4. Job's Narrative in the Qur'ān

The presence of Job in the Qur'ān as a prophetic figure presents a notable interpretive challenge. Unlike many other prophetic figures, Job is not explicitly described as receiving a divine call, delivering a message, or being sent to a specific community. This narrative ambiguity could raise important questions about the nature and criteria of prophethood in the Qur'ānic narrative framework. As Anthony H. Johns observes in his analysis of Job's Qur'ānic portrayal, "Job does not at first sight fit into the general prophetic mould. There is no account of his call, of divine words by which he is commissioned, the giving to him of a Book, the people to whom he preached, their acceptance or rejection of him, or the punishment that would follow such a rejection".⁵⁰ While Johns is not the only scholar to address the role

⁴⁸ See B.M. Wheeler, *Prophets in the Quran: An Introduction to the Quran and Muslim Exegesis*, London, Continuum, 2002, p. 9; Tottoli, *Biblical Prophets in the Qur'ān*, pp. 44–45.

⁴⁹ The exegetical literature claims a Qur'ānic allusion to Ezekiel (Ḥizqīl) in Q 2:243. Moreover, a few exegetical traditions identify Ezekiel with Dhū l-Kifl and with Elisha. See G. Vajda, "Dhū l-Kifl" s.v., in *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, vol. II, C–G, 1991, p. 242; H. Busse, "Dhū l-Kifl" s.v., in *Encyclopaedia of the Qur'ān*, vol. I, A–D, 2001, pp. 527–529. The biblical Samuel (Ṣamwīl, Ṣamwā'il, Āšmawīl, Āšmāwīl, or Iṣmawīl) has been seen in the anonymous prophet referred to in Q 2:246–248. See Muḥammad ibn 'Abd Allāh al-Kisā'ī, *Qīṣaṣ al-anbiyā'*; ET: *The Tales of the Prophets of al-Kisā'ī*, ed. by W.M. Thackston Jr., Chicago, Kazi Publications, 1997, pp. 270–278; W.M. Brinner, *'Anā'is al-majālis fi qīṣaṣ al-anbiyā'*, or "Lives of the Prophets" as Recounted by Abū Ishāq Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad ibn Ibrāhīm al-Tha'labī, Leiden, Brill, 2002, pp. 439–444. Finally, Jeremiah (Irmīyā), according to traditional exegesis, has been identified with the prophet quoted in Q 2:259–261. See al-Ṭabarī, *Ġāmī' al-bayān*, vol. V, pp. 438–484; al-Ṭarfī, *The Stories of the Prophets*, pp. 322–345; Wheeler, *Prophets in the Quran*, pp. 161–163, 250–258, 289–290; Tottoli, *Biblical Prophets in the Qur'ān*, pp. 102–102. Three other anonymous messengers must be added to these prophets; see Q 36:13–30. They are usually identified with three Christian apostles who were sent by Jesus to Antioch; see J. Walker, *Bible Characters in the Koran*, London, Gardner, 1931, p. 34.

⁵⁰ A.H. Johns, "Narrative, Intertext and Allusion in the Qur'ānic Presentation of Job", *Journal of Qur'ānic Studies* 1/1 (1999), pp. 1–25, here 3.

of Job in the Qurʾān, his remarks concisely emphasise the difficulty in categorising Job alongside other prophetic figures.

In the Qurʾānic text, the prophet Job (أيوب, Ayyūb)⁵¹ is mentioned by name in four suras.⁵² He is quoted twice as a prophet in two lists of envoys, affirming the idea of a divinely guided succession. In Q 4:163, he is enumerated along with a number of prophets to whom God revealed himself, in particular in relation to the lineage of Noah, Abraham, and Israel,⁵³ underlining that all of them experienced the same process of revelation (*wahī*): “We have sent revelation to you [Prophet] as We did to Noah and the prophets after him, to Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac, Jacob, and the Tribes, to Jesus, Job, Jonah, Aaron, and Solomon— to David We gave the book [of Psalms]” (Q 4:163).⁵⁴ All of these figures “were messengers bearing good news and warning, so that mankind would have no excuse before God, once the messengers had been sent” (Q 4:165). In Q 6:84, Job is again listed alongside envoys (that is David, Solomon, Moses, Aaron) and is clearly described as a descendent of Abraham. Furthermore, in Q 6:86–87, he is included among those to whom God granted prophethood and elevated in rank “over other people” (*alā al-ʿālamīn*), guiding them along “a straight

⁵¹ See Jeffery, *Foreign Vocabulary of the Qurʾān*, pp. 73–74; A.H. Johns, “Job” s.v., in *Encyclopaedia of the Qurʾān*, vol. III, pp. 50–51; A. Jeffery, “Ayyūb” s.v., in *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, vol. I, A–B, 1986, pp. 795–796; Brinner, *ʿArāʾis al-majālis fī qīṣaṣ al-anbiyāʾ*, pp. 254–273; al-Ṭarafī, *The Tales of the Prophets*, pp. 166–179; Tottoli, *Biblical Prophets in the Qurʾān*, p. 42; Wheeler, *Prophets in the Quran*, pp. 157–163; D.B. Macdonald, “Some External Evidence of the Original Form of the Legend of Job”, *The American Journal of Semitic Languages and Literatures* 14 (1898), pp. 137–164; J.-F. Legrain, “Variations musulmanes sur le thème de Job”, *Bulletin d'études orientales* 37–38 (1985–1986), pp. 51–114; Brinner, “Prophets and Prophecy in the Islamic and Jewish Traditions”, pp. 63–82; A.H. Johns, “Three Stories of a Prophet: Al-Ṭabarī's Treatment of Job in *Sūrah al-Anbiyāʾ* 83–4 (Part I)”, *Journal of Qurʾanic Studies* 3/2 (2001), pp. 39–61; A.H. Johns, “Three Stories of a Prophet: Al-Ṭabarī's Treatment of Job in *Sūrah al-Anbiyāʾ* 83–4 (Part II)”, *Journal of Qurʾanic Studies* 4/1 (2002), pp. 49–60; M.O. Klar, *Interpreting al-Thaʿlabī's Tales of the Prophets: Temptation, Responsibility and Loss*, Abingdon-New York, Routledge, 2009, pp. 25–60. A detailed analysis of the exegetical literature on Job is given by J.-L. Déclais, *Les premiers musulmans face à la tradition biblique: Trois récits sur Job*, Paris, L'Harmattan, 1996. For a specific analysis of inconsistent or incorrect translations of Qurʾānic passages on Job, see P. Branca, “Tra Bibbia e Corano: Problemi relativi alla traduzione di un passo riguardante Giobbe”, *Kervan – Rivista Internazionale di studi afroasiatici* 2 (2005), pp. 13–16.

⁵² See Q 4:163; 6:84; 21:83; 38:41.

⁵³ See Q 4:54; 40:53; 57:26.

⁵⁴ A cognate passage is found in Q 2:136 and Q 3:84, with the addition of other prophets.

path" (*ṣirāṭ mustaqīm*). Apart from the lists, Job's personal character is highlighted in several pericopes in Q 21 and Q 38, which focus on his well-known trials and his exemplary patience in suffering.⁵⁵

With regard to his personal qualities, Job is described in Q 38:44 as "patient" (*sābir*),⁵⁶ "excellent servant" (*ni'm al-'abd*),⁵⁷ "always turned to God" (*awwāb*).⁵⁸ Additionally, in Q 6:85 he is counted among the "righteous" (*mīn al-ṣāliḥīn*).⁵⁹ His story is further characterised in Q 21:84 as "a reminder for all who serve Us" (*dikrā li-l-'ābidīn*), demonstrating his function as a model of virtue and devotion for the faithful.

In the Islamic history of salvation, God always imposed trials on his prophets. They endured them and, in the end, prevailed by submitting to God's will. A particular group of envoys, namely Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, David, Jesus, and Muḥammad, is mentioned in Q

⁵⁵ Traditionalists have tried to explain Job's trials. The entire structure of their narratives depends on their fundamental premise, which throughout history has been divided between: Job is guilty, and his sufferings are a divine punishment; and Job is innocent, and his trials are an honour with which God grants him a high reward; see Legrain, "Variations musulmanes sur le thème de Job", pp. 59–61.

⁵⁶ This term also recurs in connection with Abraham's son during the attempted sacrifice in Q 37:102; see A.J. Wensinck, "Ṣabr" s.v., in *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, vol. VIII, *Ned-Sam*, 1995, pp. 685–687. Patience is a regular trait of prophets and messengers, and its persistent presence in the Qur'ān is clear proof of its importance in Islamic moral thought; see I. Zilio-Grandi, *The Virtues of the Good Muslim*, Venice, Edizioni Ca' Foscari, 2025, pp. 13–15. In all exegetical sources it is found that Job was the most patient of his time; see Muqātil ibn Sulaymān al-Balḥī, *Tafsīr Muqātil b. Sulaymān*, ed. by 'A.A.M. Šaḥāta, 4 vols., Cairo, al-Hay'a al-Miṣriyya al-Āmma li-l-Kitāb, 1979–1989, esp. vol. III, p. 89.

⁵⁷ This title is normally related to God's prophets: Noah (Q 17:3; 54:9), Abraham (Q 38:45), David (Q 38:17), Solomon (Q 38:30), Zechariah (Q 19:2), Jesus (Q 4:172; 19:30), and Muḥammad (Q 2:23; 17:1; 18:1; 25:1, 96:10). See Jeffery, *Foreign Vocabulary of the Qur'ān*, 209–210; J.E. Brockopp, "Servants" s.v., in *Encyclopaedia of the Qur'ān*, vol. IV, *P-Sh*, 2004, pp. 576–580; C. Wilde and J.D. McAuliffe, "Religious Pluralism and the Qur'ān" s.v., *ibid.*, pp. 400–401. See also Legrain, "Variations musulmanes sur le thème de Job", pp. 79–80.

⁵⁸ In the whole of the Qur'ān, this word is repeated in relation to David (Q 38:17), Solomon (Q 38:30), and Šu'ayb (Q 11:88). Furthermore, Muḥammad himself is associated with the topic of penitence (Q 9:117).

⁵⁹ Other prophets who are given this title are: Abraham (Q 2:130; 16:122; 29:27), Isaac (Q 37:112), Lot (Q 21:75), Dū l-Kifl (Q 21:85–6), Elijah (Q 6:85), Jonah (Q 68:50), John (Q 3:39), and Jesus (Q 3:46). According to Shī'ī exegesis Job did not commit sin; see, e.g., Quṭb al-Dīn al-Rāwandī, *Qiṣaṣ al-anbiyā'*, ed. by Ḡ.R.'I. al-Yazdī, Beirut, Mu'assasat al-murfiḍ, 1989, p. 139.

46:35, as possessing “firm resolve” (*ulū l-‘azm*),⁶⁰ in the face of hardships inherent in their missions. In addition to this, characters such as Jacob, Joseph, David, and especially Job are often included for their exemplary demonstration of perseverance. Job, in particular, is regarded as the personification of the virtue of “patience” (*ṣabr*), which, along with “trust in God” (*tawakkul* or *amāna*), is in the Qur’ān one of the essential virtue of a true believer.⁶¹ Following the examples of the prophets, believers are also called upon to remain patient in adversity: “You who believe, be steadfast, more steadfast than others; be ready; always be mindful of God, so that you may prosper” (Q 3:200), so that they “will be rewarded with the highest place in Paradise for their steadfastness. There they will be met with greetings and peace” (Q 25:75).⁶² Their recompense will even be multiplied, and those who suffered for the sake of their faith will have their sins forgiven.⁶³

“Mémorial de patience pour les vivants, Job sera à la tête des patients au jour de la résurrection”;⁶⁴ hence, Job, as well as Jacob,⁶⁵ stands as a paradigmatic embodiment of the virtue of patience, without losing belief in his Lord.⁶⁶ Given that most of the virtues of faith enter

⁶⁰ See D. De Smet, “Adam, premier prophète et législateur?: La doctrine chiite des *ulū al-‘azm* et la controverse sur la pérennité de la *ṣari‘a*”, in *Le shī‘isme imāmīte quarante ans après: Hommage à Etan Kohlberg*, ed. by M.A. Amir-Moezzi, M.M. Bar-Asher and S. Hopkins, Turnhout, Brepols, 2009, pp. 187–202, here 187–189.

⁶¹ Specifically, *ṣabr*, in addition to other derivatives of the same root, is attested in the Qur’ān a total of 103 times, emphasising the centrality of this virtue in Muslim piety; see S.C. Alexander, “Trust and Patience” s.v., in *Encyclopaedia of the Qur’ān*, vol. V, pp. 378–385. For an in-depth discussion of how translation choices affect the perception of key concepts (such as Job’s endurance), see D.J. Stewart, “Understanding the Quran in English: Notes on Translation, Form, and Prophetic Typology”, in *Diversity in Language: Contrastive Studies in English and Arabic Theoretical and Applied Linguistics*, ed. by Z. Ibrahim, N. Kassabgy and S. Aydelott, Cairo, American University in Cairo Press, 2000, pp. 31–48.

⁶² See also Q 23:111; 33:35; 76:12. In light of Griffith’s analysis, Job’s exemplary endurance emerges as a vital part of the Qur’ān’s theology of prophethood, affirming divine justice and mercy through trial and perseverance; see Griffith, “The ‘Sunna of Our Messengers’”.

⁶³ See Q 3:195; 28:54.

⁶⁴ ‘Alī ibn al-Hasan ibn ‘Asākir, *al-Tārīḥ al-Kabīr*, ed. by ‘A.Q. Badrān, vol. III, Damascus, s.n., 1911, p. 194.

⁶⁵ See Q 12:18, 83–84.

⁶⁶ See A. Khalil, “On Patience (*Ṣabr*) in Sufi Virtue Ethics”, in *Mysticism and Ethics in Islam*, ed. by O. Bilal, A. Khalil and M. Rustom, Beirut, American University of Beirut,

through the “door” of patience,⁶⁷ Job experienced both mental and physical suffering, which he endured with humble acceptance, never cursing or turning against God.⁶⁸ Unlike the biblical account, the Qur'ānic portrayal presents Job within the broader framework of prophetic figures who exemplify exceptional submission to Lord's will. Thus, he was not afflicted by the problem of theodicy.⁶⁹ In the Bible, Job attributes his pains directly to God,⁷⁰ curses the day of his birth for the reason for his affliction,⁷¹ and questions divine justice.⁷² By contrast, in the Qur'ān, Job's trial is not caused by God directly, but rather by Satan (Iblīs), with God's permission.⁷³ Indeed, “Job too knows that Satan was given a respite from punishment until Judgement Day, and recognises him by this fact”.⁷⁴ This depiction is consistent with the Qur'ānic understanding that Satan casts his influence into the hearts of all messengers, though “God removes what Satan insinuates” (Q 22:52) and “He makes Satan's insinuations a temptation only for the sick at heart and those whose hearts are hardened” (Q 22:53). Therefore, God can also test prophets with Satan's temptations, since “the wisdom and greatness of God can be experienced as much through the

2022, pp. 71–78, esp. 76. See also M. Greenberg, “Job”, in *The Literary Guide to the Bible*, ed. by R. Alter and F. Kermode, London, Collins, 1987, pp. 283–304, esp. 283.

⁶⁷ See Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī, *Patience and Thankfulness: Kitāb al-ṣabr wa'l-ṣukr*, ed. by H.T. Littlejohn, Cambridge, The Islamic Texts Society, 2010; Zilio-Grandi, *The Virtues of the Good Muslim*, pp. 13–15.

⁶⁸ Navid Kermani offers an insightful exploration of the Sufi scholar Farīd al-Dīn al-ʿAṭṭār's (d. 618/1221) *Muṣibatnāma* (The Book of Suffering) through the lens of Job's narrative. Indeed, al-ʿAṭṭār enters a deep counter-theological argument regarding the apparent incongruities and afflictions present in God's realm. The central conundrum posed is the reconciliation of human suffering and injustice with the fundamental faith in a benevolent and merciful God. Therefore, Kermani narrates this theological tension, as embodied in Job's enquiry; see N. Kermani, *The Terror of God: Attar, Job and the Metaphysical Revolt*, trans. by W. Hoban, Cambridge, Polity Press, 2011.

⁶⁹ See for instance Job 6:11.

⁷⁰ See for instance Job 6:4; 8:17–18; 10:3; 13:24; 16:7.

⁷¹ See Job 3:1–12; 6:24; 10:2b.

⁷² See Job 19:7. See also see Griffith, *The Bible in Arabic*.

⁷³ See Q 38:41. The Bible narrates Satan's temptation of Job in Job 1–2. In Qur'ānic exegetical discourse, an envy-based challenge between Satan and God has been illustrated through Job's suffering. However, Job remains faithful because he knows that what has been taken away can be returned. See Legrain, “Variations musulmanes sur le thème de Job”, pp. 58–59, 61–62; Johns, “Three Stories of a Prophet (Part I)”, pp. 42–44, 53–55.

⁷⁴ Johns, “Three stories of a prophet (Part I)”, p. 55.

pain and bewilderment of a test so painful that it passes comprehension, as through the gift of temporal blessings”.⁷⁵

Finally, Job’s prosperity was restored, and he was granted twice as much as he had before: “We restored his family to him, with many more like them: a sign of Our mercy and a lesson to all who understand” (Q 38:43).⁷⁶

5. *Job: Words and Profile*

The relationship between the Qur’ānic text and Muḥammad is so intimate that the revelation appears as a direct discourse from God to his Prophet. In this context, “the divine-human dialogue represents a special favour that man receives from God”.⁷⁷ Accordingly, the Qur’ān presents God as the speaker (the revealer), who conveys his message from the preserved celestial text, and the Prophet as the first addressee (the hearer). As many early accounts affirm, Muḥammad was ordered with authority at the very beginning of the revelation: “Read! In the name of your Lord” (*iqra’ bi-smi rabbika*) (Q 96:1).⁷⁸ Subsequently, the people (*al-nās*) represent the second group to receive the message, after Muḥammad. They are addressed through him who serves as “the mouthpiece of the divine will”.⁷⁹ Depending on the situation, this audience can be either small or a large crowd. The major difference between the first and the second addressee is that the latter react at once with assent, rejection, or insist on additional explanations.⁸⁰

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 47.

⁷⁶ The Bible adds that he lived for 140 years and also saw four generations; see Job 42:10–16. Given that the root K-F-L has the meaning of “doubling”, Walker identifies Dū l-Kifl with Job. Indeed, in the epilogue reported in the biblical text (Job 42:10) God gives Job twice what he once had, namely he received a “double portion”; see J. Walker, “Who is Dhu’l-Kifl?”, *Muslim World* 16 (1926), pp. 399–401.

⁷⁷ M. Mir, “Dialogue in the Qur’ān”, *Religion and Literature* 24/1 (1992), pp. 1–22, here 4.

⁷⁸ God’s creative imperative was also a command “Be (*kun*)!”. See Q 2:117; 3:47; 19:35; 40:68; cf. Q 3:59; 6:73; 16:40; 36:82. Indeed, command may represent the principal form of God’s mode of speech. See T. Izutsu, *Language and Magic: Studies in the Magical Function of Speech*, Tokyo, Keio Institute of Philological Studies, 1956, pp. 52–53; R. Gwynne, *Logic, Rhetoric and Legal Reasoning in the Qur’ān: God’s Arguments*, Abingdon-New York, Routledge, 2004, p. 67.

⁷⁹ Watt, *Bell’s introduction to the Qur’ān*, p. 67.

⁸⁰ In the field of Qur’ānic sciences various classical works investigate the different models of address (*ḥiṭāb*, *muḥāṭabāt*), but only rarely distinguish sections where the gen-

Because of its mainly oral origins, the Qur'ān shows great dynamism when addressing its audience directly, but also when reporting direct speech, such as in dialogues,⁸¹ a significant and recurrent trait of the Qur'ānic style and “a mosaic of voices”.⁸² However, William Montgomery Watt seems to underestimate this literary feature since “direct speech is apt to be ‘interjected’ at any point, as the personages mentioned in the narrative express themselves in words”.⁸³ Besides, dialogues, most of which are mainly “simple exchanges that are not dialogues in a strict sense”,⁸⁴ as well as the quite rare monologues, prevail in the second and third Meccan periods, because of the disapproval of the Quraysh. In fact, the Qur'ān “reflects, through dialogue, the interaction between the Muslim and non-Muslim communities of Arabia on the one hand and among the members of the Muslim community itself on the other [...]. At the same time, use of dialogue makes the Qur'ān stylistically akin to the Bible, where dialogue is very prominent”.⁸⁵

Since not all prophets are shown speaking, the amount of direct speech or significant verbal exchange attributed to each prophet generally reflects the level of narrative development in their respective stories. Prophets like Adam, and especially Job, Jonah, and Elijah, whose

eral audience is addressed from those in which one character addresses another; see R. Gwynne, “Patterns of Address”, in *The Blackwell Companion to the Qur'ān*, pp. 73–86. Some modern Arabic works discuss the general style and form of Qur'ānic narratives. Among them F.H. ‘Abbās, *al-Qaṣaṣ al-Qur'ānī: Iḥā'uhu wa Nafaḥātuhu*, Amman, Dār al Furqān, 1987, in which all of the narratives are arranged in chronological order, and M.S. Ḥasan, *Rawā'i'u al-i'ğāz fī al-qāṣaṣ al-Qur'ānī*, Alexandria, al-Maktab al-Ġāmi'ī al-Ḥadīth, 1982, who explores many literary devices, such as “interrogative style” (*uslūb al-istiḥām*), and “predicative style” (*uslūb al-asnādī*).

⁸¹ See A.S. Tritton, “The Speech of God”, *Studia Islamica* 36 (1972), pp. 5–22; Mir, “Dialogue in the Qur'ān”; M. Abdel Haleem, *Understanding the Qur'ān: Themes and Style*, London, I.B. Tauris, 1999, p. 206; M. Mir, “Dialogues” s.v., in *Encyclopaedia of the Qur'ān*, vol. I, pp. 531–535; T. Izutsu, *God and Man in the Qur'ān: Semantics of the Qur'ānic Weltanschauung*, Petaling Jaya, Islamic Book Trust, 2002, pp. 151–197; M.T. Heemskerck, “Speech” s.v., in *Encyclopaedia of the Qur'ān*, vol. V, pp. 108–112.

⁸² A. Johns, “Joseph in the Quran: Dramatic Dialogue, Human Emotion and Prophetic Wisdom”, *Islamochristiana* 7 (1981), pp. 29–55, here 32.

⁸³ Watt, *Bell's introduction to the Qur'ān*, p. 80.

⁸⁴ Mir, “Dialogue in the Qur'ān”, p. 3. The same cannot be said of several of Moses' dialogues, such as Q 18:65–83 (Moses and al-Ḥidr [or al-Ḥadir]) and Q 26:16–37 (Moses and the Pharaoh); see J.D. McAuliffe, “Debate and Disputation” s.v., in *Encyclopaedia of the Qur'ān*, vol. I, pp. 511–514.

⁸⁵ Mir, “Dialogues”, p. 534.

accounts are less elaborated, are thus presented as minor figures, both in narrative scope and in terms of speech.⁸⁶ The most common types of dialogues involve a prophet and his people, as well as exchanges between God and individual prophets. Another frequent interlocutor is the town/tribal assembly, or council of nobles (*al-mala'*), which often represents the main obstacle to the prophet's mission.⁸⁷ In Qur'anic narrative style, speech functions as a form of "narration-through-dialogue".⁸⁸ As Mustansir Mir points out, the narration also "lays down the parameters within which dialogue will take place, setting the terms and conditions of dialogue, and furnishing guidelines for 'correctly' evaluating and interpreting a given dialogue".⁸⁹ Lastly, several prophets are found in a sort of monologue/soliloquy, or one-sided dialogue,⁹⁰ when relating and sharing desires, feelings, or thoughts.⁹¹

As for Job, the Qur'an narrates his plea to Lord for relief: "Suffering has truly afflicted me, but you are the Most Merciful of the merciful"

⁸⁶ Quite different is the case of prophets like Ishmael, Aaron, and David who, even though characterised only by a few utterances, appear evidently linked to stronger characters in terms of individual narrative development, namely, Abraham, Moses and, although at a lower level, Solomon.

⁸⁷ This specific addressee emerges in the narrative of Noah (Q 11:38) and mainly in that of Moses and the Pharaoh where the major clash between an envoy, as a representative of heavenly power, materialises against a representative of earthly evil (see for example Q 7:104–106; 10:75; 17:102; 20:50–61, 63–70; 26:26–54), or, in other words, the major clash between the celestial court of God (*al-mala' al-'alā*) and an earthly court is materialised; see P. Heck, "Politics and the Qur'an" s.v., in *Encyclopaedia of the Qur'an*, vol. IV, pp. 125–151. An emblematic example is certainly the figure of the Pharaoh. Indeed, he also appears as an interlocutor in the narrative of Joseph. Moreover, Joseph also converses with his master's wife and cellmates, as well as with his brothers; see Q 12:52–55; 12:23, 37–41, 42, 47–49; 12:59–61, 69, 77–79, 88–93.

⁸⁸ R. Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, New York, Basic Books, 1981, p. 69; see also Mir, "Dialogue in the Qur'an", p. 17.

⁸⁹ Mir, "Dialogue in the Qur'an", p. 18.

⁹⁰ This specific kind of dialogue also occurs in relation to God, for instance, when in Q 2:34–39 he addresses Satan and Adam and Eve. See Mir, "Dialogue in the Qur'an", pp. 9–11; Id., "Dialogues" s.v., pp. 531–532.

⁹¹ For instance, Jacob said: "Alas for Joseph!" (Q 12:84), then he became blind in one eye out of sorrow at the loss of his son Joseph. Solomon, when he was presented with standing steeds, said: "My love of fine things is part of my remembering my Lord!" until [the horses] disappeared from sight – 'Bring them back!' [he said] and started to stroke their legs and necks" (Q 38:32–33). Lot cried: "This is a truly terrible day!" (Q 11:77), after angels had come to him. Moses, after he had accidentally killed an Egyptian, said: "This must be Satan's work: clearly he is a misleading enemy" (Q 28:15), then, while heading for Midian, he said: "May my Lord guide me to the right way" (Q 28:22).

(Q 21:83),⁹² recognising that no one but God can lift his affliction. In response to Job's call, God intervenes: "We answered him, removed his suffering, and restored his family to him, along with more like them, as an act of grace from Us" (Q 21:84). This passage appears within a broader sequence of narratives describing the trials and the virtues of other Qur'ānic figures: Moses and Aaron, Abraham, Lot, Noah, David and Solomon, Job, Jonah, Zechariah, John, mention of Ishmael, Idrīs, Dū l-Kifl, and, implicitly, Mary and Jesus. Each is portrayed as having received divine gifts such as criterion, rectitude, judgment, and knowledge.⁹³ Besides, God's support is shown. They trusted in him while enduring difficulties, since he is the true "hearer of invocation" (*sami'u l-du'ā'*)⁹⁴ and answers supplications. In particular, Abraham was saved from fire,⁹⁵ Lot from the punishment of his people,⁹⁶ Noah from the deluge,⁹⁷ Job from his distress,⁹⁸ Jonah from the belly of a fish,⁹⁹ and Zechariah mercifully received an answer to his prayer from God.¹⁰⁰ From a typological perspective,¹⁰¹ Job, Jonah, and Zechariah form a distinct group of prophets, each marked by suffering, though their experiences differ in nature and cause. They all cry appeal to God in relation to their own needs: "Job calls for relief from the hurt that has touched him – loss of property, family and physical affliction, Jonah is in darkness frustrated that his people had rejected him, and Zechariah appeals out of longing for an heir because otherwise, without a child of his own, his evil nephews would inherit from him, and destroy his spiritual patrimony".¹⁰²

In another Qur'ānic context, namely Q 38 in which Job's tale is found, his narrative is preceded by references to stories of punishment, the accounts of David and Solomon, and followed by mention of

⁹² See M. Zwettler, "A Mantic Manifesto: The Sūra of 'The Poets' and the Qur'ānic Foundations of Prophetic Authority", in *Poetry and Prophecy: The Beginnings of a Literary Tradition*, ed. by J.L. Kugel, Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 1990, pp. 75–119.

⁹³ See Q 12:22; 21:48–91; 28:14.

⁹⁴ See Q 3:38. See also for instance Q 2:127; 14:39.

⁹⁵ See Q 21:69–70.

⁹⁶ See Q 21:74.

⁹⁷ See Q 21:76.

⁹⁸ See Q 21:84.

⁹⁹ See Q 21:88.

¹⁰⁰ See Q 21:90–91.

¹⁰¹ See Zwettler, "A Mantic Manifesto"; Stewart, "Understanding the Quran in English"; Griffith, *The Bible in Arabic*; Id., "The 'Sunna of Our Messengers'".

¹⁰² Johns, "Narrative, Intertext and Allusion in the Qur'ānic Presentation of Job", p. 13.

Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Ishmael, Elisha, Dū l-Kifl. The sura ends with reflections on the destinies of believers and unbelievers in the afterlife, and with the episode of Satan's refusal to prostrate to Adam. After enduring years of trial without ever directly asking for deliverance, Job is again reported to have called out to his Lord for help: "Satan has afflicted me with weariness and suffering" (Q 38:41).¹⁰³ In keeping with God's pattern of mercy toward His faithful servants who endure trials, relief is granted; a cool spring miraculously appears, symbolising healing and refreshment.¹⁰⁴ Thus, he was ordered to scuff the earth with his foot: "Stomp your foot! Here is cool water for you to wash in and drink" (Q 38:42).¹⁰⁵ This image may evoke the ritual purification of ablution mentioned in Q 5:6, but more broadly, it recalls other Qur'anic accounts where water appears as a divine response in moments of need. For instance, the miraculous appearance of the well of Zamzam is implied in Q 2:158, as the scriptural basis for the narrative of Ishmael and Hagar. In Q 2:60, at God's command, Moses strikes a rock with his staff in the desert, causing twelve springs to gush forth. Similarly, in Q 19:24, when Mary suffers the pangs of childbirth, a voice reassures her, pointing to a stream of water beneath her as a divine provision. In each case, water emerges as a symbol of God's mercy, sustenance and presence in moments of human vulnerability, just as it does in Job's story.

6. *Job as an Emblem of Patience*

The prophetic experience of all the envoys in the Qur'an mirrors that of Muḥammad, serving as a kind of prelude to his own life.¹⁰⁶ Qur'anic

¹⁰³ See Zwettler, "A Mantic Manifesto".

¹⁰⁴ The spring is particularly significant since it is an obvious echoes of other Qur'anic references. God's command to Job to scuff the ground with his foot, in fact, can be seen as a counterpart to the order given to Moses "to strike the rock with his staff" (Q 7:160), obtaining the water that quenched the thirst of the Israelites. Besides, Schimmel sees a reference to Job and the healing spring in the ecstatic line of Rūmī, "wherever the lover touches the ground with his dancing feet, the water of life will spring out of the darkness"; see A. Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam*, Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press, 1975, p. 183.

¹⁰⁵ See H. Toelle, *Le Coran revisité: Le feu, l'eau, l'air et la terre*, Damascus, Institut français de Damas, 1999; M. Radscheit, "Springs and Fountains" s.v., in *Encyclopaedia of the Qur'an*, vol. V, pp. 121–128; A.H. Johns, "Water" s.v., *ibid.*, pp. 461–466.

¹⁰⁶ The narratives concerning the prophets and messengers, in particular that of the prophet Abraham, could appear as a kind of *preparatio prophetica* of Muḥammad.

references to the earlier prophets primarily aim to legitimise the truthfulness of his mission and to support him in the face of opposition from the majority of his Meccan adversaries. At the same time, these references reflect the limited success the Prophet initially encountered in Mecca.¹⁰⁷ By contrast, the Medinan period contains fewer and more concise accounts or phrases,¹⁰⁸ frequently focused on punishment stories; these thus “constitute the rather meagre narrative clothing of the believer-unbeliever relationship in Medina”.¹⁰⁹ For this reason, the Qur'ān frequently uses the actions and experiences of earlier prophets to remind its audience of analogous events in Muḥammad's life.¹¹⁰

See T. Nöldeke and F. Schwally, *Geschichte des Qurāns*, vol. I, Leipzig, Dieterich'sche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1909, pp. 19–20; C. Gilliot, “Récit, mythe et histoire chez Tabari: Une vision mythique de l'histoire universelle”, *Mélanges de l'Institut dominicain d'études orientales* 21 (1993), pp. 277–189, esp. 278–279; C. Snouck Hurgronje, “La légende qoranique d'Abraham et la politique religieuse du prophète Mohammed”, trans. by G.H. Bousquet, *Revue africaine* 91 (1951), pp. 73–88. In addition, Efim A. Rezvan says: “In speaking of the Biblical prophets, Muḥammad more than once fashioned his narrative on the contemporary situation in Mekka and Yathrib”; see E.A. Rezvan, “The Qur'ān and its World, IV ‘Raise not your voices above the Prophet's voice’ (Society, Power and Etiquette Norms)”, *Manuscripta Orientalia* 3/4 (1997), pp. 35–44, here 41.
¹⁰⁷ See D. Marshall, *God, Muhammad and the Unbelievers: A Qur'ānic Study*, Richmond, Curzon, 1999, pp. 29–30, 36–37; W.M. Watt, *Muhammad at Mecca*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1953, esp. chapter 5. Josef Horovitz stresses the educational purpose of the narrative parts, by highlighting that not all of them are fashioned on Muḥammad's incidents; see J. Horovitz, *Koranische Untersuchungen*, Berlin, De Gruyter, 1926, pp. 8–9. This way of dealing with the previous prophets has led scholars to use the term “monoprophetism” of the Qur'ān and its religion, since all the prophets are conceived as Muḥammad conceived himself of as a prophet; see A.L. de Prémare, “L'islam comme monoprophétisme”, in *Vivre avec l'islam?: Réflexions chrétiennes sur la religion de Mahomet*, ed. by A. Laurent, Versailles, Éditions Saint-Paul, 1996, pp. 150–162.

¹⁰⁸ See for instance Q 2:246–251; 5:20–26.

¹⁰⁹ Marshall, *God, Muhammad and the Unbelievers*, p. 161. The difference between the narrative material of the two periods could be explained by starting from the transformed religious condition, as well as the growing power and authority of Muḥammad, since his attention turned to the legal themes. Thus, messengers invoked as forerunners in the Meccan period of revelation were not as functional as in the Medinan period; See also *ibid.*, pp. 158–164 and Horovitz, *Koranische Untersuchungen*, pp. 25–27.

¹¹⁰ For the stories of punishment of unbelieving communities in the generations before Muḥammad the analogy with his trials seems incontrovertible. See T. Nagel, *Der Koran: Einföhrung Texte Erläuterungen*, Munich, C.H. Beck, 1983, pp. 68–69; Tottoli, *Biblical Prophets in the Qur'ān*, pp. 4–7. See also, W.A. Saleh, “The Arabian Context of Muḥammad's Life”, in *The Cambridge Companion to Muhammad*, ed. by J.E. Brockopp, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2010, pp. 21–38, esp. 36–37; F.E. Peters,

God reveals to the Prophet that the messengers sent before him were like him in both mission and in the trials they endured.¹¹¹ Nevertheless, they, “in the face of their sufferings for God’s cause, did not lose heart or weaken or surrender” (Q 3:146). This is a central theme in the Qur’ān, as the Prophet dealt with various types of suspicion, criticism, and opposition, not only theologically but also politically, first during the pre-hijra period in Mecca¹¹² by the majority of the Arab pagans, and later, after the flight from Mecca (622), by the Jewish questioners and opponents during his first years in Medina.¹¹³ During the Meccan period, he was derided by the pagan majority and accused of being a madman (*mağnūn*), liar (*kaddāb*), soothsayer (*kāhin*), sorcerer (*ṣāhir*), and poet (*ṣā’ir*). His recitations were dismissed as mere legends that ordinary people could imitate.¹¹⁴ From this point of view, the Qur’ānic verses that refer to Job, “God’s way of subjecting him to scrutiny and searching his heart”,¹¹⁵ constitute a clear exhortation to Muḥammad to remain patient and steadfast.¹¹⁶

The Qur’ān refutes all accusations against the Prophet, asserting opposition to him is, in essence, opposition to God.¹¹⁷ Thus, the

Jesus and Muḥammad: Parallel Tracks, Parallel Lives, New York, Oxford University Press, 2011, p. 116.

¹¹¹ See for instance Q 15:10–11; 22:42–44.

¹¹² See Watt, *Muḥammad at Mecca*, esp. chapter 5; M.W. Watt, *Muḥammad: Prophet and Statesman*, London, Oxford University Press, 1961, pp. 22, 72; R. Paret, “Der Koran als Geschichtsquelle”, *Der Islam* 37 (1961), pp. 24–42, esp. 36.

¹¹³ See Watt, *Muḥammad: Prophet and Statesman*, p. 72. The confrontation with the Jews emerges as a central subject in the Qur’ān in particular in the Medinan verses, where the polemical confrontation changed, by focusing on the demonstration that Muḥammad was the heir of the biblical tradition. Moreover, Watt speculates on “what would have happened had the Jews come to terms with Muhammad instead of opposing him. [They] might have become partners in the Arab Empire and Islam a sect of Jewry”; see M.W. Watt, *Muḥammad at Medina*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1981, p. 219. See also H. Rahman, “The Conflicts Between the Prophet and the Opposition in Madina”, *Der Islam* 62 (1985), pp. 260–297.

¹¹⁴ See for example Q 37:36; 38:4; 40:24; 51:39, 52; 52:29–30; 69:41–42. See also I.J. Boullata, “The Rhetorical Interpretation of the Qur’ān: *Ijāz* and Related Topics” in *Approaches to the History of the Interpretation of the Qur’ān*, ed. by A. Rippin, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1988, pp. 139–157, esp. 140; H. Bobzin, “The ‘Seal of the Prophets’: Towards an Understanding of Muhammad’s Prophethood”, in *The Qur’ān in Context: Historical and Literary Investigations into the Qur’ānic Milieu*, ed. by A. Neuwirth, N. Sinai and M. Marx, Leiden, Brill, 2011, pp. 565–584, esp. 569–571.

¹¹⁵ Johns, “Three Stories of a Prophet (Part I)”, p. 41.

¹¹⁶ See Legrain, “Variations musulmanes sur le thème de Job”, pp. 52–55.

¹¹⁷ See Q 4:80, 152; 58:5; 59:7.

Qur'ānic message put in the mouth of Muḥammad appears explicit, as well as the threats and consequent tragedies which befell those who rejected past divine envoys, by treating them as “men without honour in their native lands”.¹¹⁸ In fact, what unbelieving peoples suffered in the past could take place again for the Meccans. Thus, acting in his role as admonisher (*nadīr*), the Prophet is instructed to declare: “I have warned you about a blast like the one which struck ‘Ad and Thamud” (Q 41:13); “I have proclaimed the message fairly to you all. I do not know whether the judgement you are promised is near or far” (Q 21:109). As Gordon D. Newby notes, “with the aid of the story of Job, Muhammad’s persecution and the afflictions and persecutions of the rest of his community can be read as negative signs of God’s favor and guarantees of future success. Just as in the Bible, the message in the Quran is that the good will be rewarded and the bad will be punished. The exception is when the righteous suffer”.¹¹⁹

The Qur'ānic depiction of Muḥammad’s relationship to earlier prophets is deeply embedded in its vision of history, which is mainly presented as a sequence of typological events, where recurring patterns of divine guidance and human response transcend individual differences among prophetic narratives.¹²⁰ In light of this, a complementary discourse could be developed by exploring how prophets are perceived within popular religious piety. Undoubtedly, all prophets have the power to inspire believers through their stories and words serving, first and foremost, as models of faith, and then as divinely appointed envoys. Their lives communicate that each of them is a guide (*hād*), as affirmed in the Qur'an: “[Earlier] communities each had their guide” (Q 13:7). Yet, despite the plainness of these examples, human resistance remains constant, as the Qur'an also observes: “We have presented every kind of description for people, but man is more contentious than any other creature” (Q 18:54).¹²¹

In any case, the prophets are upheld as ideals to be followed and emulated, not only because of their role as messengers, but because their

¹¹⁸ S. Akhtar, *The Quran and the Secular Mind: A Philosophy of Islam*, Abingdon-New York, Routledge, 2008, p. 275.

¹¹⁹ G.D. Newby, *The Making of the Last Prophet: A Reconstruction of the Earliest Biography of Muhammad*, Columbia, University of South Carolina Press, 1989, p. 87.

¹²⁰ G. Böwering, “Chronology and the Qur'an” s.v., in *Encyclopaedia of the Qur'an*, vol. I, pp. 316–335, esp. 319.

¹²¹ See also Q 17:89; 39:21.

lives embody the spiritual, moral, and existential challenges that believers themselves face. Among them, the Prophet stands as the ultimate model, whose conduct is divinely praised: “The Messenger of God is an excellent model for those of you who put your hope in God and the Last Day and remember Him often” (Q 33:21). His life embodies both outward righteousness and inner virtues essential to prophethood, particularly patience, which is reaffirmed in God’s command “So be patient, [Prophet], as befits you” (Q 70:5). Yet, as previously noted, the quality of endurance is not exclusive to Muḥammad but is part of a broader prophetic ethos. It is powerfully conveyed in the well-known phrase “the patience of Job” (*ṣabr Ayyūb*), and echoed in the Qur’anic words of Jacob when confronted with the loss of Joseph,¹²² “patience is beautiful” (*ṣabr ḡamīl*). These expressions have become proverbial within the Islamic traditions, offering believers spiritual direction and comfort in times of hardship, as one report advises: “Whenever there is a believer put to the test, let him recall what happened to Job, and let him say, ‘It befell one better than us, one of the Prophets’”.¹²³

Since “it is his example in bearing undeserved suffering that is his message”, Job becomes “a role model for Muḥammad”.¹²⁴ Job’s behaviour specifically contrasts with that of Jonah. In fact, the latter did not demonstrate patience in the face of adversity: he did not expect to be swallowed by a fish and remained in captivity in its belly. As noted, patience “was a quality in which Jonah had fallen short”.¹²⁵ Nevertheless, this episode should not be understood as a punishment, but rather as a form of divine correction, aimed at instructing the prophet in perseverance and trust in God’s timing and judgment. From this perspective, God instructs the Prophet not to follow Jonah’s example. Referring to him as “the companion of the fish” (*ṣāhib al-ḥūt*), God tells Muḥammad: “Wait patiently [Prophet] for your Lord’s judgement: do not be like the man in the whale who called out in

¹²² See Q 12:18, 83. In the translation of the Qur’ān used for this article the passage is rendered as “it is best to be patient”.

¹²³ Al-Ṭabarī, *Ġāmī‘ al-bayān*, vol. XXVII, p. 38 ff. See also Macdonald, “Some External Evidence of the Original Form of the Legend of Job”, p. 139; Legrain, “Variations musulmanes sur le thème de Job”, p. 78.

¹²⁴ Johns, “Narrative, Intertext and Allusion in the Qur’anic Presentation Of Job”, pp. 3, 23. See also Id., “Three Stories of a Prophet (Part I)”, p. 39; Id., “Three Stories of a Prophet (Part II)”, pp. 57–58.

¹²⁵ A.H. Johns, “Jonah in the Qur’an: An Essay on Thematic Counterpoint”, *Journal of Qur’anic Studies* 5/2 (2003), pp. 48–71, here 61.

distress" (Q 68:48). In other words, Muḥammad is urged to remain patient and steadfast, trusting in God's judgment, unlike Jonah who acted hastily. As Johns states, "the essence of God's message is that Muḥammad [unlike Jonah] should endure rejection until his Lord makes His judgement. Jonah is presented to Muḥammad as a prophet offering an example that he is not to follow".¹²⁶ This distinction is further emphasised in the commentary of Muqātil, who offers a general admonition: "Do not ask for things to be brought on swiftly, as did Jonah, do not be angry, as he was, for if you are, you will be punished as he was when he called his Lord in the belly of the fish".¹²⁷ From this perspective, Jonah's story functions as a warning, underscoring the steadfast endurance required of Muḥammad. It is thus no coincidence that Jonah is not included among the envoys "of firm resolve" (*ulū l- 'azm*) (Q 46:35), who were praised for their perseverance. His trail in the belly of the fish stresses this point: "If he had not been one of those who glorified God, he would have stayed in its belly until the Day when all are raised up" (Q 37:143–144), that is until the Day of Resurrection.¹²⁸

7. Conclusions

The Qur'ān presents prophecy across spiritual, ethical, and rhetorical dimensions, portraying prophets not merely as messengers who deliver God's words, but also as models of strong faith, moral integrity, and deep devotion to God. Rather than offering linear biographies, the Qur'ān employs a fragmented and meditative narrative style aimed at moral and spiritual instruction. Even the briefest of prophetic accounts, such as that of Job, have left a lasting imprint on Islamic religious imagination, profoundly developed through tafsīr, *qiṣaṣ al-anbi-*

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 54; see also Johns, "Narrative, Intertext and Allusion in the Qur'anic Presentation of Job", p. 8.

¹²⁷ Muqātil ibn Sulaymān, *al-Aṣbāḥ wa al-naḥā'ir fī al-Qur'ān al-Karīm*, ed. by 'A.A.M. Ṣiḥāta, vol. IV, Cairo, al-Hay'a al-Miṣriyya al-Āmma li-l-Kitāb, 1975, p. 412.

¹²⁸ According to the biblical account, he was motivated by the fact that his Lord had delayed punishment for Nineveh; see Jonah 4:1. On the topic of anger, the Qur'ān mentions Moses when his people were led astray by worshipping a golden calf; see Q 7:150, 154; 20:86. See also S. Bashir, "Anger" s.v., in *Encyclopaedia of the Qur'ān*, vol. I, pp. 92–93.

yā', and Sufi tradition.¹²⁹ In fact, these stories have become existential and moral landmarks for believers.

Prophetic narratives often follow recurring motifs (for instance, being chosen by God, facing rejection, staying patient, and finally being vindicated), illustrating the ongoing nature of God's guidance and providing ethical paradigms for both the Prophet and the broader Muslim community. Yet, the Qur'ān also preserves the individuality of each prophet, using distinct linguistic and narrative features to reflect their unique missions and temperaments. This balance between shared function and personal distinction mirrors the Qur'ānic understanding of divine unity expressed through multiplicity. Just as God is one, yet known through various names/attributes (like the Most Merciful, the Giver of Peace, the Omnipotent) depending on how believers relate to him, the prophets embody a common mission while remaining distinct in their character and mode of engagement.

The story of Job exemplifies this dynamic. Though his narrative is concise, it powerfully conveys the Qur'ānic ideal of *ṣabr*, a patience infused with spiritual resilience and absolute trust in divine mercy. Job speaks little, but when he does he appeals to God's compassion without complaint or challenge. His quiet invocation signifies not resignation but profound inner strength. The Qur'ān calls his story "a sign of Our mercy and a lesson to all who understand" (Q 38:43), making it a source of solace and inspiration for those facing hardship. In this light, prophetic patience is more than a personal virtue, it becomes a theological pillar and a means of spiritual pedagogy.

Al-Gazālī refers to two *ḥadīths* that express this idea. The first one, although not strongly verified, reflects the Qur'ānic link between patience (*ṣabr*) and gratitude (*ṣukr*): "Faith has two halves: patience and thankfulness". The second *ḥadīth*, which is more reliable, states: "Patience is half of faith".¹³⁰ This helps explain why patience appears so often in the Qur'ān and is praised in many verses. Therefore, it is no coincidence that "the persistent presence of patience in the Qur'ān, along with the commendations it receives from divine *dicta*, is clear proof of its importance in Islamic moral thought".¹³¹ Ibn al-'Arabī even says God describes himself as "the Most Patient One" (*al-Ṣabūr*),

¹²⁹ See Johns, "Narrative, Intertext and Allusion in the Qur'ānic Presentation of Job", p. 2.

¹³⁰ Al-Ghazālī, *Patience and Thankfulness*, pp. 23–24, 189–204.

¹³¹ Zilio-Grandi, *The Virtues of the Good Muslim*, p. 14.

among his names in Islamic theology, because he endures the pain of human beings.¹³² At the same time, since “God is with the steadfast” (Q 2:153),¹³³ patience defines those, men and women,¹³⁴ who “are true” and “are aware of God” (Q 2:177), “those who are steadfast, truthful, truly devout” (Q 3:17), and “thankful” (Q 31:31), “those who believe and urge one another to steadfastness and compassion” (Q 90:17) and “truth” (Q 103:3), in addition to those who followed the Prophet in the *hiğra*.¹³⁵

Job is not presented as superior to other prophets. Rather, his example illustrates how different prophets may offer distinct forms of guidance depending on the spiritual needs of the believer. The Qur'ān places his steady endurance alongside Jonah's early retreat, not to criticise the latter, but to reveal a spectrum of prophetic responses, all of which fulfil the same divine mission. Similarly, Muḥammad is reminded of the trials faced by earlier prophets not only for consolation but to cultivate his own distinct prophetic identity. The Qur'ān addresses him in a unique voice, combining divine command with intimate moral instruction, allowing his character to emerge within the broader prophetic tradition.

Ultimately, at the heart of the Qur'ānic vision of prophecy is *ṣabr*, not just as a human moral quality but as a reflection of divine nature. It is both a mark of authentic faith and a pathway to nearness to God. Through the diverse lives of the prophets, especially that of Job, the Qur'ān provides believers with various lenses through which to access the eternal truth. Each prophetic experience reflects a different facet of the human condition, offering spiritual guidance that transcends historical context. Their challenges are not distant stories of the past but enduring signs, lessons for those who reflect with open hearts in the present.

In this way, *ṣabr* emerges as both a divine imperative and a human aspiration, shaping Islamic spirituality as a path of steadfastness amid life's uncertainties. The Qur'ān presents unity not through uniformity but through richness of diverse prophetic expressions. It thereby fos-

¹³² See Khalil, “On Patience (*Ṣabr*) in Sufi Virtue Ethics”, p. 76. See also A. Sam'ānī, *The Repose of the Spirits: A Sufi Commentary on the Divine Names*, trans. by W. Chittick, Albany, State University of New York Press, 2019.

¹³³ See also Q 8:56, 66.

¹³⁴ See for instance Q 33:35.

¹³⁵ See Q 16:42, 110.

ters a resilient and reflective community, rooted in divine oneness and attuned to the complexity of human experience. Thus, the prophetic ethos culminates in a vision of faith that is historically grounded, ethically profound, and spiritually transformative.

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French Kiss and Arabic Culture

Aḥmad ibn al-Ṭayyib al-Saraḥsī on Love

in Light of *Rasā'il Iḥwān al-ṣafā'*

Guillaume de Vaulx d'Arcy

Why do we warmly embrace our beloved and avidly kiss him on the mouth? Because the soul of the lover tries to reach the soul of the beloved through the mouth's aperture and the pores of the skin in order for them to unite despite the separation of their bodies. This fragment attributed to al-Saraḥsī and dealing with what is now called the French kiss remained mysterious to Franz Rosenthal. Its editing is followed by its interpretation in light of a renowned text also dedicated to the erotic phenomenon, namely Epistle 37 of *Rasā'il Iḥwān al-ṣafā'*. On a philosophical level, such a comparative study reveals a consistent theory on love that achieves erotic idealism in the wake of Plato's Symposium. On a historical level, this consistency between both texts adds weight to the hypothesis of al-Saraḥsī's authorship of *Rasā'il Iḥwān al-ṣafā'*.

Keywords: Love, Kiss, al-Saraḥsī, Brethren in Purity, Iḥwān al-ṣafā'

“Bend your lips on mine
So that out of my mouth
My soul may pass into yours”.
Denis Diderot¹

In a gem of erotic philosophy attributed to Aḥmad ibn al-Ṭayyib al-Saraḥsī (d. 286/899), al-Kindī's pupil, one can read a precise description of the erotic phenomenon. Here is the passage interpreting what is nowadays called the French kiss:

¹ “Penche tes lèvres sur moi/Et qu'au sortir de ma bouche/Mon âme repasse en toi”; D. Diderot, “Chanson dans le goût de la romance”, in Id., *Œuvres complètes: Supplément*, Paris, Armand Belin, 1819, p. 289.

[Seeking to combine with the beloved's soul] drives both tongues to insert into [one another's] mouth in order to enter inside him and penetrate his deeps. Through embracing and attracting him close, it intends to achieve the union with the body, to receive [the soul] by way of the pores, and to prevent from coming between the two bodies anything that might separate them, dissolve their meeting, and put an end to their union.²

By kissing, the lover aims to unify with the beloved. This precise description of the phenomenon entwined with a Platonic interpretation can also be found in a well-known epistle dedicated to carnal love. I quote Ep. 37 from *Rasā'il Iḥwān al-ṣafā'*:

When the lover and the beloved happen to embrace each other, kiss, suck one another's saliva and swallow it, this very moistness arrives in each other's stomach where it blends with the moistness that is there.³

The similarity between these quotations is striking: both deal with the same phenomenon, describe it in detail, and interpret it as an attempt to unite. Such a proximity commands a more accurate comparison. This requires the edition of the first fragment, which consists of a short text describing the loving embrace and explaining its hidden meanings. In this article, we propose to edit, translate, and comment on it in detail.

We are indebted to Franz Rosenthal for the discovery and the English translation of al-Saraḥsī's fragment, which he unfortunately published without the Arabic text.⁴ The fragment is an excerpt from the

² Istanbul, Topkapısaray, MS Ahmad III–3483, f. 240r. Unless specified all translations are mine. For a description of the manuscript, see F. Rosenthal, "From Arabic Books and Manuscripts VIII Al-Saraḥsī on Love", *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 81 (1961), pp. 222–224, esp. 223.

³ *Rasā'il Iḥwān al-ṣafā'*, ed. by B. al-Bustānī, Beirut, Dār ṣādir, 1957, Ep. 37, III, 274. Save for some exceptions, we will be referring to this edition of the *Rasā'il Iḥwān al-ṣafā'*, hereafter identifying each epistle with its progressive Arabic numeral, followed by the Roman numeral of the edited volume and by the relevant page number. Even if we consult and try to integrate translations from the Institute of the Ismaili Studies' project, we are compelled to reject its edition for reasons we detailed in G. de Vaulx d'Arcy, "The *Epistle of the Brethren in Purity* by the Institute of Ismaili Studies: When the Re-Edition of a Book Can Be its Destruction", *Mélanges de l'Institut dominicain d'études orientales* 34 (2019), pp. 253–330.

⁴ Rosenthal, "From Arabic Books and Manuscripts VIII".

Book on the Establishment of Astrology, the Components of Wisdom and the Names of the Soul,⁵ from which only survived, to our knowledge, this unique passage. Without any further element, reconstructing the world of meanings hidden behind the text was impossible. Therefore, Rosenthal did not venture any commentary whatsoever. The disappearance of almost all the writings of al-Saraḥsī might have annihilated any possibility of unveiling his philosophy of love.

The similarity with a passage of Ep. 37 from *Rasā'il Ihwān al-ṣafā'* provides a unique opportunity to attempt its interpretation: does Ep. 37 bestow meaning upon what had remained obscure for so long and offer unforeseen consistency to what seemed contradictory in al-Saraḥsī's text? Does the epistle on love from *Rasā'il Ihwān al-ṣafā'* help us in editing, re-translating, and understanding al-Saraḥsī's fragment on carnal love?

The article will first set out the *editio princeps* of the fragment, then it will present a new English translation and provide a detailed commentary of the philosophical "content".

1. Edition of Topkapı Sarayı, MS Ahmad III–3483, f. 240r–v

[1–240]

من كلام أبي العباس أحمد بن الطيب⁶ في العشق. ذكر في كتابه "في تثبيت أمر النجوم وأجزاء الحكمة وأسماء⁷ النفس": سئل: لِم صار⁸ العاشق إذا ظفر بمعشوقه وضع فاه على فيه وطلب أن يدخل لسانه في

⁵ Ulrich Rudolph does not list this title in the bibliographical note dedicated to al-Saraḥsī but refers to a book *On Love* (fī l-ʿiṣq) and to a philosophical opus dedicated to astronomy, *Fī anna arkān al-falsafa ba'dubā 'alā ba'd wa-huwa Kitāb al-istifā'*. See *Philosophie in der islamischen Welt 8.-10. Jahrhundert*, ed. by U. Rudolph, Basel, Schwabe, 2012, p. 152. The Islamic Scientific Manuscripts Initiative mentions two witnesses of al-Saraḥsī's book intitled *Al-maḍḥal ilā šinā'at al-nujūm*, one at the Institute of Manuscripts of Azerbaijan (Baku), and the other at Dār al-ʿulūm (Cairo), but this information is not correct: the first witness (MS Arabic 1130) is authored by Naṣīr al-Dīn al-Tūsī (672/1274), and the other (MS Miqāt 139) is authored by 'Abd al-'Azīz 'Uṭmān al-Qabīṣī (d. 380/967). See <https://ismi.mpiwg-berlin.mpg.de/text/96492> (26 November 2025).

⁶ الطيب. This is an intermediary form of al-Ṭayyib and al-Ṭabīb that is found in some manuscripts and led Latin translators to call him "Mahometh discipulo Alquindi". See F. Rosenthal, *Ahmad b. al-Ṭayyib as-Saraḥsī: A Scholar and a Litterateur of the Ninth Century*, New Haven, American Oriental Society, 1943, p. 57.

⁷ Rosenthal, "From Arabic Books and Manuscripts VIII", p. 223, suggests: <ارسأ حر>.

⁸ MS Ahmad III–3483, f. 240v, اصار.

فيه وقتله فبُله متتابعة متصلة الزمان ويضمه إلى نفسه <؟>
قال: قلت إن العشق إفراط المحبة والمحبة علة اجتماع الأشياء وليس يكون في إفراط الاجتماع أوكده من الاتحاد الذي به يصير الإنسان واحداً. ونفس الحي إنما تُدرك⁹ إرادة [240ب] النفس من هذا الجسم الذي هو آلة للنفس في أفاعيل إذا صارت النفس الإنسانية إلى العشق الذي هو إفراط المحبة التي هي علة اجتماع الأشياء. فقصدت النفس إفراط المحبة لأوكد¹⁰ الاجتماع المطلق، وإفراط المحبة علة الإفراط الاجتماع الذي هو أوكده. وطلبت الاتحاد بالمعشوق من محبة الحي. فلم تجد سبيلاً من الظاهر إلى الباطن إلا سبيل البدن الذي ينسم منها ما به قوائم الحياة ومادة القوة الحيوانية التي هي نفس ويدفع ضررها. فلم يكن في هذه السبيل أعظم من الفم والمنخرين المؤديين للهواء إلى قصبة الرئة لأن السبيل الباقية إنما هي المسام اللطاف التي في أصول الشعر. فقصدت النفس بالمعشوق نحو الفم بلحمة وتنسم¹¹ بالمنخرين ما يخرج من نفيه القريب العهد بغريزته وقوى نفيه، لتتحد¹² المادتان وتشارك القوتان وطلبت بإدخال كل واحد من اللسانين في في الآخر لئلا ينفوذ فيه والخلوص إلى باطنه وقصدت بضمتها إياه وجذبها له الاتحاد جسماً والاستقبال فيها من محبة المسام ولئلا يدخل بين الجسمين <ما> يفصل بينهما ويفرق اجتماعهما ويزيل اتحادهما.

لما عدت الحرف¹³ الحقيقي الذي هو الامتزاج طلبت اتحاد النفس. فتعبته أهواء المعشوق ومحابة فوافقت في طلبه وواصلته إليه ليكون نفس المعشوق واصله إلى محبتها الممكنة بإرادتها. فلما وقع من نفس العاشق لإرادة لمحبة المعشوق وصلت نفس المعشوق إلى محبتها بإرادة نفس العاشق كانت النفسان كإتتها واحدة لاتحادها بالموافقة.

ولهذه العلة قال الحكم: "صديقك آخر هو أنت"، يعني بقوله "آخر": اختلاف الجسمين، ويقول "هو أنت": اتفاق الإرادات. فكان التأثير في الأجسام جميعاً وقد وقع عن نفس واحدة. وجاع القول في هذا أن الصداقة اتحاد نفسي المتصادقين باتفاق الإرادات، والله أعلم بالصواب. تحريراً في واسط¹⁴ في حج تسع وستين وسبع مئة بخط العبد الضعيف النحيف أقل عباد الله وأصغر خلق الله الغني أحمد بن إسماعيل بن أحمد بن محمد ...† أصلح الله تعالى أحواله.

2. Translation

From the discussion of love by Abū l-'Abbās Aḥmad ibn al-Tayyib. In his book on *The Establishment of Astrology, the Components of Wisdom and the Names of the Soul*, he mentioned [the following]: He was asked: "Why does the lover upon winning his beloved's heart get to place his mouth upon that of his beloved, seek to put his tongue

⁹ يدرك.

¹⁰ The manuscript states: لاوكد, but a later instance at the end of the sentence shows the right form.

¹¹ وسلسم.

¹² ليتحد.

¹³ Rosenthal, "From Arabic Books and Manuscripts VIII", p. 223, suggests: صرف.

¹⁴ لولسط.

into his mouth and give him a continuous, long-lasting kiss and press him unto himself?”. He said. “I said that love [*al-‘iṣq*] is extreme affection [*al-maḥabba*], and that affection is the cause of the meeting [*iğtimāʿ*] of things. And nothing results more certainly from ultimate meeting than this union [*al-ittihād*] through which men become one. The soul of the living being only grasps the soul’s will thanks to this body, which is the instrument of the soul for acting, provided that the human soul is led by love, which is an extreme affection, cause of the meeting of things. Thus, the soul aspires, through extreme affection, to reach absolute union with certainty. Indeed, extreme affection is the cause of ultimate meeting, which is the most certain [way to union]. So [the human soul] looks for the union with the beloved through its living part. And the only way from the outside in is through the body from which blows what makes the subsistence of life, constitutes the matter of the animal power – also called the soul –, and rejects out whatever might harm it. Now, the most important of these passages are the mouth and the nostrils which direct the air to the windpipe, since the only remaining passages are the fine pores at the roots of the hair. Therefore, the soul seeks the beloved through kissing him on the mouth and inhaling [*tanassama*] the breath [*nafasih*] coming out of the nostrils, which had a recent contact with its natural disposition and the powers of his soul, in order for both materials to unite and the two powers to combine. Thus, [love] drives both tongues to insert into [one another’s] mouth in order to enter inside him and penetrate his deeps. Through embracing and attracting him close, it intends to achieve the union with the body, to receive [the soul] by way of the pores, and to prevent from coming between the two bodies anything that might separate them, dissolve the meeting of both, and put an end to their union. Once the soul loses the true direction, which is the blending (*al-imtizāğ*), it looks for unifying with the soul. The desires and inclinations of the beloved follow it, agree with [the lover’s] quest and join him in such a manner that the soul of the beloved obtains his affection offered by his own will. So, the soul of the lover is affected by the voluntary affection of the lover, the soul of the beloved reaches the affection voluntarily given by the lover and, at this moment, both souls become like one, due to their union by mutual consent. For this reason, the sage said: ‘Your friend is your alter ego [*sadiquka ābiru huwa anta*],’ signifying by ‘alter’ the difference of the two bodies, and by ‘ego’, the agreement of wills, for the influence extends to both bodies, as if it came from one soul. In sum, it can be said in this respect

that friendship is the union of the souls of those who seek friendship through the agreement of wills. And God knows what is best”.

Issued at Wāṣiṭ the year of the pilgrimage 769 by the pen of His humble and modest servant, the last of the servants of God and the meaningless creature of God the Provider, the poor Aḥmad ibn Ismāʿīl ibn Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad †...†. May God, the Almighty, restore him in his state.

3. Commentary

3.1. Nature of the Text

A “majlis”

The text takes the form of a philosopher’s answer to what could be the question a student asked during a lesson – like the explanation given by Ṭābit ibn Qurra (d. 288/901) to his disciple Ibn Usayyid for instance¹⁵ – or to the question sent by a friend and requiring the writing of a particular epistle, as was the practice of al-Kindī (d. before 256/870), al-Sarāḥsī’s master.¹⁶ However, the nature of the question and the brevity of the answer correspond better with the style of the *majlis*. Admittedly, the genre of the *majlis* will mostly flourish by the end of the 4th/10th century with Abū Ḥayyān al-Tawḥīdī (d. 414/1023) or Badīʿ al-Zamān al-Ḥamaḍānī (d. 398/1008),¹⁷ but it has a clear origin in philosophy, and may have been taken from pseudo-Ar-

¹⁵ M. Rashed, “Ṭābit b. Qurra sur l’existence et l’infini: Les Réponses aux questions posées par Ibn Usayyide”, in *Ṭābit ibn Qurra: Science and Philosophy in Ninth-Century Baghdad*, ed. by R. Rashed, Berlin, De Gruyter, 2009, pp. 619–673.

¹⁶ For instance, al-Kindī, *Epistle to Aḥmad b. Muḥammad al-Ḥurāsānī Explaining the Finiteness of the Body of the World*, and *Epistle of the Unity of God*, which is addressed to Muḥammad ibn al-Gāhm al-Barmākī. See al-Kindī, *Rasāʾil al-Kindī al-Falsafīyya*, ed. by ‘A.H. Abū Rida, vol. I, Cairo, Dār al-Fikr al-‘Arabī, 1950, respectively pp. 199–207 and 185–192; see also *The Philosophical Works of al-Kindī*, trans. by P. Adamson and P. Pormann, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2012, pp. 63–68 and 68–72.

¹⁷ Al-Tawḥīdī, *K. al-intinā’ wa-l-mu’anasa*, ed. by A. Amīn and A. al-Zayn, Cairo, al-Hay’a al-‘amma li-quṣūr al-ṭaqāfa, 2002; Badīʿ al-zamān al-Ḥamaḍānī, *Maqāmāt*, French trans. by R. Blachère and P. Masnou, Paris, Klincksieck, 1957. The foreword reconstitutes the literary history of the genre, but without any reference to al-Tawḥīdī.

istotelian *Problemata*.¹⁸ At the very time of al-Saraḥsī, a sample is available with a fragment of Ṭābit ibn Qurra transmitted by Abī Ya‘qūb al-Siġistānī (d. 331/971),¹⁹ in which a discussion on what is now known as the honeycomb theorem is the occasion to express his opinion on Pythagoras and to give his own interpretation in terms of mathematical providence.²⁰ Both excerpts share the same context since Ṭābit ibn Qurra was al-Saraḥsī’s colleague at al-Mu‘taḍid’s court, shared with him a Pythagorean influence, and a book was written based on al-Saraḥsī’s questions and Ṭābit ibn Qurra’s answers.²¹ It should also be noted that the reflection on the beehives which may be excerpted from Ṭābit’s work will find its echoes in the *Rasā’il Iḥwān al-ṣafā’* (Ep. 2, I, 96).

Literary Status of Carnal Love

Having written a book on fleshy love (*al-‘iṣq*),²² al-Saraḥsī is well-immersed in the topic of the fragment. Moreover, he is the narrator of a “controversy between a pederast and a fornicator” (“*munāẓara bayn al-lūṭī wa-l-zānī*”),²³ in the same tradition as al-Ġāḥiz’s book on *The Relative Merits of Maids and Boys*, and with obvious echoes to the court’s saucy entertainments. Neither is this topic alien to the *Rasā’il Iḥwān al-ṣafā’*, which contains an epistle entirely dedicated to carnal love proposing a philosophical interpretation of the controversy between the two types of love, namely the pederastic and the heterosexual (Ep. 37, III, 277–278).

¹⁸ *Pseudo-Aristotelian Problemata: Works*, vol. VII, trans. by E.S. Forster, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1927.

¹⁹ Refer to Abū Sulaymān al-Siġistānī, *Muntahab Siwān al-Hikma*, ed. by D.M. Dunlop, The Hague-Paris-New York, Mouton, 1979, pp. 124–125; see also Abū Sulaymān al-Siġistānī, *Muntakhab Siwān al-hikmah and Three Other Treaties*, ed. by ‘A.R. Badawī, Teheran, s.n., 1974, pp. 301–303.

²⁰ French translation and philosophical commentary in M. Rashed, “Thābit ibn Qurra, la *Physique* d’Aristote et le meilleur des mondes”, in *Thābit ibn Qurra*, pp. 675–714, esp. 703–704.

²¹ Mentioned by al-Qiftī, *Tārīḥ al-ḥukamā’*, ed. by J. Lippert, Leipzig, Dieterich’sche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1908, p. 117.

²² *Philosophie in der islamischen Welt*, p. 152.

²³ Abū l-Ḥasan al-Kātib, *Kitāb ḡawāmi‘ al-ladda* (Istanbul, Sulaymaniye, MS Fatih 03279), ff. 64v–73r. An English translation exists, which we were unable to consult: Alī ibn Naṣr Abū al-Ḥasan al-Kātib, *Encyclopedia of Pleasure*, trans. by A. Jarkas and S.A. Khawwam, Toronto, Aleppo publishing, 1977.

Al-Sarahsī's fragment intersects two different treatments of the erotic experience: between the crude description of sexual intercourse told for entertainment purposes and an idealist analysis in the tradition of Plato's *Symposium*. Such a duality was theorised by al-Ġāḥiẓ:²⁴

While I mention the sweetness of the world, rejoice of its pleasures and the features of its beauty, quoting its proponents and its lords, your talking of the ascetics and the jurisconsults cuts off debates between us. As we said at the very beginning of this book, when the talk is made of jokes and banter, if you switch to something serious, it loses its original meaning and comes to nullity.²⁵

Al-Ġāḥiẓ, who greatly influenced al-Sarahsī, does not reject the profane way of dealing with the question, he simply refuses to amalgamate sacred and profane, to merge seriousness and banter within the same text. Such a preoccupation can also be traced in the *Rasā'il Iḥwān al-ṣafā'* about music:

In this epistle entitled "On Music" we wish to discuss that art which combines the physical and the spiritual, that is, the art of composition and the knowledge of proportion [*ma'rifat al-nisab*]. But it is not our intention in this epistle to give instruction in practical musicianship [*ta'līm al-ġinā'*] and the construction of instruments, even if such matters have to be touched upon. Rather, we are concerned with knowledge of proportion and the modalities of composition, whose command results in skill in all the arts [Ep. 5, I, 183].²⁶

Music is both the worldly art of practicing an instrument (*al-malāḥī*) for sensual enjoyment, which is studied by *'ilm al-ġinā'*, and the

²⁴ Following Rosenthal's opinion: "He was probably acquainted with the man who enjoyed the greatest reputation ever accorded to an Arabic littérateur: al-Ġāḥiẓ"; Rosenthal, *Aḥmad b. al-Ṭayyib as-Sarahsī*, p. 20. Rosenthal supports his claim with an extract from *Kitāb al-Aḡānī* (*ibid.*, p. 102 and commentary note 228) in which Aḥmad ibn al-Ṭayyib confirms having heard an anecdote from al-Ġāḥiẓ's own mouth.

²⁵ Al-Ġāḥiẓ, "Kitāb mufaḥarat al-ḡawārī wa-l-ġilmān", in *Rasā'il al-Jāḥiẓ*, ed. by 'A.S. Hārūn, vol. II, Cairo, Maktabat al-Ḥanḡī, 1965, pp. 87–137.

²⁶ *On Music: An Arabic Critical Edition and English Translation of Epistle 5*, ed. and trans. by O. Wright, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2010, pp. 75–76 (amended trans.).

spiritual science of harmony (*al-nisab*) studied by *‘ilm al-mūsīqā*. Al-Sarāḥsī’s book on *Entertainment and Musical Practice* (*fī l-lawḥ wa-l-malāḥī*) was probably dedicated to the first, while Ep. 5 of *Rasā’il Iḥwān al-ṣafā’* deals with the second. Our fragment on the loving embrace seems to fall within the first category because of its explicitly erotic description, however, its philosophical aim falls within the second. If the title of the book had not been given, only a comparison with other texts would have helped us decide whether the philosophical material was satirical or whether the crude description is, in effect, a pedagogical instrument to draw the attention of the layman to spiritual truths.

A Treaty of Astrological Erotology

But it is rather surprising to find it in a book dedicated to astrology.²⁷ However, the apparent dissimilarity between eroticism and astrology should not entirely unsettle the reader. In a long side note dedicated to love (*al-‘iṣq*) that will be discussed in detail below, al-Mas‘ūdī (d. 346/956) reports the views of a wide range of schools. Among them, astrologers are confirmed to be among the main authorities on the topic together with poets, theologians, and philosophers.²⁸

Concerning more precisely al-Sarāḥsī, as a Kindian thinker, he may assume the priority of a vertical causality by which the situation of the celestial bodies determines human states, including the impulses of the human heart. The application of astrological principles to love life can already be found in the *Epistle on the Description of Spiritual Beings* (*rūḥāniyyāt*), dedicated to astral intelligences and attributed to al-Kindī, although it may have been written by one of his students.²⁹ The following passage is of particular interest:

²⁷ Rosenthal, “From Arabic Books and Manuscripts VIII”, p. 223: “It is hard to say why the discussion of love should have been included in a work that presumably dealt mainly with astrology, but as long as we do not have any precise information about the contents of that work, we must accept the statement of our text”.

²⁸ Al-Mas‘ūdī, *Muruḡ al-dabab wa-ma‘ādin al-ḡawḥar*, ed. by C. Piellat, vol. IV, Beirut, Lebanese University, 1973, pp. 243–244.

²⁹ On a more theoretical level, one can refer to the cosmological function that relates, in al-Kindī’s thought, love and celestial action on earth. See al-Kindī, “Risāla fī ibāna ‘an sujūd al-ḡirm al-aqṣā”, in Id., *Rasā’il al-Kindī al-Falsafīyya*, vol. I, pp. 177–189, here 184–185; al-Kindī, “The Prostration of the Outmost Body”, in *The Philosophical Works of al-Kindī*, pp. 177–199, 184–185, 174–186, here 178.

When Jupiter is in relation with Saturn, that the day and the hour are those of Saturn, that the Moon has no direction, take some already used wax and shape two images, one of the man, and the other of the boy. Then, make them embrace each other but with the boy's face turning away from the man's. Then, cover them with a silk material and fumigate them with two dirhams of *qust*, saying: "I separate so-and-so from so-and-so, and so-and-so from so-and-so, in the name of the farthest star and God the Almighty! By Saturn, by Saturn, I separate them and I settle enmity and hate between them until the day of resurrection!" You will say that seven times, then you will put both images inside a new jug and bury it in a dark house. They will split up for certain.³⁰

Yes, the text is a spell, it deals with the separation of lovers and not their union, but what we should retain from this quotation is the means of intervention in love affairs: one should not directly remedy the lovers but rather address the celestial causes of their feelings. Such astral magic applied to lovers' woes is also prescribed in Ep. 37 of *Rasā'il Ḥwān al-ṣafā'*. Among the different opinions of the ancients, the epistle mentions the consideration of love as "a disease of the soul" (Ep. 37, III, 270) called melancholia, whose forms are studied in "the books of horoscopes [*kutub aḥkām al-mawālīd*]" (Ep. 37, III, 271), that the author regrets having to "quit mentioning, for fear of lingering too long thereon". But he already specified that the malady of love is divine madness that can only be cured through prayer:

As to those who claim that [love] is divine madness they do it solely because they did not find any medicine to cure it or antidote to swallow to protect from misfortune and woes. It is only God's invocation in prayer, giving alms and offerings at the temple, through the witchcraft of priestesses and so on [Ep. 37, III, 270].

Physical medicine is a horizontal causality which is helpless in front of the outburst of passion that possesses a loving soul. The only possible therapy comes from God, who can listen to the prayers of his believers. And God's actions and believers' supplications are mediated by celestial bodies.

³⁰ "Trois épitres d'al-Kindī", ed. by L. Vecchia Vaglieri and G. Celentano, *Annali dell'Istituto Orientale di Napoli* 34 (1974), pp. 523–562, here 551.

Ep. 37 classifies the objects of love (*al-ma'sūqāt*) relatively to the nature of the soul: the vegetative soul (*al-nafs al-nabātiyya*) loves concupiscence, the sensitive soul (*al-nafs al-ḥayawāniyya*) loves conquest and power, and the rational soul (*al-nafs al-nātiqa*) loves knowledge. The domination of one of these three souls over the others depends on the astrological conditions of one's birth:

From his very birth, each man is under control. If the influence is that of the Moon, or Venus and Saturn, the desires toward food and beverages, their gathering and accumulation, will dominate his nature. If, from his very birth, he is under the control of Mars and Venus or the Moon, his desires lean toward intercourse and women [Ep. 37, III, 273].

Whereas conjunctions of planets with the moon explain natures dominated by concupiscence, the influence of the sun and Mars on his birth makes the spirited soul (*al-nafs al-ḡadabiyya*) dominate, and his desire leans toward power. This general theory is repeated on the level of relationships, for the exclusivity of the object of carnal love is explained by the unique similarity between the lovers' astral birth conditions (Ep. 37, III, 284). Hence, we do not only understand the relation between love and astrology but also the precise title of al-Sarāḥsī's book, which Rosenthal preferred to rectify by substituting "the names (*asmā*) of the soul" with "the secrets (*asrār*) of the soul", as if astrology had to mean esotericism. But the manuscript may not be mistaken, and the book may indeed have dealt with the numerous names of the soul and its kinds: vegetative appetitive (*nabātiyya ṣahwāniyya*), animal spirited (*ḥayawāniyya ḡadabiyya*), human rational (*insāniyya nātiqa*), angelic (*malakiyya*), and so on.³¹

3.2. The Topic of the Text: *Al-Maḥabba wa-l-ʿIṣq*

In the effort to understand the fragment one is immediately faced with an ambiguity that blocks its interpretation and even the translation

³¹ Note that Ibn Baḥṭiṣū' attributes a doctrine close to the *Rasā'il Iḥwān al-ṣafā*'s astrological and medical one on love to an Indian physician called Miskasār: "He said that *al-ʿiṣq* is made of airs flowing in the mind and mixing with the spirit. It is astral by essence"; Abū Šā'id 'Ubaydallāh Ibn Baḥṭiṣū', *Risāla fī l-ṭibb wa-l-aḥdāt al-nafsāniyya*, ed. by F. Klein-Franke, Beirut, Dār al-mašriq, 1986, p. 64.

of its main concepts. It defines *al-ʿiṣq* as *ifrāt al-maḥabba*, translated by Rosenthal as “excessive affection”. Indeed, *al-ifrāt* was used in the philosophical tradition of Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics* with its opposite *al-tafrīt* to express the two extremes, the default and the excess that surpass the reasonable limits of the right balance (*al-iʿtidāl/al-waṣaʿ*). But Rosenthal did not translate “passion is an excessive affection”, which would have been more consistent with the doctrine of moderation, and he is right: the text is not the description of the lover’s vain attempt because of his ignorance of the immaterial nature of his soul and his getting lost in desperate physical intercourse with his beloved. Quite the contrary, carnal love succeeds in uniting the lovers. Then, *al-ʿiṣq* is not an excess but the realisation of *al-maḥabba*’s end, for it leads to the ultimate state where “both souls become one”.³² Hence, how can *al-ʿiṣq* be at once an excess and a success?

Such an ambiguity similarly characterises Ep. 37 of *Rasāʾil Iḥwān al-ṣafāʾ* “on the essence of *al-ʿiṣq* and *maḥabbat al-nufūs*”. Its resolution may serve to unravel the fragment’s ambiguity. The epistle also defines *al-ʿiṣq* in comparison to *al-maḥabba*:

Among the wise men, one assumes that *al-ʿiṣq* is *ifrāt al-maḥabba* and a violent inclination [*ṣiddat al-mayl*] toward a particular species of beings and not others, toward a certain person and not others [Ep. 37, III, 271].

The definition is attributed to an ancient sage, but *Rasāʾil Iḥwān al-ṣafāʾ* claimed it as its own and rephrased it by defining *al-ʿiṣq* as “an intense desire [*ṣiddat al-ṣawq*] of union” (Ep. 37, III, 272). This intensity cannot nonetheless mean a vicious excess: “*Al-maḥabba* and *al-ʿiṣq* are virtues that appeared in all creatures, a brilliant wisdom and an extraordinary spiritual quality” (Ep. 37, III, 279). No distinction here is made between *al-maḥabba* and *al-ʿiṣq*; both being divine providence and the Creator’s protection of his creatures. Indeed, by provok-

³² The translation of *ifrāt* as “excess” by Constantine Zurayk in Miskawayh and reuse of such a definition of *al-ʿiṣq* pose the same challenge. Love is clearly more a praised extreme than a blamed excess: “The first kind of love (*maḥabba*) we have described cannot exist in great numbers because such a person is precious and he is loved excessively, for excess in love (*maḥabba*) can take place and be achieved with a single person only”; Miskawayh, *Tahdīb al-ablāq*, ed. by C. Zurayk, Beirut, The American University of Beirut, 1966, p. 155; ET: Miskawayh, *The Refinement of Character*, trans. by C. Zurayk, Beirut, The American University of Beirut, 1968, p. 140.

ing women's desire toward men, *al-ʿiṣq* leads to the reproduction of the species, and by provoking men's desire toward boys, it perpetuates knowledge (Ep. 37, III, 277). So, *al-ʿiṣq* is not an excess, but an extreme, and a providential intensity (*ʿidda*). Surely, such a sexual desire would be a vice for an angelic soul separated from the body and then condemned to suffer from its lack of flesh (Ep. 30, III, 79–80), but it is a virtue for the human soul joined to a body. Essentially used to reproduce the ancients' opinion, the term *al-ifrāt* originates in al-Kindī's lexicon, and can be found in his *Epistle on Definitions* which states that "*al-ʿiṣq* is *ifrāt al-maḥabba*".³³ Indeed, whether the idea can be found elsewhere in texts of the second part of the 3rd/9th century, the phrasing is very specific to the Kindian circle. For example, al-Ġāhiz shares the principle but uses the term *al-ḥubb* instead of *al-maḥabba*, and *al-fāḍil* '*an al-miqdār* or *ma yufawwat minhā* instead of *al-ifrāt*.³⁴ In that sense, we can state that al-Kindī, al-Saraḥsī, and the *Rasāʾil Iḥwān al-ṣafā*' share a common wording of the concept and that the negative connotation of *al-ifrāt* disappears, at least, starting with al-Saraḥsī. Then, "extreme" and "ultimate" are a better translation than "excessive".

The translation of the concepts of *maḥabba* and *ʿiṣq* poses another challenge. The generation before al-Saraḥsī used the distinction to specify the presence or absence of reason in the feeling. For instance, al-Ġāhiz's *Kitāb al-qiyān* distinguishes two types of carnal love.³⁵ The first, *al-ḥubb*, stands for the legitimate sexual desire toward the free spouse and the concubine. This love remains under the control of reason. The second, *al-ʿiṣq*, is the uncontrolled passion that pushes men into the arms of the singing-slave girls who are shared with others and taint men's honor (*al-murūʾa*).³⁶ In this case, *al-ʿiṣq* signifies a vice by excess, whereas *al-ḥubb* denotes a virtue by moderation. Like-

³³ Al-Kindī, "Risāla fī l-ḥudūd", in *Al-rasāʾil al-falsafiyya*, vol. I, pp. 175–176; ET: Id., "On Definitions and Descriptions of Things", in *The Philosophical Works of al-Kindī*, p. 306.

³⁴ See Al-Ġāhiz, *The Epistle on Singing-Girls (Kitāb al-qiyān)*, ed. and trans. by A.F.L. Beeston, Warminster, Wilts, 1980, p. 25, § 35. Note that Ibn Baḥṭīšū' will quote this version in *Risāla fī l-ṭibb wa-l-aḥdāt al-naṣāniyya*, p. 47.

³⁵ See Al-Ġāhiz, *The Epistle on Singing-Girls*, p. 28, § 42, and A. Cheikh-Moussa, "La négation d'Éros ou le *ʿiṣq* d'après deux épîtres d'al-Jāhiz", *Studia Islamica* 72 (1990), pp. 71–119, esp. 73–74.

³⁶ See al-Ġāhiz, "Kitāb al-nisā", in *Rasāʾil al-Jāhiz*, vol. II, pp. 139 and 141, and Cheikh-Moussa, "La négation d'Éros", pp. 73–74.

wise, Ḥunayn ibn Ishāq attributes to Hippocrates a close distinction between *al-maḥabba* that “occurs between two rational beings thanks to their similitude on the level of the intellect [*taṣākulihumā fī l-‘aql*] but not between idiots who are similar in dumbness”,³⁷ and *al-‘iṣq* that “is a natural disposition that stems from the heart and provokes an accumulation of material when it is desired”.³⁸ Such an accumulation leads to an excessive and pathological imbalance of humours. In both texts, *al-‘iṣq* is characterised by a lack of reason and falls within the field of passion.

However, it is quite another story with al-Saraḥsī, who distinguishes both concepts only by a difference of degree: *al-maḥabba* which causes the meeting of souls, and *al-‘iṣq* which results in the ultimate meeting, which is the union of the two souls. The same is the case in Ep. 37: in both texts, the intensity of *al-‘iṣq* leads to a carnal relation, therefore we shall conserve Rosenthal’s translation of *maḥabba* as “affection” and *‘iṣq* as “love”.

The distinction between affection and love is not inherited from the Islamic juridical tradition as the distinction between passion and love is in al-Ġāhiz, but from the Greek philosophical heritage, since it corroborates the Greek distinction between φιλία and ἔρως. For instance, the *Rasā’il Iḥwān al-ṣafā’* talks about *maḥabbat al-riyāsa* (the will of power),³⁹ *maḥabbat al-ḥayāt / al-baqā’* (the will to live),⁴⁰ and *maḥabbat al-‘ulūm* (φιλοσοφία).⁴¹ So, *maḥabba* is the generic term also used in zoology and cosmology, and *‘iṣq* almost restricted to human relationship with sexual connotations: “[Among the noble morals] there is affection for fellowmen, and what we call love” (Ep. 37, III, 279). Yet, in al-Kindī’s writings, the general term is not *maḥabba*, but *ḥubb* – philosophy being translated *ḥubb al-ḥikma*.⁴² Once more, al-Saraḥsī’s lexicon comes even closer to the *Iḥwān al-ṣafā’* than to his

³⁷ Ḥunayn ibn Ishāq, *Ādāb al-falāsifa*, ed. by ‘A.R. Badawī, Kuwait, al-Munazzama al-‘arabiyya li-l-tarbiyya wa-l-ṭaqāfa wa-l-‘ulūm, 1975, p. 121. This view is debated in Ep. 37, III, 276: “Know brother that most of the people believe that love stirs only toward beautiful realities. But it is not like they believe”. Al-Mas‘ūdī, *Murūḡ al-dahab*, vol. IV, p. 243, will attribute such a view to Galen.

³⁸ Ḥunayn ibn Ishāq, *Ādāb al-falāsifa*, p. 121.

³⁹ Ep. 25, II, 437.

⁴⁰ Ep. 40, III, 370.

⁴¹ Ep. 1, I, 48.

⁴² Al-Kindī, “Risāla fī l-ḥudūd”, p. 172; ET: Id., “On Definitions and Descriptions of Things”, p. 304.

master. Starting from Miskawayh (d. 421/1030) who attentively read the *Rasā'il ihwān al-ṣafā*, the term *al-maḥabba* will establish itself in the tradition of *kutub al-aḥlāq* to include the Aristotelian socio-political dimension of φίλῶν.⁴³

The last important pair of concepts, *al-iḡtimā'* and *al-ittihād*, deals with the vocabulary of gathering and, once more, introduces a difference of degree. *Al-iḡtimā'* is the end of *al-maḥabba* and *al-ittihād* the end of *al-iṣq*. *Al-iḡtimā'* is the meeting of things, including the reunion of the philosophers, such as their symposiums. Rosenthal translates *iḡtimā'* as “junction”, to signify that the union is not entirely accomplished and to layer an astrological dimension to the concept. We prefer to translate it by “meeting” for its social connotation: it opens to more than the junction of two. In any case, it is the idea to put separate things together, to gather and assemble them. Concerning the term *ittihād*, which derives from the root *w-h-d*, naming the idea of unity, the translation should use a similar English root, therefore “union” is the most suitable translation.

In Ep. 37, the term *al-iḡtimā'* is endowed with additional meaning. In the other epistles of *Ihwān al-ṣafā*, it indicates the political or religious meeting (Ep. 42, III, 442), or the intellectual agreement on a particular opinion (Ep. 42, III, 431), but in the epistle on love, it is also used in lieu of *al-ḡimā'*, meaning the sexual intercourse in the expression *al-iḡtimā' wa-l-sifād* (Ep. 37, III, 277). By using *al-iḡtimā'* in place of *al-ḡimā'*, the *Rasā'il Ihwān al-ṣafā* assumes that carnal love may be the paradigm of all meetings, hence its constant use as a metaphor. For instance:

Another example is the nature of magnet and iron; in fact, between these two dry and hard stones, and between their nature, there is affection [*ulfa*] and longing [*iṣṭiyāq*]: when the iron is close to this stone at the point that it smells its odour, it goes towards it and is attached to it, and

⁴³ Miskawayh, *Tabdīb al-aḥlāq*, p. 137; ET: Id., *The Refinement of Character*, p. 125. He distinguishes between collective and individual friendship: “[*Al-ṣadāqa*] does not take place among a large group, as is the case with [*al-maḥabba*]”. See also the third discourse of Naṣīr al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī, *Nasirean Ethics*, trans. by G.-M. Wickens, Abingdon-New York, Routledge, 2011, pp. 195–210 and 242–252. And compare with Carmela Baffioni, who founds the political bond on the concept of *al-ulfa*. See C. Baffioni, “*Al-Madinah al-Fāḍilah* in al-Fārābī and the Ikhwān al-Ṣafā: A Comparison”, in *Studies in Arabic and Islam*. Proceedings of the 19th Union Européenne des Arabisants et Islamisants (Halle 1998), ed. by S. Leder et al., Leuven, Peeters, 2002, pp. 3–12, esp. 5.

the stone attracts it to itself, retaining it as a lover does with his beloved [Ep. 19, II, 111].⁴⁴

It can be surmised that the loving embrace is the paradigm of all unions. More broadly, we may refer to the *Rasā'il Ihwān al-ṣafā*'s concern for a pedagogy that has a starting point in the immediate experience of the common people,⁴⁵ and also remind their epistemological premise that argues that "[man] is the sum of the ideas of all beings" (Introductory Ep., I, 32). Then, all cosmic or natural attractions will be explained by referring to the immediate experience of sexual intercourse.

3.3. *An Idealist Doctrine of Carnal Love: The Heritage of Plato's Symposium*

A second ambiguity right at the beginning of the text prevents one from developing a consistent interpretation: although carnal experience will specifically be the subject of analysis, love is defined as an affection of the soul, a desire toward the soul, and a relationship between two souls. How can the text reconcile the physical manifestations of love with its spiritual principle?

Al-Sarāḥsī differs from the vitalist conception of al-Ġāḥiẓ who defines passion (*īṣq*) as an amalgam of love (*ḥubb*), sexual drive (*hawā*), and identity of nature between lovers (*muṣākala*), and identifies its origin in animal nature.⁴⁶ This conception leads to a pathological approach of passion, as soon as carnal desire becomes a need dependent on a certain being, especially if the latter is forbidden or tabooed. For instance, al-Ġāḥiẓ calls passion a disease (*dā' al-īṣq*).⁴⁷ Such an approach comes from the *ṭabī'iyyūn*, particularly from Hunayn ibn Ishāq's medical analysis of passion. In his translation of the Greek

⁴⁴ *On the Natural Sciences: An Arabic Critical Edition and English Translation of Epistles 15–21*, ed. and trans. by C. Baffioni, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2013, p. 254. This example of natural love at the level of minerals can already be found in al-Kindī, "Risāla fī ibāna 'an sujūd al-ġirm al-aqṣā", p. 249; al-Kindī, "The Prostration of the Outmost Body", p. 178: "But love occurs [...] without the intermediary of sense, like the love of the nature of iron for a magnetic stone".

⁴⁵ Ep. 37, III, 271: "We would like to speak about love as most people know it".

⁴⁶ Al-Ġāḥiẓ, *The Epistle on Singing-Girls*, p. 28, § 41 and p. 29, § 44, and Cheikh-Moussa, "La négation d'Eros", p. 114.

⁴⁷ Al-Ġāḥiẓ, *The Epistle on Singing-Girls*, pp. 27–28, §§ 40–41.

Gnomologia,⁴⁸ he gives a symptomatic description of the malady of love, as well as in the part of *Adāb al-falāsifa* dedicated to the sayings attributed to Galen.⁴⁹ The distinction between *mahabba* in the sense of spiritual love, and *ʿiṣq* in the sense of carnal love restricted to corporal life seems to be a generally shared opinion among philosophers during the 9th century, especially in Pythagoras's following words as relayed by Gutas: "He said: Not the mutual love (*mu'āṣaqa*) of souls but that of bodies ought to be prevented".⁵⁰

This is not dissimilar from the position that emerged from the Arabic reading of Plato's *Symposium*, to which al-Saraḥsī is indebted despite some minor disparities. Indeed, his reflections on love must have originated from his master's *Epistle on the Symposium of Philosophers on Mysteries of Love* from which only two fragments survived, the first being the myth of Aristophanes while the second is the participation of Alcibiades that precisely deals with the link between carnal and spiritual desire. Along these lines, this second excerpt highlights the relation between the two types of desire:

Al-Kindi mentioned that a handsome young Greek aristocrat named Alcibiades said: "I loved philosophy and I used to go frequently to Sokrates. While teaching others, however, he kept looking at me, and so it occurred to me that he might want from me what people want from fresh-faced young boys. I thus contrived to be alone with him and I presented myself to him. He said to me, 'What calls you [here], Alcibiades?' 'My desire for your wisdom', I replied. He then came closer and said, 'What do you expect from the wisdom of a person the extent of whose precious wisdom is this contemptible act? My son, he who advocates virtue but commits debauchery is not a wise man [or: philosopher]. Someone else is responsible for the beauty of your face, but you are responsible for the beauty of your soul; so don't debase what you are responsible for lest you derive nothing from all your qualities!'" The young man said: "I never remember in moments of solitude this reprimand without being overcome by a sense of shame, or gaining a deeper insight into the nobility of Sokrates' soul;

⁴⁸ H.H. Biesterfeldt and D. Gutas, "The Malady of Love", *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 104 (1984), pp. 21–55.

⁴⁹ Hunayn ibn Ishāq, *Adāb al-falāsifa*, p. 121. For the Greek medical tradition on love, see P. Toohey, "Love, Lovesickness, and Melancholia", *Illinois Classical Studies* 17/2 (1992), pp. 265–286.

⁵⁰ D. Gutas, *Greek Wisdom Literature in Arabic Translation: A Study of the Graeco-Arabic Gnomologia*, New Haven, American Oriental Society, 1975, p. 80.

and had it not been for the fact that those who hear this story told will love Socrates even more, I would not have mentioned my vile behavior”.⁵¹

Although it differs from the original dialogue of Plato in form, this text follows quite faithfully the spirit of *Smp.* 217a–219e, where Alcibiades tells how he tried to seduce Socrates, and how the latter rejected his proposal to enjoy the physical beauty of the ephebe in exchange of sharing his own spiritual beauty. If Socrates' wisdom provokes Alcibiades' carnal desire, this very desire is to be condemned – particularly in al-Kindī's text – for it lacks any spiritual value.

In contrast, al-Saraḥsī's concern for carnal manifestations of love is revealed through both his role in the erotic controversy mentioned by al-Kātib⁵² and al-Kaskarī's reference to his theorisation of pederasty.⁵³ In that case, how do we conciliate his subscription to Platonic idealism and his appreciation of carnal love? The answer lies in the fragment: souls achieve union through the mediation of bodies.

Given that Ep. 37 contains the same duality, a comparison of the two perspectives is due. First, the same influence of Plato's *Symposium* can be observed regarding *Rasā'il Iḥwān al-ṣaḥā'*. Amnon Shiloah has already observed it on the formal level of the dialogue as a genre concerning the wise men's discussion on music at the end of Ep. 5 (I, 234–239).⁵⁴ The presence of such discussions in Ḥunayn ibn Ishāq's *Ādāb al-falāsifa*⁵⁵ – knowing that Ḥunayn is the second Arabic source for Plato's *Symposium* – confirms that such a writing style has its origin in Plato's dialogue, or in any material derived from it. Indeed, Ḥunayn reports several philosophers' meetings (*iḡtimā'āt al-falāsifa*) in which

⁵¹ Ibn Baḥṭišū', *Risāla fī l-ṭibb wa-l-aḥdāt al-naḥsāniyya*, p. 52; ET: D. Gutas, “Plato's *Symposium* in the Arabic Tradition”, *Oriens* 31 (1988), pp. 36–60, here 38–39.

⁵² Following the testimony of three manuscripts of *Kitāb ḡawāmi' al-ladḡa* that mention Aḥmad ibn al-Ṭayyib al-Saraḥsī in a controversy between the pederast (*al-lūṭī*) and the fornicator (*al-zānī*). See Istanbul, Sulaymaniye, MS Ayasofya 3836, ff. 63r–82r, (dated 533/1139), MS Fatih 3729, ff. 64v–73r (dated 582/1186), and Dublin, MS Chester Beatty, ff. 61v–85v (dated 724/1324).

⁵³ G. de Vaulx d'Arcy, “Al-Saraḥsī versus al-Kaskarī: Plus qu'une dispute religieuse, un événement philosophique”, *Bulletin d'études orientales* 66 (2018), pp. 275–321, esp. 299–300.

⁵⁴ A. Shiloah, “L'épître sur la musique des *Iḥwān al-ṣaḥā'*”, *Revue des études islamiques* 32 (1964), pp. 125–162, esp. 128, note 8. For an English translation, see *On Music*, pp. 162–172.

⁵⁵ Ḥunayn ibn Ishāq, *Ādāb al-falāsifa*, pp. 51, and 56–61.

they briefly converse, each one giving his proper opinion on a particular topic.

Furthermore, al-Mas'ūdī, in the same concise style as Ḥunayn ibn Ishāq, begins his side note on love with the abstract of an Arabic symposium, an assembly of theologians at Yahyā ibn Ḥālid ibn Barmak's (d. 808) on the same topic as Plato's dialogue. Then, he moves to the opinions of other schools of Islam (*abl al-ḥadīth*, poets, *falāsifa*, astronomers, Sufis). Such a large digression indicates the great influence of Plato's *Symposium* on the representation of intellectual life.

Ep. 37 on the essence of love precisely starts with such a presentation of competing perspectives. If we accept that Kindian works are the base material of the *Rasā'il Iḥwān al-ṣafā'*,⁵⁶ we can reasonably assume that the opinions contained in Ep. 37 come from al-Kindī's *Epistle on the Symposium of Philosophers on Mysteries of Love*. The list of opinions found in Ep. 37 is as follows:

Know brother that among the wise men, 1) one spoke about love blaming it, talking about the villainy of those who are engaged in such affection and the ugliness of its causes. They pretended that it was a vice. 2) One of them said that love is a virtue of the soul, praised it and talked about the goodness of those who are engaged in it and the beauty of its causes. 3) Another one could not catch the truth and precise meaning of its secrets, causes, and reasons, so he pretended that it is a spiritual disease. 4) Another said that it is divine madness. 5) Another one said that it is a concern for empty souls. 6) A last one said that it is the conduct of idle people with no occupation or concern [Ep. 37, III, 270].

Since we ignore the real content of al-Kindī's lost epistle, it would be presumptuous to argue that it is only the opinions of the participants in Plato's *Symposium* that are reported in both al-Kindī's and *Rasā'il Iḥwān al-ṣafā'*'s epistles on love. Of course, blaming or praising love as the two first wise men do remind the reader of the beginning of the *Symposium* and Pausanias' distinction between the noble love of the heavenly Aphrodite, which deserves eulogy, and the vile love of the common Aphrodite, which deserves blame (Pl., *Smp.* 181b). The second opinion can also refer to Phaedrus' opening speech, in which he

⁵⁶ G. de Vaulx d'Arcy, "Foreword", in *Les Épîtres des Frères en Pureté (Rasā'il Iḥwān al-ṣafā'): Mathématique et philosophie*, trans. by G. de Vaulx d'Arcy, Paris, Les Belles Lettres, 2019, pp. 13–63, esp. 41–45.

praises *Eros* for being the “giver of virtue in life, and of happiness after death” (Pl., *Smp.* 180b). Even if the third opinion can be traced back to the physician of the assembly Eryximachus who distinguishes between the love of the healthy and the desire of the diseased (Pl., *Smp.* 186b), it will be associated later in the text with the symptomatic trait inherited from the aforementioned Galenic literature translated by Ḥunayn ibn Isḥaq. No relation whatsoever can be made between the last three positions and the philosophers of the *Symposium*, but despite this not only does the expression “divine madness” had an impact on erotic philosophy in Islam,⁵⁷ but it was also precisely related to Plato. Indeed, in his side note on love, al-Masʿūdī attributes such a view to him: “It is said [*ḥukiya*] about Plato that he asserts the following: ‘I do not know what love [*hawā*] is, but what I know is that it is a divine madness and that it should neither be praised nor blamed’”.⁵⁸

The penultimate category mentioned in Ep. 37 may be tracked back to Pythagoras through a Greek *Gnomologia* translated in Arabic: “He was asked, ‘What is love?’ He said, ‘A foolishness (*ḡahl*) that has encountered, or found, an idle heart’”.⁵⁹ Later, Ibn Baḥṭiṣūʿ will attribute this phrase to Socrates.⁶⁰ Although *Rasāʾil Iḥwān al-ṣafāʾ* equally disapprove of these opinions, the epistles apply their doctrine consist-

⁵⁷ Such a view will be later associated by tradition to Ḡāfar al-Šādiq who would have said that “love is a divine madness without limit nor prohibition”: see for instance, Farīd al-Dīn al-ʿAṭṭār, *Tadkirat al-awliyyāʾ*, ed. by M.A. al-Ġādir and trans. by M. al-Šāfiʿi, Beirut, Dār maktabatī, 2016, p. 38. However, this author may have inherited the expression from the *Rasāʾil Iḥwān al-ṣafāʾ*, for we know that they were of great influence on him, and especially on his *Manṭiq al-ṭayr*. But the structure of the saying reproduces the structure of Plato’s quote.

⁵⁸ Al-Masʿūdī, *Murūḡ al-dahab*, vol. IV, p. 245. This saying is conserved in a more complete version in al-Rāḡib al-Aṣḥāhānī, *Muḥāḍarāt al-udabāʾ wa-muḥāwarāt al-šuʿarāʾ*, ed. by I. Zidān, Cairo, Maktabat al-hilāl, 1902, p. 168: “Some philosopher was asked about love, he said: ‘A divine madness! Not to be praised nor blamed’. Another said: ‘The movement of an empty soul’”. The presence of Plato’s pseudo-quotation and of the second definition may indicate that we are here in presence of the same source read by the authors of Ep. 37, namely, a quotation of al-Kindī’s epistle on the *Symposium*. The link of the medical doctrine of the malady of love with Plato concerns the *Republic*, III, 403ab. See Ibn Baḥṭiṣūʿ, *Risāla fī l-ṭibb wa-l-aḥdāt al-nafsiyya*, p. 47: “True, I cannot say that, and I know no pleasure producing more madness than [the pleasure of the sexual intercourse]”. The expression *al-junūn al-ilabī* or *al-maraḍ al-ilabī* most probably comes from Hippocrates’ book on the sacred illness translated in Arabic *Fī l-maraḍ al-ilabī*. See *ibid.*, p. 57.

⁵⁹ Quoted by Gutas, *Greek Wisdom Literature in Arabic Translation*, p. 80.

⁶⁰ Ibn Baḥṭiṣūʿ, *Risāla fī l-ṭibb wa-l-aḥdāt al-nafsiyya*, p. 48.

ing of “giving all his own due” (Ep. 33, III, 199) and find a part of truth in each one of said opinions. So, after having criticised the medical view for its materialism, they gratify it for its faithful description of the signs of love; the idea of divine madness adds the verticality of love’s causes, and the opinion of the empty soul adds a layer of understanding of the effects of this feeling (Ep. 37, III, 270–271). The science of the soul and its resurrection that guides love toward the elevation of the soul remains the dominating thesis amongst many others. It is the thesis of love as a cause of union, which we will start studying beginning from al-Saraḥsī’s fragment.

Another element that can be inherited from Plato’s *Symposium* through al-Kindī’s epistle is the relation between pederasty and education. A double shift occurs between the Platonic view and that of *Rasā’il Iḥwān al-ṣafā’*. First, the epistles flip the subject and the object of love: sexual desire is no longer felt by the student toward the master, but by the master toward the student, and this last desire is a requisite for education:

Then know that even if they benefit from the education of their fathers and mothers, children and young people need to be taught the sciences and arts by masters in order to achieve accomplishment and perfection. For this sake, mature men feel sexual desire toward boys and love for ephesbes. Such a motive propels them to educate them, teach them and help them improve, in order to reach their own ends. This can be found in the dispositions of most nations that are driven by a passionate love for acquiring knowledge [Ep. 37, III, 277].

Yes, such an asymmetric relation hereby described is very different from the situation found in al-Saraḥsī’s fragment. However, if we refer to his controversy with Isrā’īl al-Kaskarī, it appears that it is very similar to the mixing of spiritual fatherhood and pederast love, which the Nestorian bishop accuses al-Saraḥsī of.⁶¹

The second shift consists in setting the *raḡba fī nikāḥ al-ḡilmān* as a cunning of reason. Whereas women’s sexual desire for men is a cunning of nature pushing them to mate, reproduce, and ensure the continuation of the species, men’s love for boys is a cunning of reason pushing them to teach, develop their knowing soul, and ensure the

⁶¹ De Vaulx d’Arcy, “Al-Saraḥsī versus al-Kaskarī”, pp. 297–299.

transmission of knowledge. The first part of the idea could already be found in Ḥunayn ibn Ishāq who attributes to Socrates the following:

Carnal love is a power established by God, may He be praised and exalted, for the generation of the animals, which are moved by this power that drives them to desire mating in order to ensure the continuity of their form in the world, lacking any means to help perpetuate all that is submissive to generations and corruption. Nevertheless, the lover loves the nicest forms in order for the fruit to have the most accomplished form and be the nicest fruit.⁶²

Indeed, the pursuit of pleasure is a cunning of nature to optimise the reproduction of the species. However, as already established, to limit oneself to this statement would reduce love to an affection of the body, although both al-Sarāḥsī's fragment and Ep. 37 consider it an affection of the soul.

In fact, Ep. 37 conceives eroticism in the same way Ep. 5 conceives music, that is as an affection of the soul through the body. Indeed, music is "that art which combines the physical and the spiritual" (Ep. 5, I, 183).⁶³ Knowing that the distinction between matter and form in the epistles belongs to the category of relation (Ep. 35, III, 234–235), spiritual substances can be the material of art. Such manual art uses sound vibrations produced by bodies in order to transform the listeners' states of mind. The spiritual aim of such a physical practice consists in the elevation of the soul:

The tones produced by the movements of the musician remind the individual souls that are in the world of generation and corruption of the joy of the world of the celestial spheres, just as the tones produced by the movements of the celestial spheres and the heavenly bodies remind the souls that are there of the joy of the world of the spirits. This is the conclusion derived from the premises confessed by the sages, that is, their assertion that the states of secondary, caused entities imitate those of the primary entities that cause them [Ep. 5, I, 207].⁶⁴

⁶² Ḥunayn ibn Ishāq, *Ādāb al-falāsifa*, p. 64.

⁶³ *On Music*, p. 75.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 120 (amended trans.).

Musical experience brings the perception of harmony between artificial sounds and, consequently, evokes to the soul the natural harmony of the celestial world, which is a sign of the harmony between eternal forms. In the same way, the erotic experience must be perceived as a physical initiation to the soul's separate destiny:

Know that the presence of love in the innate disposition of souls, their affection for bodies, their taste for flesh and physical beauty, their craving for all sorts of desirable beings, all of that is to awaken them from the sleep of negligence and the slumber of ignorance, a training, an inclination, and an elevation from physical sensitive realities to spiritual rational ones [Ep. 37, III, 282].

Even if the will to persevere in its being (*maḥabbat al-baqāʾ*) characterises the concupiscent soul through carnal love, the spirited soul through the love of power, and the rational soul through the love of knowledge, only the latter will actually perpetuate for eternity. Therefore, the rational soul is the true place of realisation of the final end, which the body cannot reach. More broadly speaking, in the epistles the body is a propaedeutic path toward the achievement of the soul. For instance, whereas prophets can reach knowledge directly through intellectual power (*quwwat al-fikr*), common people reach it through the means of the faculties of the body, through tradition and sensuous experience (Ep. 26, III, 13).

That way, the ambiguity concerning the body in this idealist perspective is cleared. Just as the peasant in *Kalīla wa-Dimna* has to grow grass to harvest grains, caring for the spiritual destiny of our soul, men have to cultivate their bodies (Ep. 19, II, 124). Since the intellect needs the mediation of the body (Ep. 14, I, 437–438), the soul should not be considered separately from it. Therefore, the first object of concern is the union of the body and the soul. Precisely, eroticism, just like music, does not belong to the arts of the soul or the body alone, but to the arts of the union of both body and soul (*maḡmūʿubumā* – Ep. 23, II, 379). Indeed, Ep. 30 identifies seven pleasures specific to the union body-soul: besides pleasure of the five senses, there is also mating (*al-ḡimāʾ*), which is a pleasure specific to the union of the body with the concupiscent soul, and revenge that is characteristic of the union with the irascible soul (Ep. 30, III, 53 and 68–69). Hence, music starts from the pleasure in audition, and eroticism from the pleasure in mating to initiate the soul to its spiritual elevation.

3.4. *The Proposition on Symbiotic Love*

We now move on to address the specific proposition on love, considered as a cause of ultimate meeting in the Sāraḥsian fragment. A contradiction immediately appears: carnal love is indeed described as an ultimate meeting, but physical union is confirmed as impossible. So, how could union strictly speaking, that is, the “becoming one” (*yaṣīru al-insānⁿ wāḥid^{an}*), occur through a loving embrace although both bodies will never become one? First, corporal union is nothing more than a spatial contiguity, endangered by the intrusion of an alien body in between the two bodies. Second, union does not particularly concern bodies, but their spiritual power (*quwwatān*). Third and last, to say that love develops an ultimate stage of meeting implies that different stages of affection between men exist and produce other forms of meeting. Let us discuss these three points in detail.

The Union of Souls through Physical Embrace

The definition of love and the description of the loving embrace found in the fragment ultimately refer to Aristophanes’ intervention in Plato’s *Symposium*: “So ancient is the desire of one another which is implanted in us, reuniting our original nature, making one of two, and healing the state of man” (191d). The Aristophanes myth which illustrates this proposition was available in Arabic in two different versions: one by Ḥunayn ibn Ishāq (d. 260/873) which reappeared in Ibn Dāwūd’s (d. 257/910) *Kitāb al-zahrāʾ*, and the other by al-Kindī reported in Ibn Baḥtīšū’s (d. 450/1058) *Epistle on Medicine*. Here is the latter:

Certain [*qawm*] Sabian scholars believe that when humans were first created, they were connected [with each other] at the place of the navel and that Zeus commanded that they be cut apart on account of their strength and power and the deeds they were committing on earth. Thus, a male who was attached to another male now loves males, a female who was attached to another female now loves females and one who was attached to a male now loves males, and <a male> who was attached to a female now loves females. Whoever falls in love, falls in love only with the person to whom he was originally attached and of whose stuff and substance he is.⁶⁵

⁶⁵ Ibn Baḥtīšū, *Risāla fī l-ṭibb wa-l-aḥdāt al-naḥsāniyya*, p. 52; ET: Gutas, “Plato’s *Symposium* in the Arabic Tradition”, p. 37.

Gutas legitimates the possibility of a Sabeian transmission of such an abstract of Pl., *Smp.* 190b–191e.⁶⁶ Quite interestingly, one may notice that the association between Sabaeans and ancient Greeks is consistent, on the one hand, with al-Kindī's book on the *Apology of Socrates* entitled *On What Happened between Socrates and the Harranians*,⁶⁷ and on the other hand with the assertion of *Rasā'il Iḥwān al-ṣafā'* that Pythagoras was Harranian (Ep. 33, III, 200). For both al-Kindī and the epistles, in a way or another, sages do not belong only to a foundational past, but have also a present and very local existence. Coming back to the Aristophanian proposition, we can notice that al-Kindī seems to have made it his own, as we can infer from the *Epistle on Definitions*: “*Al-maḥabba* is the cause for the meeting (*iḡtimā'*) of things”.⁶⁸ Knowing that the same epistle asserts that “*al-iṣq ifrāt al-maḥabba*”, all the beginning of the fragment can be deduced from al-Kindī's definitions.

Moving now to the second version of the Aristophanian myth, we translate Ḥunayn's text:

Ptolemy was asked about love and he said: God created every spirit round in the form of a sphere, which he then cut into [two] halves and put one half in every body. So, every body that encounters the body containing the half [of the spirit] which was cut from it is filled with love that arises between the two on account of the original relationship.⁶⁹

Two main differences with the Kindian version may be noticed: first, the adaptation of the text to the monotheist context by mentioning the creation; second, the assertion that the cut concerns the souls be-

⁶⁶ Gutas, “Plato's *Symposion* in the Arabic Tradition”, pp. 41–47.

⁶⁷ *Al-Risāla fī mā ḡarā bayn Suḡrāt wa-l-Harrāniyyin* (see *Philosophie in der islamischen Welt* 8. – 10. Jahrhundert, p. 97). However, some manuscripts contain another version and evoke the guards (*ḥurrās*), instead of the Harranians. See D. De Smet, “L'héritage de Platon et de Pythagore: Sa voie diffuse en terre d'Islam”, in *Entre Orient et Occident: La philosophie et la science gréco-romaines dans le monde arabe*, ed. by R. Goulet and U. Rudolph, *Vandœuvres*, Fondation Hardt, 2011, pp. 87–133, here 123.

⁶⁸ Al-Kindī, “*Risāla fī l-ḥudūd*”, p. 168; ET: Id., “On Definitions and Descriptions of Things”, p. 302 (amended trans.). Such a definition is confirmed by that of *al-iḡtimā'*: “Meeting: its cause by nature is affection” (Id., “*Risāla fī l-ḥudūd*”, p. 170; ET: Id., “On Definitions and Descriptions of Things”, p. 303).

⁶⁹ Ḥunayn ibn Iṣḥāq, *Adāb al-falāsifa*, p. 128; Gutas, “Plato's *Symposion* in the Arabic Tradition”, p. 48 (amended trans.).

fore their incarnation. The consequence of the second is that love is the reunion of the souls, not the bodies: this is the reason why Nuha al-Šaʿar considered that Ep. 37 followed Hunayn's version rather than al-Kindī's, as this is precisely the case in the former's fragment. However, the difference with al-Kindī should not be overestimated,⁷⁰ for he also considers that the soul is the subject of affection: "*Al-maḥabba*. What the soul seeks; what perfects a potentiality by assembling (*iğtimāʿ*) things".⁷¹

According to al-Kindī, love (*al-maḥabba* as well as *al-ʿiṣq*) is a principle that exceeds the anthropological level. Thus, the definition of love as a cause of union is also applied to cosmology in the epistle *The Prostration of the Outmost Body*: "Love without the intermediary of sense is a natural tendency towards union with the beloved object, either through the body or through nature".⁷²

It is not the exclusion of the body from the conditions of love that one may surmise from this quotation, but rather the maintenance of the possibility of love, then union, for non-sensitive beings, hence the possibility to establish love as the cosmic principle of movement, in the tradition of Aristotle's *Metaphysics*, Λ. Such a cosmological status of love is still the case at the end of Ep. 37, despite its insistence on carnal love:

The universal soul is [like the soul of the wise men alongside it]: it acts like the Creator in its administration of celestial bodies, animation of the planets, generation of beings, ever obedient to its Creator, full of adoration and burning desire. That is why the wise men said: God is the first beloved, around which evolve all animated celestial bodies, craving for him, pleased to perpetuate this way [Ep. 37, III, 285].

⁷⁰ So Gutas' opinion should be tempered. See Gutas, "Plato's *Symposium* in the Arabic Tradition", p. 48: "The differences between [Hunayn's] version of the Aristophanes myth and the preceding one by Kindī are immediately apparent. This version is 'spiritualized': it is not the *bodies* of the original humans which were created joined together (in a spherical form), but their *spirits*; it is also provided with a 'scientific' (medical) rationalization: the final sentence is added to forestall possible objections, on the grounds that all people would then love each other equally, to the doctrine of the bisected spheres. The purpose of the author of this version, therefore, seems to be to 'demythologize' the Aristophanes myth and present it as a serious doctrine with medical pretensions".

⁷¹ Al-Kindī, "Risāla fī l-ḥudūd", p. 175; ET: Id., "On Definitions and Descriptions of Things", p. 306 (amended trans.).

⁷² Al-Kindī, "Risāla fī ibāna ʿan suğūd al-ğirm al-aqṣā", p. 249; Id., "The Prostration of the Outmost Body", p. 178.

We presently return to the doctrine of symbiotic love as described in Ep. 37. After some comments on the first list of views on love, the epistle adds two other opinions:

Among the wise men, one asserts that love is a passion [*hawā*] that dominates the soul and targets a physically similar temperament [*tab‘ mušākil*] or a form of an identical [*mumātala*] gender. Another one claims that love is a burning desire [*šiddat al-maḥabba*] toward union [*al-ittiḥād*] [Ep. 37, III 272].

The first opinion contains the very elements of *al-‘iṣq* according to al-Gāhiz as already established, while the second opinion is precisely the proposition on symbiotic love. The text endorses the latter, adding that “it is the most persuasive statement”, that “we have to discuss in this chapter to shed light on its truth” (Ep. 37, III, 272).⁷³ Then, the text associates each type of soul with a type of desirable object with which the soul aims to unify. Therefore, the nature of love depends on the nature of the soul. This results in an important statement:

We presently return to the explanation of the wise man’s statement: love is a burning desire toward union. We say: union is a property of realities of the soul and spiritual states, whereas union is impossible for bodies, only vicinity, mixture [*al-mumāzaḡa*] or contact, nothing more. So, union concerns spiritual realities, as we will show it in the following sections [Ep. 37, III 273].

Among the contenders for union, bodies sharing love are not the best candidates, because it is precisely through the body that particular souls are separated.⁷⁴ Carnal love is thus condemned to contiguity.

⁷³ The Beirut edition adds a remark and some verses of Ibn al-Rūmī (d. 283/895) between the definition and its confirmation, what distorts the intention of the judgement. Yes, it designates the definition and not the verses. Such an interpolation does not appear in Istanbul, Süleymaniye, MS Atif Effendi 1681, f. 352r and Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, MS Arabe 2303, f. 337r. They can be added to Abbas Hamdani’s study of poetic interpolations: A. Hamdani, “The Arrangement of the *Rasā’il Iḥwān al-Ṣafā*’ and the Problem of Interpolations”, in *The Iḥwān al-Ṣafā’ and Their Rasā’il: An Introduction*, ed. by N. El-Birzi, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2008, pp. 83–100.

⁷⁴ Or “otherness is due to matter only”, to use Miskawayh’s words in *Tahdīb al-ablāq*, p. 139; ET: Miskawayh, *The Refinement of Character*, p. 126.

However, carnal love encourages union and tends to it. Since it is unable to achieve it, it leads the soul to the love's overcoming at a spiritual level, where amalgamation is only possible. Such a breakthrough stems from the heart of carnal love, and this corporal origin is still metaphorically in check, even when the union concerns separated souls with eternal forms:⁷⁵ "Once [the soul] sees these hidden realities, it gets connected with them as a lover's connection with his beloved and unites with them as the light unites with the light" (Ep. 27, III, 3). Bodies are condemned to contiguity, but subtle substances reach absolute union. However, erotic experience is the first step in man's initiation to union. While in the Sarāḥsian fragment the overcoming of the physical dimension happens from the contiguity of bodies to the actual unity of will, in Ep. 37 it happens, for instance, from the pederast relationship of masters and pupils to the actualisation of the intellect, from the contiguity of bodies to the union of rational souls.

The Different Paths to the Union of Souls

Carnal love, as we previously established, is the path toward union but not quite where the union actually occurs. Other paths exist and the end of the Sarāḥsian fragment evokes one, that is friendship: "Therefore, the sage said: your friend is your *alter ego* [*ṣadiquka āḥaru huwa anta*], signifying by 'alter' the difference of the two bodies, and by 'ego', the agreement of wills".

The philosopher who will develop this dimension of affection is Miskawayh, who will do it by combining the Brethren in Purity's doctrine of brotherhood and the Aristotelian *philia*.⁷⁶ Specifically, he quotes the same saying (here in Constantine Zurayk's translation): "This is why a friend is defined as another person who is yourself [*ḥudda al-ṣadāq annahu āḥar huwa anta*] but is another than you in person".⁷⁷ This quotation is taken from Aristotle's *Nichomachean*

⁷⁵ Note that Miskawayh, despite his mitigation of the importance of eroticism, also refuses to consider a friendship separated from "the love which is caused by pleasure": only the composite love lasts (or "dissolves slowly"). See Miskawayh, *Tahdīb al-ablāq*, p. 136; ET: Id., *The Refinement of Character*, pp. 123–124.

⁷⁶ Miskawayh's dependence on the Brethren in Purity is proved elsewhere by his sociological treatment of religious rituals, directly taken from the epistles. Compare Miskawayh, *Tahdīb al-ablāq*, pp. 140–141; ET: Id., *The Refinement of Character*, pp. 127–128, with *Rasā'il Iḥwān al-ṣafā'*, Ep. 22, II, 328.

⁷⁷ Miskawayh, *Tahdīb al-ablāq*, p. 144; ET: Id., *The Refinement of Character*, p. 131.

Ethics (IX, 1666a).⁷⁸ In Miskawayh, the context does not link such a definition of friendship with *al-ʿiṣq* nor the loving embrace, not even with astrology. The quotation follows the definition of the highest type of affection: “The mutual affection between virtuous people [*maḥabbat al-aḥyār baʿdihim baʿd^{an}*] is not motivated by any external pleasure or any benefit, but is due to their essential similarity, namely, in aiming at what is good and seeking virtue”.⁷⁹

This definition could be a paraphrase of the *Rasāʾil Iḥwān al-ṣafāʾ*’s passage in the epistle on friendship defining the highest degree of friendship in a similar way. I quote:

The friendship of [the Brethren in Purity (*iḥwān al-ṣafāʾ*)⁸⁰] is not exterior to their essence. Indeed, any friendship happens for some reason, so the disappearance of such a reason puts an end to the very friendship, except the friendship between Brethren in Purity that is a uterine affinity [*qarābat raḥim*] that consists in living for one another, in inheriting one another, so they consider and believe that they are one soul in separate bodies [Ep. 45, IV, 48].

This text holds some echoes of Arist., *EN* IX. It shows that the epistle of the Brethren in Purity and that of Miskawayh develop two different commentaries of the Aristotelian conception of friendship. The idea dealing with the different degrees of affection will be later reflected in a saying attributed to Hermes Trismegistus: “[Hermes] said: ‘A brother’s affection does not happen for the pursuit of a particular interest, or the flight from a nuisance, but for his own good and his character’”.⁸¹

⁷⁸ “Therefore, since each of these characteristics belongs to the good man in relation to himself, and he is related to his friend as to himself (for his friend is another self), friendship too is thought to be one of these attributes, and those who have these attributes to be friends”. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. by W.D. Ross, Kitchener, Batoche Books, 1999.

⁷⁹ Miskawayh, *Tabḍīb al-aḥlāq*, p. 144; ET: Id., *The Refinement of Character*, pp. 130–131 (amended trans.).

⁸⁰ Rather than “Brethren of Purity”, we find more correct to translate the concept of *iḥwān al-ṣafāʾ* as “Brethren in Purity”, modelled on the common expression “brethren in faith”. Indeed, purity is not a common property of the brethren, but the cause of their friendship.

⁸¹ Al-Šahrastānī, *Kitāb al-milal wa-l-niḥal*, ed. by A.ʿA. Manhā and ʿA.Ḥ. Fāʿūr, vol. II, Beirut, Dār al-maʿrifā, 1993, p. 354. The presence of an approximate sentence in Miskawayh’s *Tabḍīb al-aḥlāq* throws doubt on such an attribution: “Friendship (*al-ṣadāqa*) is a sincere affection which causes one to take an interest in all that concerns his

The first sentence of the Brethren in Purity will be analysed independently below. What is important to notice at this stage is that the friendship of the Brethren in Purity represents the unity of souls beyond the separation of bodies. Nevertheless, this unity starts with the material community: the sharing of life and heritage that is reminiscent of the relationship between Muslim immigrants and Medina inhabitants at the beginning of Islam. As for the “uterine affinity”, it participates in a metaphor used all along the epistles, which refers to the stay of souls in bodies before the second birth, namely their separation from the mortal body, and which is similar to the stay of the foetus in the uterus before the first birth.⁸² Here, the material path towards unity is not erotic, but economic and consists of a communitarian way of life in which no one owns something that others do not.

Now, even if the definition of friendship in the fragment refers to Aristotle’s passage, it is not sure that al-Saraḥsī refers to him while speaking of “the sage”. Indeed, the conception of love he develops is not Aristotelian. Therefore, knowing that the *Rasā’il Iḥwān al-ṣafā’* share a similar concept of friendship with the fragment, do they contain any element hinting at the identity of the wise thinker who conceived such a theory on friendship? The idea is not Platonic, it does not originate in the *Symposium*. So, who is the one that al-Saraḥsī calls “the wise man” and that he follows?

In the *Rasā’il Iḥwān al-ṣafā’*, *al-ḥakīm* is the word describing the founder of the philosophical heritage, analogous to *al-nabī*, which refers to the founder of the prophetic tradition. Two persons are more directly named *al-ḥakīm*: Socrates and Pythagoras.⁸³ Interestingly enough, the clue may come from a reader of the *Rasā’il* rather than from the *Rasā’il* themselves. Abū l-Farağ al-Ṭayyib (d. 434/1043) credits Pythagoras for a similar concept of friendship: “Friendship was glorified among the party of Pythagoras [*šī‘at Fīṭāgūrus*], and friend-

friend and to choose to do all the good he can for him”; Miskawayh, *Ṭahdīb al-aḥlāq*, p. 24; ET: Id., *The Refinement of Character*, p. 21. Notice that Miskawayh refuses the metaphoric use of kinship (*ṣilat al-raḥim*) and gives back legitimacy to the biological bond. See Id., *Ṭahdīb al-aḥlāq*, pp. 24 and 145–146; ET: Id., *The Refinement of Character*, pp. 21 and 131–132.

⁸² See for instance, among many others, Ep. 27, III, 6 and Ep. 42, III, 522.

⁸³ Concerning Socrates, “the wise among the Greeks”, see Ep. 46, IV, 73. For Pythagoras, see Ep. 5, I, 208 and 226, Ep. 31, III, 125, Ep. 32, III, 178.

ship was the model of the union with the gods”.⁸⁴ The doctrine of friendship as union is attributed to Pythagoreanism,⁸⁵ to which al-Kindī and al-Saraḥsī may be linked,⁸⁶ and which philosophy *Rasā’il Iḥwān al-ṣafā’* claim.

Some Pythagorean apophthegms concerning friendship were transmitted into Arabic by Ḥunayn ibn Iṣḥāq. Among them, is the following one:

[Pythagoras] saw two men who significantly differed one from another. He said: “What binds them?” He was said: “They have nothing in common, however, they are sincere friends [*lakinnahumā mutaṣāfiyān*]”. [Pythagoras replied:] “Therefore, one is not [*lam*] poor, and the other rich”.

Having edited the text, Gutas offered a remarkably distinctive translation:

Observing two men who hardly ever separated, he asked, “What is the relationship between them?” “There is no relationship between them”, he was told, “but they are sincere friends”. “Why [*lima*], then”, said Pythagoras, “is one of them rich and the other poor?”⁸⁷

According to Gutas, Pythagoras could not accept the existence of a friendship without similarity, consequently denying the sincerity of their friendship. The linguistic reason for his interpretation is his reading of the two letters l-m as the interrogative pronoun *lima*? But it can also be read as the negation *lam*. If one adopts this reading, the wise man does not confirm the impossibility of a friendship between opposites but effectively solves the contradiction. Then, the apothegm

⁸⁴ Ibn al-Tayyib, *Proclus’ Commentary of the Pythagorean Golden Verses*, ed. by N. Linley, New York, University of New York, 1984, p. 24.

⁸⁵ “According to Timaeus, he was the first to say, ‘friends have all things in common’ and ‘friendship is equality’; indeed, his disciples did put all their possessions into one common stock”; Diogenes Laertius, *The Lives and Opinions of Eminent Philosophers*, trans. by R.D. Hicks, vol. II, London-New York, Heinemann-Putnam’s sons, 1925, p. 325.

⁸⁶ See de Vaulx d’Arcy, “Foreword”, pp. 49–53.

⁸⁷ Gutas, *Greek Wisdom Literature in Arabic Translation*, p. 71, note 2: “He meant: if they had really been friends, they would have helped each other out”. But that is precisely what they do.

may be read as formed of three parts: first, the fact of the existence of friendship between opposites, then the astonishment of common people in front of this kind of friendship without affinity, and finally the solution given by Pythagoras: one completes the other, so no one lacks what the other possesses. Al-Saraḥsī, who proposes a spiritual friendship beyond material differences, would have no objection to such a doctrine.

Above all, this doctrine is consistent with *Rasā'il Iḥwān al-ṣafā*'s complementarianism. More precisely, the epistles propose two illustrations of the friendship between opposites: the couple formed by the blind and the cripple (Ep. 31, III, 156–159) and the other composed by the rich weak and the strong poor. Here is the second parable:

The financial assistance of the wealthy brother to the educated brother, and the scientific assistance of the educated brother to the wealthy brother for the benefit of the religion are like those two travellers who kept each other company across the desert. One of them was well-sighted and weak but had heavy provisions he was unable to carry. The other was blind and strong but had no provisions. So, the well-sighted took the blind by his hand and led him, while the blind carried the provisions of the well-sighted man on his shoulders. They shared provisions, had a safe trip, and achieved salvation. No one owed the other for his help and his salvation from annihilation, for both achieved salvation together thanks to their mutual assistance [Ep. 45, IV 55].

This parable is formulated exactly within the frame of the Pythagorean apothegm, just adding a soteriological dimension with the religious idea of *zād al-musāfirīn*, and giving a clear solution to the problem of friendship between opposites: indeed, one is rich and the other poor, but no one possesses all the required qualities for salvation, so the rich will need the strength of the poor, even if the latter is also blind.⁸⁸ Finally, we can discern the term used by Ḥunayn ibn Isḥāq for friend:

⁸⁸ In the perspective of debates in theology of religions, *Rasā'il Iḥwān al-ṣafā*'s view is original and cannot be reduced to the three classical doctrines (exclusivism, pluralism, and inclusivism). Their proposition, which appears in such a parable, can be named complementarianism and claims that no one will be saved if all are not. See G. de Vaulx d'Arcy, "Nul ne sera sauvé si tous ne le sont: Le complémentarisme des *Iḥwān al-Ṣafā* – Contribution à la théologie des religions", *Mélanges de l'Institut dominicain d'études orientales* 33 (2018), pp. 136–179.

mutaṣāfiyān, those who strive to achieve sincerity, or purity (*ṣafāʾ*). Then, it can be said that *Rasāʾil Iḥwān al-ṣafāʾ* not only follow the Pythagorean doctrine at an ontological level but also the Pythagorean communitarian organisation at a political level.⁸⁹

In addition to love and sincere friendship, the epistles develop a third path to union through religious gatherings. In the fable in Ep. 22, which puts on stage the case of animals versus man on the latter's claim to domination over the beasts, in his reply to the men's representative, who boasts the superiority of their religious laws, the leader of the birds put things into perspective:

You say you have festivals, days of collective prayer, attendance at houses of worship, and we have none.⁹⁰ Know that if you were well-educated and supportive brothers during hard times, that you were like one soul in the management of your business, so festivals and meeting for prayers would not be mandated to you.

So the legislator required that people gather together after living in disregard of each other, so that their meeting [*ig̃timāʾihim*] produces friendship [*al-ṣadāqa*], for friendship is the foundation of fraternity [*al-uhūwwa*], fraternity the foundation of affection [*al-maḥabbā*], affection the foundation of the reform of things, such a reform the guaranty of the welfare of the country, and such a welfare the foundation of the perpetuation of the world and the progeny [Ep. 22, II, 328].

The first paragraph is an implicit reference to the definition of friendship between sincere brothers in Ep. 45, IV, 48. The second one proposes an accurate conceptual distinction between degrees of affection, reminiscent of the precision of the Sarāḥsian fragment. Indeed, the nightingale presents religious regulations as a substitute for the true

⁸⁹ See F. Rosenthal, "Fiṭāḡūras" s.v., in *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, ed. by P.J. Bearman *et al.*, vol. II, C-G, Leiden, Brill, 1991, p. 930: "The Iḥwān al-Ṣafāʾ may not have been entirely unaware of the organizational precedent of Pythagoreanism".

⁹⁰ We borrowed, with some changes, the translation of this first sentence from *The Case of the Animals Versus Man Before the King of the Jinn: An Arabic Critical Edition and English Translation of Epistle 22*, ed. and trans. by L.E. Goodman and R. McGregor, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2009, p. 258. But then, their edition is based on manuscripts that contain a flagrant oversight by *saut du même au même* (*homocleuton* or *homoearchon*) confusing two occurrences of *wa-laysa lanā šayʾ min ḍalika*. MS BnF 2303, f. 224r, contains many differences compared to the Beirut edition, but the meaning remains almost similar.

friendship which people are unable to establish between them. Therefore, when love and desire are lacking, the legislator institutes physical proximity by law and the authoritarian will of the legislator replaces the free agreement between friends, hence friendship becomes citizenship. Miskawayh, who discusses *Rasā'il Iḥwān al-ṣafā*'s doctrine of friendship thanks to Aristotelian elements,⁹¹ endorses this very interpretation of religious rituals in terms of social bond.⁹²

The analysis of the three different paths to the unity of humankind may lead to the following proposition: knowing that love is a desire of the soul, as there are different kinds of souls so there are different kinds of love, each drawing a different path, thus carnal love happens to the concupiscent soul, which aims at mating, whereas citizenship happens to the irascible soul, which aims at governing, and friendship between sincere brothers would be specific to the rational soul, which is potentially independent of any physical determination (even time and space). Friendship does not found a family or a community, but it institutes a "spiritual city [*madīna rūḥāniyya*]" (Ep. 47, IV, 134), a timeless place gathering the angelic souls of the blessed brothers.⁹³ In this perspective, al-Sarāḥsī's text would focus on the elevation from the first form, that is, the union of the concupiscent souls in the loving embrace, to the second, namely the union of the irascible souls in citizenship.

3.5. The Status of the Body in Another Sarāḥsian Fragment

The prospect of an idealist doctrine of love that includes erotic experience presupposes a particular conception of the body. This concep-

⁹¹ This is not the place for commenting chapter 5 of Miskawayh, *Tabḍīb al-aḥlāq*, but we can reasonably state that "these people [*qawm*]" [who] had in view the virtue of unification which is realised in a collectivity" refer to the Brethren in Purity. See *ibid.*, p. 133; ET: Id., *The Refinement of Character*, p. 118. Miskawayh begins his chapter on friendship with the Brethren in Purity's view, before amending it with Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*. Indeed, their definition of friendship between sincere brothers opened the chapter: "Everyone finds his completion in his friend"; Miskawayh, *Tabḍīb al-aḥlāq*, p. 135; ET: Id., *The Refinement of Character*, p. 123 (amended trans.).

⁹² Miskawayh, *Tabḍīb al-aḥlāq*, pp. 140–141; ET: Id., *The Refinement of Character*, pp. 127–128.

⁹³ Ep. 45, IV, 58 distinguishes between present companions and pure souls from the past, and illustrates it with Socrates' farewell to his companions: "As for me who kept you company, dear virtuous brothers [*al-iḥwān al-ṣuḍalā*], I am going to reach our blessed brothers [*al-iḥwān al-kirām*] who preceded us". Inspired by Pl., *Phd.* 63bc.

tion is clearly explained in the fragment. The body is the path to the realisation of love because it is the way through which the lover's soul reaches that of the beloved. In other words, the body is "the instrument of the soul in acting [*alat al-nafs fi af'āl*]" . Far from being arbitrary, this clarification lives up to the status of a principle. Indeed, the same conception of the body equally determines al-Sarāḥsī's view on paternity, as shown in a second fragment, that we also edit here.

Edition of MS Fatih 03222, ff. 48v–49r

In his article "Arabic Books and Manuscripts VI" dedicated to Kindian and Sarāḥsian fragments,⁹⁴ Rosenthal specifies and translates a passage of the *muḥtaṣar* of al-Siğistānī's *Siwān al-ḥikma* by 'Umar ibn Sahlān al-Sāwī from manuscript Fatih 03222 that is missing in other manuscripts. Strangely enough, although 'Abd al-Raḥmān Badawī claims to have based his edition of the book on this manuscript, he omitted the following paragraph. It is indeed quite corrupted and necessitates some radical changes to find out its meaning. Hence, our translation differs to some extent from Rosenthal's one.

[48ب] أحمد بن [49أ] الطيب السرخسي.
 قرابة الآباء إلى الأبناء بالآلات أي الأجسام، والآلات خارجة عن الذوات. فإذا، قرابة الآباء إلى الأبناء
 بما هو خارج عن الذوات.
 الناصح لغيره⁹⁵ > لتحقيق⁹⁵ بأن ينصح نفسه >بـ <نصح⁹⁶ أفضل من لم يظلم غيره لم يظلم نفسه، ومن عد<⁹⁷
 عليها بغير إنصاف⁹⁸ فقد ظلم نفسه. ومن ظلم نفسه فحقيق⁹⁹ بأن يظلم غيره، ومن يظلم نفسه وغيره فهو
 تام الجور، والتام الجور تام الرذيلة.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁴ F. Rosenthal, "From Arabic Books and Manuscripts VI, Istanbul Materials for al-Kindi and as-Sarāḥsī", *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 76 (1956), pp. 27–31, esp. 29 and 31.

⁹⁵ محقيق.

⁹⁶ من ينصح.

⁹⁷ ومن لم يظلم نفسه عطل.

⁹⁸ من بغير الانصاف.

⁹⁹ محقيق.

¹⁰⁰ التام الرذيلة.

Translation

Aḥmad ibn al-Ṭayyib al-Saraḥsī.

The relationship between fathers [*abāʾ*] and sons [*abnāʾ*] is through instruments,¹⁰¹ that is, bodies. And instruments are exteriors to essences. So, the relationship between fathers and sons is through what is exterior to essences.

He who advises the other is able to advise himself with even better advice. He who does not harm the other does not harm his own soul [*naḥṣahu*]. He who opposes his own soul unfairly harms it. And he who harms his own soul is able to harm the other. So, he who harms his own soul and the other is definitively unfair. And who is definitively unfair is absolutely evil.

Commentary

This note is composed of two independent quotes. We will make first a few comments concerning the second one, which is not directly relevant to our subject. It relies on a Qurʾānic topic, the harm to oneself (*ẓulm al-naḥṣ*): “And We did not wrong them, but they wronged themselves” (Q 11:101, 16:118, 29:40, 30:9). However, al-Saraḥsī does not read it under the theological question of the divine responsibility of human faults,¹⁰² but his interpretation must be understood in comparison with the Muʿtazilite ethical premise: it is obligatory for the agent to avoid any unjustified harm that he expects to befall him. Harming oneself is evil because it is a form of wrongdoing, and wrongdoing is intrinsically evil.¹⁰³ In place, the Muʿtazili theologian al-Qāḍī ʿAbd al-Ġabbār (d. 415/1025) will use the expression *al-ḍarār fi naḥṣihi*, while al-Saraḥsī uses *ẓulm al-naḥṣ* in a particular way, understanding *naḥṣ* not as the self by contrast with the others, but as the soul in distinction to the body, which is only an inessential instrument. He gives such a Qurʾānic formulation to an idea that is initially attributed to Aristotle by Ḥunayn ibn Ishāq: “The ignorant is the enemy of

¹⁰¹ Rosenthal, “From Arabic Books and Manuscripts VI”, p. 29: “Is through organs”.

¹⁰² Hence, the Qurʾānic reminiscence may better be the following: “Whoever transgresses God’s limits has truly wronged his own soul” (Q 65:1).

¹⁰³ See Al-Qāḍī ʿAbd al-Ġabbār, *Sharḥ al-fuṣūl al-ḥamsa*, ed. by ʿA.K. ʿUṭmān, Cairo, Maktabat Wahba, 1965, p. 67, commented by A. Shihadeh, “The Existence of God”, in *The Cambridge Companion to Classical Islamic Theology*, ed. by T. Winter, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2008, p. 199.

himself, so how could he be another's friend?"¹⁰⁴ Al-Saraḥsī's thinking epitomises this bond between self-respect and respect for others. The bond annihilates the distance between the self and the other and paves the way for a conception of the effective unity of the human soul. This conception will later be attributed to Hermes Trismegistus whom the *Rasā'il Iḥwān al-ṣafā'* claimed to be a prophet:

Perpetual unbreakable fraternity is twofold: on the one side, man's love for his own soul regarding its return, the purification he exercises on it by true knowledge and good deeds; on the other side, his affection for his brother in God's faith, because this man accompanies his brother physically here below, and spiritually in the hereafter.¹⁰⁵

This saying of Hermes was familiar to scholars of the 4th/10th century, and perhaps earlier than that.¹⁰⁶

We shall now return to the first part of this excerpt, which deals with paternity. The sentence shares close similarities with the fragment on the loving embrace and the doctrine of the body in the *Rasā'il Iḥwān al-ṣafā'* and represents the third testimony of al-Saraḥsī's instrumental doctrine of the body.¹⁰⁷ This fact is quite remarkable, knowing the scarcity of available texts written by al-Kindī's pupil. The origin of such instrumental conception may be traced back to Plato's *Timaeus* and is plainly expressed by Galen as follows:

[All the organs (*al-a'dā'*)] find their achievement in the soul's need. That is why the body is an instrument [*āla*] for the soul. Therefore, the organs of the bodies differ; due to the differences between the souls contained [in the bodies] themselves.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁴ Ḥunayn ibn Ishāq, *Adāb al-falāsifa*, p. 82.

¹⁰⁵ Al-Šahrastānī, *Kitāb al-milāl wa-l-niḥāl*, vol. II, p. 356.

¹⁰⁶ In Al-Šahrastānī, *Le livre des religions et des sectes*, trans. by D. Gimaret, J. Jolivet and G. Monnot, vol. II, Leuven, Peeters, 1986, p. 156, note 296, Daniel Gimaret and Jean Jolivet note that such a sentence is already found in al-Siğistānī's *Muntaḥab ṣiḥwān al-ḥikma* and Miskawayh's *al-ḥikma al-ḥālida*.

¹⁰⁷ The other instances are the main fragment on the loving embrace and his controversy with Isrā'īl al-Kaskarī. See de Vaulx d'Arcy, "Al-Saraḥsī versus al-Kaskarī".

¹⁰⁸ Ḡālīnūs, *K. manāfi' al-a'dā'*, Arabic translation by Ḥunayn ibn Ishāq, in Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, MS Arab 2853, f. 1v.

The instrumental conception as presented in this text is highlighted by the necessity to interpret the Greek word ὄργανον which means as well a tool (*ālā*) or an organ (*ʿaḍw*). This conception had great importance at the end of the 3rd/9th century. For instance, Abū Bakr al-Rāzī also claims it,¹⁰⁹ and develops its ontological foundations (the separated nature of the soul).

The same conception surfaces at different intervals in the *Rasāʾil Ihwān al-ṣafāʾ*:

The soul is a rational substance that uses the brain, the heart, and the other senses and organs, which are instruments [*al-ālāt*] and tools [*al-adawāt*] for it and through which it manifests some of its actions [*yazhar bihā baʿḍa afʿālihā*] [Ep. 46, IV, 85-86].

[Know that] the cause of the difference between the actions of [the soul] lies on the difference of instruments and tools regarding their qualities and defaults, for each organ of the body is an instrument and a tool for a certain power of the soul [Ep. 42, III, 405].

Know brother that souls are like craftsmen, bodies like workshops, and organs like instruments, as we have shown in the epistle on the structure of the body¹¹⁰ [Ep. 29, III, 46].

Know brother that Indian wise men gave this example just to represent the soul as a cripple, because it does not act unless through the mediation of the instruments of the body [Ep. 31, III, 159].

Above all, there is an explicit instance in the epistle on love itself:

It belongs to the soul to depend on the complexion [*mizāğ*] of the body in the manifestation of its deeds and habits, because the complexion of the body, its organs and articulations are for the soul like the instruments and the tools for the wise craftsman, it acts and appears through them [Ep. 37, III, 275].

¹⁰⁹ Abū Bakr al-Rāzī, “Al-ṭibb al-rūḥānī”, in Id., *Rasāʾil falsafīyya*, ed. by P. Kraus, Beirut, Dār al-al-ʾafāq al-ḡadida, 1979, pp. 28–29.

¹¹⁰ More precisely, Ep. 23, II, 384.

Applied to eroticism, the analogy confirms that love is a spiritual matter: the body is just the tool through which the living soul perpetuates itself. Such an instrumental view is inherited from Galen, but will find with the Brethren in Purity its own development that differs from the Galenic source. Let us quote again the Arabic version of Galen's *Usefulness of parts*: "Among all the animals, the body is adapted to its soul. In the case of the horse, which is characterised by his ardour and impetuosity, he received a body possessing strong hooves".¹¹¹

The instruments suit the soul's powers. Other examples follow:

As the soul of the lion possesses strong boldness and long endurance, courage and wrath, his paws have been provided with claws and fangs, appropriately to those situations. [...] Concerning those who are characterised by cowardice, like hares, and rabbits, and others, they were not provided with what serves boldness but with tools that are adequate to these souls: lightness and strong legs as tools for fleeing, taking shelter, and running away.¹¹²

According to Galen, each soul receives an appropriate body, but *Rasā'il Iḥwān al-ṣafā*'s interpretation of Galen is quite different. If one reads the monotheist version of the Promethean myth in Epistle 22, he can see that the distribution of the powers of the soul and instruments of the body is explained thus:

"The Creator understood", the cricket replied, "that a powerful frame and a mighty body are fit only for toil, brute labour, and bearing heavy loads. Had He linked great souls with such bodies they would not so readily be led to drudgery and menial labour. They'd be fractious and unruly and would refuse to bear a rider. But praise be to God for the bounties of His creation. Small bodies and great souls full of learning befit the artistry of the bees, silkworms, pearl oysters, and their ilk" [Ep. 22, II, 363–364].¹¹³

God does not dispense organs to particular souls but rather arranges the powers of the soul with the instruments of the body to form harmonious beings. Whereas souls in their specific forms were, in

¹¹¹ Gālīnūs, *K. manāfi' al-a'ḍā'*, f. 1v.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, ff. 1v–2r.

¹¹³ *The Case of the Animals Versus Man*, p. 298.

Galen, eternal, for the *Rasā'il Iḥwān al-ṣafā'* the universal soul passes through the different reigns aiming for its separation from the body and changing its form at every step of its ascension. So, in the epistles, not only the organs are the instruments of the particular soul, but also the bodies are the uterus of the universal soul.

Concerning the question of paternity in this second fragment, such an undermining of kinship is the counterpart of the overestimation of spiritual relationships, in the same fashion as in the quotation of Ep. 45. Indeed, in this epistle, whereas the friendship of sincere brothers involves the unity of their souls and is “not exterior to their essence”, kinship is only a relationship between bodies, then it is exterior to their essence. Another text mentions al-Saraḥsī's thinking on paternity: in his controversy with the Nestorian bishop and Aristotelian logician Isrā'īl al-Kaskarī (d. 258/872), he is accused of overestimating the spiritual fatherhood of teachers over their students.¹¹⁴

3.6. *Al-Imtizāḡ, Necessary Condition of the Loving Union*

Now, if we come back to the main fragment of al-Saraḥsī, a last concept remains unexplained. Indeed, it is said that the conversion from carnal love to spiritual love occurs when mixing (*imtizāḡ*) ceases. Therefore, this mixing is the proper result of erotic union, and its end encourages the soul to find another path towards union. But how is such a melding possible when human bodies are barely capable of contiguity?

The term *al-imtizāḡ* has a unique occurrence in the fragment, and no further explanation is given to clarify its meaning: what was mixing? Theories on mixing were violently debated among philosophers at al-Saraḥsī's time,¹¹⁵ so what kind of mixing is described here? The row was over the consequences of mixing for the nature of the ingredients involved: do they stay the same or are transformed by the mixing? The terms of such a debate were mainly inherited from Galen and his theory of *κρᾶσις*, or *μῖξις*, distinguish in Arabic two types of mixture:

¹¹⁴ See our analysis in de Vaulx d'Arcy, “Al-Saraḥsī versus al-Kaskarī”, pp. 292–300.

¹¹⁵ And apparently opposed the Banū Mūsā to al-Kindī's school, following Pauline Koetschet's interpretation of Abū Bakr al-Rāzī's testimony. See Abū Bakr al-Rāzī, *Doutes sur Galien*, ed. and trans. by P. Koetschet, Berlin, De Gruyter, 2019, section XVI, § 8, p. 146, and also P. Koetschet, “Foreword”, *ibid.*, pp. i–cxxi, here xcvi–xcviii.

al-mumāsa and *al-imtizāḡ*. *Al-mumāsa* refers to a juxtaposition of elements producing a reversible mixing at the level of the qualities, like the softness of mud (*tīn*) which is the sensation produced by a combination of the earth's (*turba*) drought and the water's humidity. Regarding *al-imtizāḡ*, it refers to a real blending, either because both mixing elements go through an alteration in the Aristotelian sense (ἡ ἀλλοίωσις), either because the mixing is the blend of each part of the two substances with one another, which makes them inseparable (the Stoic μίξις).¹¹⁶

Because al-Saraḥsī asserts that *al-imtizāḡ* leads to *al-ittiḥād*, he may really intend the plain meaning of the concept and not only a sort of *mumāsa*; an application of such a doctrine of *al-imtizāḡ* to the question of the nature of love was indeed available in the Greek medical literature in Arabic at that time. In his section on *al-ʿiṣq*, al-Masʿūdī quotes a saying that he attributes to Hippocrates:

Love [*al-hawā*] is the blending [*imtizāḡ*] of the two souls in the same way water mixes with water, which makes difficult, if not impossible, the purification of one from the other by whatever means. Knowing that the soul is even more subtle and of a gentler run than water, the sequence of the days does not dim [love] nor time can wear it out. It resists any obstacle; its run is unpredictable, and its object remains hidden. Reason stays confused about the explanation of its power and can only say that its movement and powerfulness come from the heart before spreading in all the organs.¹¹⁷

We did not succeed in tracking the quotation back, but it was obviously important for al-Saraḥsī too. The beginning of the quotation summarises the theory of the μίξις applied to love, then the text goes on, describing the propagation of love in the organism. Knowing Galen's conception of *pneuma* as a subtle substance able to interact with matter, we may understand the spreading of love in the organs in the same way the *pneuma* does. But because of the scarcity of the texts by

¹¹⁶ Koetschet, "Foreword", pp. xcii–xcviii. On the Aristotelian origin of the question of mixture, and on the debate on the Stoic view, see Jocelyn Groisard introduction to Alexandre d'Aphrodise, *Sur la mixtion et la croissance*, ed. by J. Groisard, Paris, Les Belles Lettres, 2013, pp. xix–civ.

¹¹⁷ Al-Masʿūdī, *Murūḡ al-dahab*, vol. IV, p. 241.

Galen on love, we do not have any proof that that is the case, nor that it corresponds to al-Sarāḥsī's view.

Once more, do the *Rasā'il Iḥwān al-ṣafā'* give any additional information about such a singular conception of love? The term *imtizāğ* is indeed found in there where *imtizāğ al-arkān* or *imtizāğ al-ṭabā'ī*, *ba'dihā wa-ba'd* mainly designate the mixture of the four elements that all creatures are made of. In those cases it is not a real mixture, for decomposition will occur with the destruction of the body. But *al-imtizāğ* is also used concerning the composition of certain sounds to produce music (Ep. 31, III, 96), or to the gathering of particular souls to form the universal soul on the Day of Resurrection: "We said that the union [of the souls in the universal soul] is the blending of the spiritual substances, similar to the mixing of the sound of the low string with the sound of the sharp string" (Ep. 41, III, 398). In both cases, the mixed elements can no longer be pulled apart.

We have already seen with the quotation of Ep. 27, III, 3 that the *Rasā'il Iḥwān al-ṣafā'* also apply the theory of *al-imtizāğ* to love, finding a metaphor closest to the subtlety of the souls than water, namely the melding of light with light. And naturally, Ep. 37 develops such an application. The term *imtizāğ* has one instance in Ep. 37, and we find many instances of *al-mizāğ* used with the same meaning in the very context of the description of a loving embrace (Ep. 37, III, 274–275). Hence, the comparison of the fragment with the epistle becomes crucial and the text on *al-imtizāğ* applied to love in Ep. 37 will be entirely translated.

It starts by explaining the subtle nature of the spirit:

Then know that the spirit of life [*rūḥ al-ḥayāt*]¹¹⁸ is a humid vapour that splits into moistness and blood and develops in the whole body. The life of the body and the organism is generated from it. Its material originates from the inhalation [*istinšāq*] of the air during normal breathing which ventilates the innate warmth of the heart.

The *rūḥ al-ḥayāt* clearly refers to the *pneuma* in Galenic medicine, which is inhaled from the outside air and then rushes through the

¹¹⁸ We may precise here that MS Atif Effendi 1681, f. 352v, as well as MS BnF 2303, f. 337v, omit *al-ḥayāt*. However, the meaning of the expression *rūḥ al-ḥayāt* has already been established in *Rasā'il Iḥwān al-ṣafā'* (see Ep. 22, II, 313 and Ep. 25, II, 423), thus the expression may be genuine.

arteries till it reaches the various centres – the brain, the heart, and the liver – and there causes thoughts and organic movements.¹¹⁹ *Rūḥ al-ḥayā* is another way to name the vital, or animal, *pneuma*, usually named *al-rūḥ al-ḥayawānī*.¹²⁰ So, the subsequent part of the text will analyse what happens when the inhaled air already comes from a soul. Following the same succession as al-Saraḥsī's fragment, it starts at the level of the mouth:

When the lover and the beloved happen to embrace [*ta'ānaqa*] each other [*ḡami^{can}*], kiss, suck one another's saliva and swallow it, this very moistness arrives in each other's stomach where it blends [*imtazaḡat*] with the moistness that is there. Then, it reaches the liver where it melts [*ihṭalaṭat*] with the parts of the blood, before spreading through the blood vessels up to all other parts of the body, where it melts with all the parts of the organism, becoming flesh, blood, fat, vessels, nerves and the like.

The description refers here to Galen's vital *pneuma*. Then, the text describes another entrance of the body, the nostrils, and what corresponds in Galen to the flow of psychic and animal *pneumas* (respectively generated in the brain and the heart):

Likewise, when each one breathes into the face of his companion, some of his spiritual blow is expelled with the breathing and melts with the air. Therefore, if they inhale this air, some parts of the blow enter the nostrils with the inhaled air. Some arrive at the front of the brain where they pass like the light through a crystal, then each one enjoys this inspiration [*al-tanassum*].¹²¹ Other parts of this inhaled air arrive in the lungs through the windpipe, and from there reach the heart, and [propagate

¹¹⁹ See Galen, *On the Usefulness of the Parts of the Body*, trans. by M.T. May, Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 1968, p. 347 (book VII, § 8): "The outer air drawn in by the rough arteries receives its first elaboration in the flesh of the lungs, its second thereafter in the heart and arteries, particularly those of the retiform plexus, and a final one in the ventricles of the encephalon, where its transformation into psychic *pneuma* is complete".

¹²⁰ See P. Pormann and E. Savage-Smith, *Medical Islamic Medicine*, Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, 2007, p. 45.

¹²¹ MS Atif Effendi 1681, f. 353r, and MS BnF 2303, f. 338r contain *al-nasīm*. But the presence of *al-tanassum* in al-Saraḥsī's text confirms the use of such a form and validates the Beirut edition. Such a term was already used by al-Ġaḥīz, *The Epistle on Singing-Girls*, p. 31, § 47.

from the heart]¹²² in all the parts of the body thanks to the blood vessels' systoles. Then, they melt with the blood, the flesh, and the other components of the body. What was dissolved from this body settles down in that one, and what was dissolved from that one [settles down] in this one.

This passage of the text details what the Saraḥsian fragment meant by a breath "full of his dispositions and of the powers of his soul". Then, the text explains how *al-imtizāğ* produces new *mizāğ*:

Then, from these different complexions [*durūb min al-mizāğāt*]¹²³ together with these complexions [*al-amziğā*] happen different humours [*al-ablāt*], and from these humours different morals [*al-ablāq*]. This is all dependent on the complexions of their body.

As long as the loving embrace lasts, the contiguity of the bodies is fortified by an exchange of fluids coming from each soul and penetrating deep inside the organism of the companion, making it impossible to separate these particles from one's own, and determinant for one's behaviour as one's own complexion does. Hence, it is right to say that love produces ultimate meeting, union of souls, and blending of complexions. But all loving embrace has an end, and then the complexions' blend dims and fades out. The only way for the union to perpetuate is to pass to the level of the agreement of wills.

On a theoretical level, if *al-imtizāğ* leads to the union of the lovers, does it mean that al-Saraḥsī adopts the Stoic theory of the melding matter, then refuses categorically the atomistic view on the contiguity of the atoms? Did he adopt the anti-atomist view of his master? The problem is that it would be contradictory with Abū l-Qāsim al-Balḥī's testimony on al-Saraḥsī.¹²⁴ If al-Saraḥsī really understands the proper

¹²² "Wa-min al-qalb yadibb", following MS BnF 2303, f. 338r. MS Atif Effendi 1681, f. 353r, contains a trace of this expression with *dabba*.

¹²³ According to MS Atif Effendi 1681, f. 353r, and MS BnF 2303, f. 338r. Remove "*wa-*" *min al-mizāğāt* from the Beirut edition, that is erroneous.

¹²⁴ Abū l-Qāsim al-Balḥī, *Kitāb al-maqālāt*, ed. by Ḥ. Ḥānṣū, R. Kurdī and 'A.Ḥ. Kurdī, Istanbul-Amman, Kuramer/Dār al-fath, 2019, p. 76. Al-Balḥī mentions al-Saraḥsī's book on geometry where he discusses the use of geometrical arguments by both the atomistic doctrine and the supporters of continuity. Al-Saraḥsī did not take sides with either one but, if we paraphrase the *Rasā'il Iḥwān al-ṣafā'*, he gave to each their own due and attributed a proper domain of truth to both views.

truth of both atomism and the doctrine of continuity in geometry, he should also attribute their own domain of truth to both theories of contiguity and blending of the matter. If al-Saraḥsī is also the author of the *Rasā'il Iḥwan al-ṣafā'*, such a complementarity should be found there. Do the epistles apply their complementarianism to this topic? Indeed they do: based on the debates on matter, we can deepen our interpretation of Ep. 37, III, 273: "Union is a property of realities of the soul and spiritual states, whereas union is impossible for bodies, only vicinity, mixture, or contact [*al-muḡāwara wa-l-mumāzaḡa wa-l-mumāsa*], nothing more". On a material level, mixture (*mumāzaḡa*) is nothing more than juxtaposition (*mumāsa*), thus the distinction between material realities and spiritual realities overlaps with the distinction between atomistic contiguity and Aristotelian continuity, since material realities are barely capable of contiguity while spiritual ones achieve mixing. We can notice here that this doctrinal duality is perfectly consistent with another duality found in Ep. 2 concerning the duality of geometries, with the atomist foundation of sensitive geometry on the one hand and the foundation of intellective geometry in the continuity doctrine on the other.¹²⁵

4. Historical Remarks

The comparative study of al-Saraḥsī's fragment with the *Rasā'il Iḥwan al-ṣafā'*, specifically Ep. 37, shed light on some of the fragment's obscure statements and results in a consistent philosophical view on love. Now, how can we understand such a unity of meaning between both texts? What does their philosophical proximity imply on a historical level? Why interpreting al-Saraḥsī's fragment in light of Ep. 37 is not the same as projecting an alien meaning to the text?

First, both texts belong to a well-defined genre, the Abbasid erotology. Authors of such literature were divided by Pernilla Myrne into two factions: "Those who regard sex as a necessary component of a romantic relationship and those who maintain that sex and love are incompatible".¹²⁶ Whereas al-Ġāḥiẓ belongs to the second cate-

¹²⁵ Ep. 2, I, 79–81. To understand this duality in light of the atomistic and continuistic views on matter, see Ep. 42, III, 469–470.

¹²⁶ P. Myrne, "Pleasing the Beloved: Sex and True Love in a Medieval Arabic Erotic Compendium", in *The Beloved in Middle Eastern Literatures: The Culture of Love and*

gory,¹²⁷ both texts obviously belong to the first faction, the one that maintains that sensuality is a condition of spirituality and that the goal of carnal love is “spiritual union”,¹²⁸ a faction to which also belongs Ibn Naṣr al-Kātib (4th/10th century), the author of the *Encyclopedia of Pleasure* (*Ġawāmi‘ al-ladda*), a compendium gathering earlier material, “a deliberate attempt to synthesize knowledge from different disciplines”.¹²⁹ Its goal is both entertainment and the education of a cultivated elite,¹³⁰ showing how “love for the beloved’s own sake is strengthened by sexual union”.¹³¹ However, such a practical thesis is not grounded on precise philosophical principles. This is obvious in his use of the concept of mixing: “The mixing of his and her seminal fluid is the most efficient in assuring love [*mawadda*] and mutual affection”.¹³² In al-Kātib’s view, mixing is only the melting of the material fluids, not the union with the beloved’s soul, while he knew al-Saraḥsī’s work on love. The *Encyclopedia of Pleasure* is more a compilation of views and debates on carnal love than a treatise asserting a philosophical thesis; like the abovementioned al-Mas‘ūdī’s *Murūğ al-dahab* it belongs to this secondary literature, whereas al-Saraḥsī’s fragment and the epistle on love belong to the primary literature they refer to.

A second and more restrictive hypothesis places both texts in the same philosophical milieu, namely the Kindian school, with al-Saraḥsī as al-Kindī’s only known pupil.¹³³ As seen before, the Arabic Aristophanes myth is quite proper to the Kindian school since the only quotations of the *Symposium* can be found in Ḥunayn ibn Ishāq and Ibn Ishāq al-Kindī, with slight differences in their interpretation of

Languishing, ed. by A. Korangy, H. Al-Samman and M.C. Beard, New York, I.B. Tauris, 2018, pp. 215–236, here 218.

¹²⁷ Cheikh-Moussa, “La négation d’Éros”, pp. 73–74.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 219.

¹²⁹ P. Myrne, “Organizing, Presenting, and Reading Sexual Knowledge: The Abbasid Context of *Jawāmi‘ al-ladhdha*”, *Journal of Abbasid Studies* 7 (2020), pp. 182–206, here 200.

¹³⁰ Myrne, “Pleasing the Beloved”, p. 221, Ead., “Organizing, Presenting, and Reading Sexual Knowledge”, p. 185.

¹³¹ Myrne, “Pleasing the Beloved”, p. 227.

¹³² *Ibid.*, p. 224.

¹³³ Ibn al-Nadīm, *Kitāb al-Fihrist*, ed. by R. Tağaddud, Tehran, Maṭba‘at-e dānešgāh-e Tehrān, 1971, p. 320, names a list of disciples, but none of them left any work for posterity and Abū Zayd al-Balḥī (born in 235/849) related to al-Kindī’s school may have rather been al-Saraḥsī’s student.

the myth. We could conclude that both al-Saraḥsī's fragment and Ep. 37 followed the same interpretation, closer to Ḥunayn's than to al-Kindī's.

This proximity allows us to make an even more restrictive assumption and suggest that the author of both texts is the same, meaning that al-Saraḥsī was involved in the writing of the *Rasā'il Iḥwān al-ṣafā'*, an historical assumption we already suggested.¹³⁴ It opened the possibility of a rationalist reading of the *Rasā'il Iḥwān al-ṣafā'* and an interpretation of their philosophical system grounded in mathematics.¹³⁵ Such a hypothesis also provided clues to break the code of Aḥmad ibn al-Ṭayyib's controversy with Isrā'īl al-Kaskarī by enlightening the debate's background,¹³⁶ and also led to the identification of the author of the Arabic version of Nichomachus of Gerasa's *Introduction to Arithmetic* with al-Saraḥsī.¹³⁷ Comparing al-Saraḥsī's fragment on love with the Brethren in Purity's epistle on love can be considered, in Popperian terms, as another test refuting or strengthening the hypothesis.

Of course it is impossible to reach a conclusion based on the state of the art, due to the scarcity of available testimonies on al-Saraḥsī's thinking, but the hypothesis deserves to be tested on any of his philosophical statements. Other tests are possible, like the theory of arithmetic developed in Ep. 1 and the mention of al-Saraḥsī's view on arithmetic in Abū l-Qāsim al-Balḥī's *Kitāb al-Maqālāt*.

5. Conclusions

Sexual intercourse may just be a cunning of nature to perpetuate the species, as suggested in Ep. 37, but carnal love contains something else. So, why does a lover embrace his beloved so passionately and kiss them so avidly? Following Plato's *Symposium*, al-Saraḥsī describes how love is an attempt to unite with the other but, from his point of view, it is not merely an attempt. Following Galen's theory of the *pneuma* he

¹³⁴ See our demonstration in the foreword to our translation of six epistles in de Vaulx d'Arcy, "Foreword", pp. 22–48.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 49–60.

¹³⁶ De Vaulx d'Arcy, "Al-Saraḥsī versus al-Kaskarī".

¹³⁷ G. de Vaulx d'Arcy, "Aḥmad b. al-Ṭayyib as-Saraḥsī, réviseur de l'*Introduction arithmétique* de Nicomaque de Géraise, et rédacteur des *Rasā'il Iḥwān al-ṣafā'*", *Arabic Sciences and Philosophy* 29/2 (2019), pp. 261–283.

demonstrates that, although bodies remain in contiguity during the embrace, one breathes the other's breath which holds particles from his spirit. Hence, during their kiss, they inhale those subtle particles which will blend with their own complexion, thus union occurs. Such an intense although short experience makes people long for a sustainable union with the other soul and will progress to the agreement of wills in sharing life and belongings, before becoming a pure spiritual union of intellects for eternity. Then, erotic experience is the starting point of the spiritual experience of union, and because personal salvation is dependent on the help of others, it is also the starting point of religious life.

The understanding of the text would have been far less extensive without the assertion that Aḥmad ibn al-Ṭayyib al-Sarāḥsī is the author of *Rasā'il Ihwān al-ṣafā'*. Many clues on other topics already made us suspect such a hypothesis, but with this fragment we are finally in the presence of an original text signed by al-Sarāḥsī that has another instance in Ep. 37 on love. In particular, the phenomenological method consisting in describing the loving embrace before interpreting it in a Platonic-Galenic fashion is quite specific to both texts, without other previous instance. Furthermore, the application of the theory of mixture to the lover's blow penetrating the beloved's body is worded in almost the same way, as if the same author rewrote his very interpretation in a different context.

This interpretation of the fiery kiss will have a great destiny, influencing later thinkers such Avicenna, Mullā Ṣadrā, and Ibn al-ʿArabī,¹³⁸ and percolating into the Jewish gloss of the Song of Songs' verse: "O that he would kiss me with the kisses of his mouth!"¹³⁹

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¹³⁸ J.F. Toosi and S.N. Virani, "Love and the Brethren of Purity: A Comparative Study of Human Intimacy in Islamic Philosophy", *Journal of Sufi Studies* 11/2 (2022), pp. 149–180.

¹³⁹ T. Werthmann, "'Spirit to Spirit': The Imagery of the Kiss in the Zohar and its Possible Sources", *Harvard Theological Review* 114/4 (2018), pp. 586–609.

“Wa-law ḡa‘alnāhu Qur’ānan ‘aḡamiyyan” (Q 41:44)

Nota sul Corano e la traducibilità:
studio comparativo su sette traduzioni italiane

Raoul Villano

This paper explores the issue of the Qur’ān’s translatability through a comparative study of seven Italian translations produced between the 20th and 21st centuries. After tracing the historical development of Qur’ānic translation in Italy – from medieval Latin renderings and humanist philology to modern and contemporary versions –, the study focuses on two key lexical and morphological cases: *al-rahmān al-rahīm* (Q 1:1) and the derivatives of ‘B-D in *sūrat al-kāfirīn* (Q 109:2–5). By analysing how each translator renders the semantic and phonetic interplay between root and form, the article highlights the specific challenges of rendering Arabic derivational morphology into Italian.

Keywords: Qur’ān Translation, Italian Qur’ān, Arabic Derivational Morphology

1. Premessa

Il Corano è traducibile? È possibile tradurre il testo rivelato in una lingua altra, senza tradire la complessità linguistica e la profondità semantica dell’arabo coranico? È il Corano stesso, nel noto versetto (Q 41:44) “wa-law ḡa‘alnāhu Qur’ānan ‘aḡamiyyan la-qālū lawlā fuṣṣilat ‘āyātuḥu” (e se Noi ne avessimo fatto un Corano in lingua straniera, avrebber detto di certo: “Perché non son chiari precisi i suoi Segni? [...])”,¹ ma anche

¹ Qui citato nella trad. a cura di A. Bausani, *Il Corano*, Florence, Sansoni, 1955. Secondo il giurista mālikita ‘Abū Bakr ibn al-‘Arabī (m. 543/1148) basterebbe questo solo versetto a invalidare l’opinione ḥanafita secondo cui sarebbe lecito recitare durante la

altrove, del resto,² che sembra segnalare fin da subito un problema di intraducibilità o, meglio, inadeguatezza (*ʿiḡāz*, alla lettera “inabilità”) di ogni possibile umana traduzione a riprodurre il dettato divino, il flusso fonico che trasforma la luce in suono, aprendo un dibattito che, anche in ambito musulmano, non può dirsi ancora del tutto esaurito.³

Secondo il punto di vista della tradizione islamica maggioritaria, con la sola, parziale ma notevole, eccezione della scuola ḥanafita,⁴ una corretta recitazione del Corano è possibile soltanto in arabo. Ciò significa che sarebbe possibile spiegare (*tafsīr*), o eventualmente anche tradurre (*tarǧama*) i significati (*maʿānī*) del Corano, ma resta sostan-

preghiera anche la traduzione dei significati del Corano in un'altra lingua (“hādā yubṭilu qawl ʿAbī Ḥanifa fī qawlihi ʾinna tarǧamat al-Qurʾān bi-ʾibdāl al-luġat al-ʿarabiyya fihi bi-l-fārisiyya ḡāʾiz”, Muḥammad ibn ʿAbd Allāh Abū Bakr ibn al-ʿArabī, *Aḥkām al-Qurʾān*, a cura di M.ʿA.Q. Aṭā, vol. IV, Beirut, Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, 2003³, p. 88). Cf. A.L. Tibawi, “Is the Qurʾān Translatable?: Early Muslim Opinion”, *The Muslim World* 52/1 (1962), pp. 4–16, qui 8–9. Quando non indicato diversamente, le traduzioni italiane dei testi in arabo o in latino sono dell'autore.

² Molteplici i riferimenti all'arabicità del testo. Si veda, a titolo di esempio, Q 12:2; 13:37; 14:4; 16:103; 19:97; 20:113; 26:192–195; 39:27–28; 41:3; 42:6; 43:3; 44:58; 46:12. Rilevanti, in questo senso, sono anche i versetti relativi all'inimitabilità (*ʿiḡāz*) del Corano. Si veda, sempre a titolo di esempio, Q 2:23–24; 10:38; 11:13; 17:88; 52:33–34. Cf. R.C. Martin, “Inimitability”, in *Encyclopaedia of the Qurʾān*, vol. II, a cura di J.D. McAuliffe, Leiden, Brill, 2002, pp. 526–536.

³ Su tutta la questione si veda, a titolo di esempio, M.M. Moreno, “È lecito ai musulmani tradurre il Corano?”, *Oriente Moderno* 5/10 (1925), pp. 532–543; Tibawi, “Is the Qurʾān Translatable?”; A.H. Abdul-Raof, *Qurʾān Translation: Discourse, Texture and Exegesis*, Abingdon-New York, Routledge, 2001; H. Bobzin, “Translations of the Qurʾān [2005]”, in *Encyclopaedia of the Qurʾān*, vol. V, a cura di J.D. McAuliffe, Leiden, Brill, 2006, pp. 340–354. M.B. Wilson, *Translating the Qurʾān in an Age of Nationalism: Print Culture and Modern Islam in Turkey*, Oxford, Oxford University Press/The Institute of Ismaili Studies, 2014; K.Y. Blankinship, *The Inimitable Qurʾān: Some Problems in English Translations of the Qurʾān with Reference to Rhetorical Features*, Leiden, Brill, 2019; E.A.Y. Aly, *Qurʾān Translation as a Modern Phenomenon*, Leiden, Brill, 2023; Y.M. Yakubovych, *The Kingdom and the Qurʾān: Translating the Holy Book of Islam in Saudi Arabia*, Cambridge, Open Book Publishers, 2024; A. Othman, “Narratives of (un)Translatability: The Recurrent Case of the Qurʾān”, *Translation Studies* 17/2 (2024), pp. 314–332; J. Pink *et al.*, “Translations of the Qurʾān [2025]”, in *Encyclopaedia of the Qurʾān Online*, Leiden, Brill, 2025, https://doi.org/10.1163/1875-3922_EQO_EQCOM_063375 (26 ottobre 2025).

⁴ Secondo il punto di vista della scuola ḥanafita la preghiera sarebbe lecita, per coloro che non sono in grado di recitare il Corano in arabo, anche attraverso la riproduzione della traduzione dei suoi significati in altre lingue, poiché l'obbligo dovrebbe sempre essere commisurato alle effettive capacità del credente (*al-taklīf bi-ḥasab al-uusʿ*), cf. Tibawi, “Is the Qurʾān Translatable?”, pp. 8–9.

zialmente impossibile riprodurre il testo rivelato nella sua totalità in una lingua che non sia l'arabo, senza tradirlo almeno in parte sul piano semantico, estetico e formale, anche e soprattutto a fini liturgici.⁵

Il contributo affronta la questione della traducibilità del Corano in altre lingue, segnatamente in riferimento all'italiano, e si articola in due sezioni. La prima, di carattere introduttivo, va intesa come uno strumento per comprendere le dinamiche che hanno accompagnato, anche in ambito accademico, la produzione di studi e traduzioni del Corano fino a tempi recenti, formatasi sovente attraverso opere non prive di filtri ideologici anche rilevanti. La seconda sezione propone invece uno studio comparativo di sette traduzioni italiane del Corano prodotte fra il XX e il XXI secolo. Le versioni analizzate vengono messe alla prova rispetto alla loro capacità di rendere sul piano formale, stilistico e semantico una caratteristica peculiare della lingua araba, pressoché assente o scarsamente produttiva in italiano: il legame morfologico e semantico tra radice e lemma.

2. Lo studio e la traduzione del Corano in Italia

2.1. Il Corano latino e il suo lungo lascito

Le prime istanze relative allo studio e alla traduzione del Corano in Italia vanno inserite nel quadro del crescente interesse per il testo sacro dell'islam che ha fatto seguito alla prima traduzione latina del Corano⁶

⁵ Cf. *ibid.*, pp. 4–9. Non rientra fra gli scopi di questo contributo offrire una rassegna, neppure sommaria, del dibattito musulmano in merito alla traducibilità del testo rivelato, ma la situazione è evidentemente molto più sfumata e articolata, segnatamente in epoca moderna e contemporanea. Per una panoramica più ampia su tutta la questione si veda Wilson, *Translating the Qur'an*. Cf. Blankinship, *The Inimitable Qur'an*.

⁶ Il presente articolo non ha tra i propri obiettivi quello di riassumere gli enormi progressi della ricerca, da una parte nell'inquadrare il Corano come prodotto della religiosità tardoantica, liberandolo così da un preteso isolamento etico e culturale, dall'altra nel percepire e delineare in maniera sempre più chiara e articolata una vera e propria dimensione europea del testo coranico che, se fino a un certo punto si caratterizza principalmente per un'attitudine polemica o apologetica, in una prospettiva più ampia finisce per inglobare anche la produzione di studi e traduzioni del Corano da parte delle diverse comunità musulmane europee. La bibliografia in proposito è sterminata. Si veda, giusto a titolo di esempio, A. Neuwirth, *Der Koran als Text der Spätantike: Ein europäischer Zugang*, Berlin, Verlag der Weltreligionen, 2010; Ead., "Qur'anic Studies and Historical-Critical Philology: The Qur'an's Staging, Penetrating and Eclipsing of

commissionata da Pietro il Venerabile, abate di Cluny, e realizzata in Spagna da Roberto di Ketton nel 1142/1143.⁷

Biblical Tradition”, *Philological Encounters* 1 (2016), pp. 31–60; G.G. Stroumsa, *The Making of the Abrahamic Religions in Late Antiquity*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2015; J. Loop, “Introduction: The Qur’an in Europe – the European Qur’an”, *Journal of Qur’anic Studies* 20 (2018), pp. 1–20; *The Latin Qur’an, 1143–1500: Translation, Transition, Interpretation*, a cura di C. Ferrero Hernández e J. Tolan, Berlin, De Gruyter, 2021; *The Iberian Qur’an: From the Middle Ages to Modern Times*, a cura di M. García-Arenal e G. Wieggers, Berlin, De Gruyter, 2022; *The Qur’an in Rome: Manuscripts, Translations, and the Study of Islam in Early Modern Catholicism*, a cura di F. Stella e R. Tottoli, Berlin, De Gruyter, 2023; *European Muslims and the Qur’an: Practices of Translation, Interpretation, and Commodification*, a cura di G. Sibgatullina e G. Wieggers, Berlin, De Gruyter, 2024; D. Scotto, *Juan de Segovia and the Qur’an: Converting the Muslims in Fifteenth-Century Europe*, Berlin, De Gruyter, 2024.

⁷ Sulla traduzione di Roberto di Ketton e, più in generale, su tutta l’impresa cluniacense e la successiva traduzione di Marco da Toledo, nonché sul ruolo fondativo di questo gruppo di testi rispetto al Corano latino ed europeo, si veda, a titolo di esempio, M.-T. d’Alverny, “Deux traductions latines du Coran au Moyen Âge”, *Archives d’histoire doctrinale et littéraire du Moyen Âge* 16 (1947–1948), pp. 69–131; T.E. Burman, “Tafsir and Translation: Traditional Arabic Qur’ān Exegesis and the Latin Qur’āns of Robert of Ketton and Mark of Toledo”, *Speculum* 73/3 (1998), pp. 703–732; Id., “Polemic, Philology and Ambivalence: Reading the Qur’ān in Latin Christendom”, *Journal of Islamic Studies* 15 (2004), pp. 181–209; Id., *Reading the Qur’ān in Latin Christendom, 1140–1560*, Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007; N. Petrus i Pons, “La seconda traduzione latina del Corano di Marco da Toledo: Alcuni appunti linguistici”, in *Il Mediterraneo del ’300: Raimondo Lullo e Federico III d’Aragona, re di Sicilia. Omaggio a Fernando Domínguez Reboiras*. Atti del Seminario internazionale (Palermo-Castelvetro-Selinunte, 17–19 novembre 2005), a cura di A. Musco e M.M.M. Romano, Turnhout, Brepols, 2008, pp. 295–304; J. Yolles, “Scientific Language in the Latin Qur’āns of Robert of Ketton and Mark of Toledo”, *Journal of Qur’anic Studies* 22/3 (2020), pp. 121–148; A.J. Lappin, “On the Genesis and Formation of the *Corpus Cluniacense*”, in *The Latin Qur’an, 1143–1500*, pp. 27–56; R.F. Glei, “Dixit apostoli: The Word-by-Word Principle in Latin Translations of the Qur’an”, *ibid.*, pp. 57–70; O. Hanne, “Translating from Arabic to Latin in the Twelfth Century: The Examples of Two Englishmen, Robert of Ketton and Adelard of Bath”, *ibid.*, pp. 71–94; Ó. de la Cruz Palma, “Robert of Ketton, *traditore*: Manifestations of Anti-Islamic Radicalism in the First Latin Translation of the Qur’an”, *ibid.*, pp. 111–122; J.L.A. Rivera Luque, “Translatological Remarks on Rendering the Qur’an into Latin (Robert of Ketton, Mark of Toledo and Egidio da Viterbo): Purposes, Theory and Technique”, *ibid.*, pp. 123–138; N. Petrus Pons, “The Glosses on Mark of Toledo’s *Alchoranus Latinus*”, *ibid.*, pp. 283–298; J. Tolan, “Conclusion: Robert of Ketton’s Translation and Its Legacy”, *ibid.*, pp. 475–480; C. Burnett, “Robert of Ketton and Mark of Toledo and the Rise and Development of the Literal Translation of the Qur’an”, in *The Iberian Qur’an: From the Middle Ages to Modern Times*, a cura di M. García-Arenal e G. Wieggers, Berlin, De Gruyter, 2022, pp. 27–48.

La traduzione di Roberto di Ketton, significativamente intitolata *Lex Mahumet pseudoprophete*, avrà un impatto enorme sulla successiva storia degli studi coranici e ne resterà per secoli il testo di riferimento.⁸ Il carattere della traduzione è apertamente polemico, a tratti mistificatorio, in linea con gli altri testi del *Corpus cluniacense* e con le intenzioni stesse del committente e del traduttore.⁹

La tradizione manoscritta conserva, nei *marginalia*, un corpus di note e commenti al testo, probabilmente redatti dal medesimo gruppo di traduttori e ricercatori radunati da Pietro il Venerabile e concepiti come uno strumento di studio, un ausilio scolastico destinato al lettore europeo che per la prima volta si confrontava con una tale alterità.¹⁰ I commenti insistono da un lato sul carattere artificiale della rivelazione coranica, dall'altro sulla mancanza di coerenza formale e semantica del testo. A margine del racconto della creazione di Q 2:30–38, una glossa mette in guardia il lettore sulla vera natura del testo tradotto, definito senza mezzi termini artificioso (*fabula*) e assurdo (*stulticissima*): “Sequitur de deo et adam et angelis et diabolus fabula stulticissima quam nescio ubi repererit” (segue un racconto privo di senso su Dio, Adamo, gli angeli e il diavolo, che non so da dove abbia attinto).¹¹

Il primo studio sul Corano realizzato nell'area culturale italiana è il *Contra legem Sarracenorum* del frate domenicano Riccoldo da Monte di Croce, scritto alla fine del XIII secolo.¹² L'opera costituisce un'esposizione sistematica e una confutazione del Corano e conoscerà un'enorme fortuna, non solo in Italia, ma in tutta l'Europa medievale e rinascimentale. La sua impronta marcatamente polemica segnerà in

⁸ See Tolan, “Conclusion”, p. 475.

⁹ Cf. Burman, “Polemic, Philology and Ambivalence”; Lappin, “On the Genesis and Formation”; de la Cruz Palma, “Robert of Ketton, *traditore*”; Rivera Luque, “Translatological Remarks”.

¹⁰ D'Alverny, “Deux traductions latines”; Burman, *Reading the Qur'ān*, pp. 61–76.

¹¹ Burman, “Polemic, Philology and Ambivalence”, pp. 189–191; Id., *Reading the Qur'ān*, pp. 65–66.

¹² Il testo latino del *Contra legem Sarracenorum* è stato pubblicato in J.-M. Mérigoux, “L'ouvrage d'un frère prêcheur florentin en Orient à la fin du XIII^e siècle: Le *Contra legem Sarracenorum* de Riccoldo da Monte di Croce”, *Memorie Domenicane* 17 (1986), pp. 1–144, qui 60–142, cf. Riccoldo da Monte di Croce, *Contra legem Sarracenorum*, a cura di E. Panella, ed. online riveduta dell'ed. a cura di J.-M. Mérigoux del manoscritto della Biblioteca nazionale centrale di Firenze, Conv. soppr. C 8.1173, ff. 185r–218r, e traduzione italiana, <http://www.e-theca.net/emiliopanella/riccoldo2/clsc000.htm> (26 ottobre 2025).

maniera indelebile anche la produzione successiva, fornendo un importante arsenale critico alle opere posteriori, non esclusivamente di ambito polemico o apologetico.¹³

Alcuni brevi estratti ci aiutano a comprendere meglio questa attitudine polemica e sprezzante e il modo in cui ha influenzato la percezione stessa del Corano non solo sul piano dottrinale e contenutistico, ma anche su quello formale della lingua, dello stile e della struttura del testo.

Nella visione di Riccoldo, è di primaria importanza che il lettore cristiano comprenda innanzitutto che il Corano non proviene da Dio, ma è una falsificazione ottenuta rimaneggiando materiali già circolanti in ambienti eretici: “Et sciendum quod omnium antiquorum hereticorum feces, quas diabolus in aliis sparsim seminaverat, simul in Machometum revomuit” (si deve sapere che le lordure di tutti gli antichi eretici, che il diavolo aveva disseminato qua e là, le rivomitò poi tutte insieme in Muḥammad).¹⁴

È interessante notare, in relazione a quanto si viene dicendo, come Riccoldo ritenga che lo stile e la forma stessa del Corano non siano consoni alla parola di Dio: “Sciendum est quod alchoranum non est

¹³ Su Riccoldo e il *Contra legem Sarracenorum* si veda, giusto a titolo di esempio, Méri-goux, “L’ouvrage d’un frère prêcheur”; J.V. Tolan, *Saracens: Islam in the Medieval European Imagination*, New York, Columbia University Press, 2002, pp. 252–254; Burman, “Polemic, Philology and Ambivalence”; Id., “How an Italian Friar Read His Arabic Qur’an”, *Dante Studies* 125 (2007), pp. 93–109; Id., *Reading the Qur’an*; Id., “Riccoldo da Monte di Croce y las traducciones latinas del árabe realizadas en España”, in *Estudios de latín medieval hispánico*, a cura di J. Martínez Gázquez, Ó. de la Cruz Palma e C. Ferrero Hernández, Florence, Sismel – Edizioni del Galluzzo, 2011, pp. 601–608; Id., “Riccoldo da Monte di Croce”, in *Christian-Muslim Relations: A Bibliographical History*, vol. IV, (1200–1350), a cura di D. Thomas e A. Mallet (con J.P. Monferrer Sala et al.), Leiden, Brill, 2012, pp. 679–691; R. George-Tvrtković, *A Christian Pilgrim in Medieval Iraq: Riccoldo da Montecroce’s Encounter with Islam*, Turnhout, Brepols, 2012; N. Petrus Pons, “Riccoldo da Monte di Croce lector de Marcos de Toledo”, *Medievalia* 19 (2016), pp. 115–132; C. Ferrero Hernández, “*Lectio et disputatio* en el prólogo del *Contra legem Sarracenorum* de Riccoldo da Monte di Croce”, *Mélanges de la Casa de Velázquez* 49 (2019), pp. 141–155; Ead., “Riccoldo the Florentine’s Reprobacion del Alcoran: A Manual for Preaching to the ‘Moors’”, in *The Latin Qur’an, 1143–1500*, pp. 395–424; D. Scotto, “Riccoldo da Monte di Croce Deliberating on God’s Judgements: Exegesis, Intercession, Islam”, in *Soteriologie in der hochmittelalterlichen Theologie*, a cura di D. Olszynski e U. Roth, Münster, Aschendorff Verlag, 2021, pp. 165–192; D. Scotto, “Riccoldo da Monte di Croce and the Origins of the Qur’an as a Deviation from Christian Salvation History”, in *The Latin Qur’an, 1143–1500*, pp. 363–394.

¹⁴ Riccoldo da Monte di Croce, *Contra legem Sarracenorum*, f. 186r.

lex Dei quia non habet stilum nec modum consonum legi Dei. Est enim metrica vel rithmica in stilo, blanditoria in verbis et fabulosa in sententiis” (bisogna sapere che il Corano non è legge di Dio, perché non ha uno stile né una forma conformi alla legge divina: ha infatti uno stile metrico o ritmico, è lusinghiero nelle parole e affabulatorio nei contenuti).¹⁵

Secondo Riccoldo, il fatto che il Corano non sia parola di Dio risulterebbe evidente anche a causa della sua divergenza rispetto alla Bibbia e alla filosofia: “Sciendum est quod, quicquid sit de stilo et modo, sed manifeste patet quod non est lex Dei ipsum Alchoranum quia non concordat in sententia cum lege Dei nec etiam cum philosophis” (bisogna sapere che, a prescindere da stile e forma, è comunque evidente che il Corano non è legge di Dio, poiché non concorda nei contenuti con la legge divina né con i filosofi).¹⁶

Riccoldo trova infine sconcertante, anticipando un elemento che sarà ricorrente in sede critica nei secoli a venire, l'evoluzione cronologica della religione nel testo coranico, ben nota alla tradizione islamica e regolata attraverso il genere esegetico *Nāsīḥ wa-mansūḥ* (Abrogante e abrogato):¹⁷ “Considerandum est quod lex Alchorani non solum disidet a lege Dei, sed etiam non convenit sibi ipsii” (bisogna osservare che il Corano non solo è in contrasto con la Bibbia, ma non è neppure coerente con se stesso).¹⁸

Quanto alla questione della traducibilità, Riccoldo, che pure aveva cominciato a tradurre il Corano in latino durante il suo soggiorno a Baghdad, dissuaso poi “dalla quantità di invenzioni, falsità ed empietà ripetute continuamente” che vi aveva trovate (“et cum inceperim eam in latinum transferre, tot inveni fabulas et falsitates et blasphemias, et eadem per omnia in locis creberrimis repetita, quod tunc attediatus dimisi”),¹⁹ in merito alla possibilità di riprodurre sul piano formale lo

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, f. 190v.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, f. 192r.

¹⁷ Sul genere esegetico *Nāsīḥ wa-mansūḥ* si veda, giusto a titolo di esempio, A. Rippin, “Al-Zuhrī, *Naskh al-Qur’ān* and the Problem of Early *Tafsīr* Texts”, *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 47/1 (1984), pp. 22–43; D.S. Powers, “The Exegetical Genre *nāsikh al-Qur’ān wa-mansūkhuhu*”, in *Approaches to the History of the Interpretation of the Qur’ān*, a cura di A. Rippin, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1988, pp. 117–138.

¹⁸ Riccoldo da Monte di Croce, *Contra legem Sarracenorum*, f. 193r.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, f. 190v. Nonostante questo embrionale tentativo di traduzione, sembra in realtà che Riccoldo si sia appoggiato soprattutto sul *Corpus cluniacense* e sulla traduzione

stile del Corano in un'altra lingua, esprimeva già un certo scetticismo: "Quod autem sit rithmica in stilo, per totem librum patet legentibus in eo. Nec tamen de hoc possum ponere convenienter exemplum, quia rithmus et versus in arabico non esset si per omnia et fideliter transferetur in latinum!" (che abbia uno stile ritmico risulta chiaro a chiunque lo legga per intero. Tuttavia, non posso riportarne agevolmente un esempio, perché il ritmo e il verso dell'arabo scomparirebbero se si traducesse il tutto fedelmente in latino).²⁰

Studi recenti hanno mostrato come Roma, tra XV e XVII secolo, sia stata il centro di un processo di radicale trasformazione dell'approccio europeo allo studio del Corano e dell'islam, in cui l'interesse religioso si intrecciava a un crescente impulso erudito, segnando un primo passaggio dalla polemica alla filologia e gettando le basi di un progetto culturale europeo volto a comprendere ma anche a confutare l'islam.²¹

Un esempio particolarmente significativo di questa nuova attitudine si ha nella traduzione latina del Corano commissionata dal cardinale Egidio Antonini da Viterbo tra XV e XVI secolo. Importante figura dell'umanesimo e priore generale dell'ordine degli agostiniani, Egidio è particolarmente interessato allo studio delle religioni e al dialogo inter-religioso. Studia filosofia, teologia, ebraico e arabo; conosce Giovanni Pico della Mirandola a Padova e studia con Marsilio Ficino a Firenze. Durante un viaggio in Spagna, influenzato probabilmente dalle idee di Pico sulla filosofia universale, commissiona una nuova traduzione latina del Corano.²²

di Marco da Toledo (1210) nella redazione effettiva del *Contra legem Sarracenorum*, cf. Burman, "How an Italian Friar Read"; Petrus Pons, "Riccoldo da Monte di Croce lector"; Scotto, "Riccoldo da Monte di Croce and the Origins".

²⁰ Riccoldo da Monte di Croce, *Contra legem Sarracenorum*, f. 190v.

²¹ Si veda, giusto a titolo di esempio, A.M. Piemontese, "Il Corano latino di Ficino e i Corani arabi di Pico e Monchates", *Rinascimento* 36 (1996), pp. 227–273; Id., "Il Corano in Italia umanistica", in *Bibbia e Corano. Edizioni e ricezioni*, a cura di C. Baffioni et al., Milan-Rome, Biblioteca Ambrosiana/Bulzoni, 2016, pp. 31–66; A. Girard, "Teaching and Learning Arabic in Early Modern Rome: Shaping a Missionary Language", in *The Teaching and Learning of Arabic in Early Modern Europe*, a cura di J. Loop, A. Hamilton e C. Burnett, Leiden, Brill, 2017, pp. 189–212; *The Qur'an in Rome*.

²² Sulla figura di Egidio da Viterbo si veda F.X. Martin, *Friar, Reformer, and Renaissance Scholar: Life and Work of Giles of Viterbo, 1469–1532*, a cura di J.E. Rotelle, Villanova (PA), Augustinian Press, 1992. Sulla traduzione commissionata da Egidio si veda, a titolo di esempio, Burman, *Reading the Qur'an*, pp. 149–177; M. García-Arenal e K.K. Starczewska, "The Law of Abraham the Catholic: Juan Gabriel as Qur'an Translator for Martín de Figuerola and Egidio da Viterbo", *Al-Qanṭara* 35/2 (2014),

La traduzione commissionata da Egidio, che da un lato si inserisce in un momento di crescente apertura intellettuale, ma dall'altro di confronto politico e religioso anche aspro e duro con l'islam, fu completata nel 1518 da Juan Gabriel Terrolensis (prec. 'Alī al-'Ayyar), un *mudéjar* di Teruel convertito al cristianesimo che era in contatto con una rete di predicatori antislamici legati alla missione di evangelizzazione dei musulmani aragonesi che culminerà con le conversioni forzate del 1526, e poi corretta nel 1525 da Leo Africanus (Yūḥannā al-'Asad, prec. al-Ḥasan al-Wazzān), un altro convertito con cui Egidio stesso aveva studiato l'arabo. Pur non del tutto estranea a questo ambiente caratterizzato da una forte tensione antislamica, dunque, la traduzione commissionata da Egidio, divisa in quattro colonne che riportano, oltre al testo arabo del Corano, la traduzione latina, un'innovativa trascrizione del testo arabo in caratteri latini e una colonna di commenti tratti dall'esegesi musulmana, si caratterizza per l'assenza della maggior parte dei temi della polemica medievale con l'islam e si propone piuttosto come un vero e proprio strumento di studio.²³

Tuttavia, nonostante l'impostazione filologica e la prevalenza dell'interesse erudito su quello polemico o apologetico, è stato messo in luce come le note alla traduzione rivelino comunque una selettività tematica da cui si può intravedere un sottotesto apologetico cristiano: i commenti riportati nella quarta colonna si concentrano infatti su questioni sensibili nel dibattito interreligioso, riprendendo in parte i *topoi* della polemica medievale. In questo senso, l'opera di Egidio si colloca in una posizione intermedia: da un lato, l'uso sistematico dei *tafsīr* e la disposizione del testo in quattro colonne rappresentano un esperimento di filologia comparata che anticipa la stagione erudita inaugurata un secolo più tardi da Ludovico Marracci; dall'altro, la scelta dei passi e

pp. 409–459; K.K. Starczewska, "Anti-Muslim Preaching in 16th-Century Spain and Egidio da Viterbo's Research on Islam", *Rivista di storia e letteratura religiosa* 51/3 (2015), numero monografico, *Esperienza e rappresentazione dell'Islam nell'Europa mediterranea (secoli XVI–XVIII)*, a cura di A. Celli e D. Scotto, pp. 413–430; K.K. Starczewska, *Latin Translation of the Qur'an (1518/1621): Commissioned by Egidio da Viterbo: Critical Edition and Case Study*, Wiesbaden, Harrassowitz Verlag, 2018; Glei, "Dixit apostoli: The Word-by-Word Principle"; Rivera Luque, "Translatological Remarks"; K.K. Starczewska, "Translations from Arabic of Iberian Origin in Egidio da Viterbo's Qur'an", in *The Iberian Qur'an: From the Middle Ages to Modern Times*, a cura di M. García-Arenal e G. Wieggers, Berlin, De Gruyter, 2022, pp. 399–420.

²³ Cf. Starczewska, *Latin Translation of the Qur'an*, pp. XIII–XCI.

la tipologia delle glosse testimoniano la persistenza di un intento apologetico, seppure attenuato e dissimulato sotto una veste filologica.²⁴

Nonostante le intenzioni e le idee stesse di Egidio, infatti, bisogna tener conto anche dell'ambiente in cui la traduzione è effettivamente maturata. Juan Gabriel, il suo primo traduttore, aveva collaborato anche con Joan Martí de Figuerola, che lo ricorda come suo maestro di arabo nella *Lumbre de fe contra el Alcorán* (1521), un trattato polemico concepito esplicitamente per dibattere con i musulmani attraverso l'uso del Corano e dell'esegesi islamica. Il confronto tra le due opere ha messo in luce corrispondenze lessicali e sintattiche, oltre a coincidenze significative nella scelta dei versetti, nelle glosse e nell'impiego dell'esegesi islamica, collocando la traduzione di Egidio entro una più ampia tradizione di studio e di confutazione del Corano, nella quale la filologia umanistica si intrecciava intimamente con l'intento missionario.²⁵

L'esito più compiuto di tutta la produzione degli umanisti del XV e XVI secolo sul Corano e sull'islam si avrà nella pubblicazione dell'*Alcorani textus universus* di Ludovico Marracci (1698).²⁶ L'opera

²⁴ Cf. Burman, *Reading the Qur'an*, pp. 173–177.

²⁵ García-Arenal e Starczewska, “The Law of Abraham the Catholic”; Starczewska, “Anti-Muslim Preaching”.

²⁶ La bibliografia su Marracci è sterminata e ha conosciuto un incremento esponenziale negli ultimi anni. Si veda, giusto a titolo di esempio, E. Denison Ross, “Ludovico Marracci”, *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 2 (1921), pp. 117–123; C.A. Nallino, “Le fonti arabe manoscritte dell'opera di Ludovico Marracci sul Corano”, in Id., *Raccolta di scritti editi e inediti*, vol. II, Roma, Istituto per l'Oriente, 1940, pp. 90–134; G. Levi Della Vida, “Ludovico Marracci e la sua opera negli studi islamici”, in Id., *Aneddoti e svaghi arabi e non arabi*, Milano-Napoli, Ricciardi, 1959, pp. 193–210; M. Borrmans, “Ludovico Marracci et sa traduction latine du Coran”, *Islamochristiana* 28 (2002), pp. 73–85; M.P. Pedani Fabris, “Ludovico Marracci e la conoscenza dell'islam in Italia”, *Campus Maior* 16 (2004), pp. 6–23; M. Rizzi, *Le prime traduzioni del Corano in Italia: contesto storico e attitudine dei traduttori: Ludovico Marracci (1612–1700) e la lettura critica del commentario coranico di al-Zamakhshari (1075–1144)*, Turin, L'Harmattan, 2007; R.F. Gleis, “Arabismus latine personatus. Die Koranübersetzung von Ludovico Marracci (1698) und die Funktion des Lateinischen”, *Jahrbuch für Europäische Wissenschaftskultur* 5 (2009), pp. 93–115; A. Bevilacqua, “The Qur'an Translations of Marracci and Sale”, *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 76 (2013), pp. 93–130; R. Tottoli, “La vida de Muḥammad y sus fuentes en las obras de Ludovico Marracci, según sus manuscritos personales”, in *Vitae Mahometi. Rescrittura e invenzione in la literatura cristiana de controversia*. Simposio internacional (Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona, 19–20 marzo 2013), a cura di C. Ferrero Hernández e Ó. de la Cruz Palma, Madrid, Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas, 2014, pp. 291–304; R. Tottoli, “Ex Historia Orientali Joh. Henrici Hottingeri ... Ludovico Mar-

di Marracci rappresenta il coronamento dell'intero progetto filologico, polemico e apologetico, europeo e cristiano sull'islam. Il testo arabo era presentato accanto a una traduzione latina letterale e a due serie di annotazioni: le une di carattere filologico e derivate dai commentari islamici, le altre di natura teologica e apologetica, precedute da una lunga introduzione e da una vera e propria confutazione. Per l'ampiezza delle fonti impiegate e per la precisione della resa linguistica, l'*Alcorani textus universus* può essere considerato il cardine degli studi islamici cattolici del Seicento ed è tuttora riconosciuto come il punto di partenza degli studi moderni sul Corano in Europa, segnando un

racci and Reformed Sources According to His Manuscripts”, *Rivista di storia e letteratura religiosa* 51 (2015), pp. 691–702; Id., “New Light on the Translation of the Qurʾān of Ludovico Marracci from His Manuscripts Recently Discovered at the Order of the Mother of God in Rome”, in *Books and Written Culture of the Islamic World: Studies Presented to Claude Gilliot on the Occasion of His 75th Birthday*, a cura di A. Rippin e R. Tottoli, Leiden, Brill, 2015, pp. 91–130; *Il Corano e il pontefice: Ludovico Marracci tra cultura islamica e Curia papale*, a cura di G.L. D’Errico, Rome, Carocci, 2015; R.F. Gleij, “Scripture and Tradition: Traces of Counter-Reformatory Discourse in Marracci’s Work on Islam”, *Rivista di storia e letteratura religiosa* 51/3 (2015), pp. 671–690; R.F. Gleij e R. Tottoli, *Ludovico Marracci at Work: The Evolution of His Latin Translation of the Qurʾān in the Light of His Newly Discovered Manuscripts, with an Edition and a Comparative Linguistic Analysis of Sura 18*, Wiesbaden, Harrassowitz, 2016; R. Tottoli, “Ludovico Marracci”, in *Christian-Muslim Relations: A Bibliographical History*, vol. IX, *Western and Southern Europe (1600–1700)*, a cura di D. Thomas e J.A. Chesworth, Leiden, Brill, 2017, pp. 791–800; Girard, “Teaching and Learning Arabic”; R. Tottoli, “Le molteplici forme di un testo: Ludovico Marracci e la trasmissione del *Kitāb al-anwār* di Abū al-Hasan al-Bakrī”, in *Studi arabistici in memoria di Anna Pagnini*, a cura di S. Bertoni, M. Cassarino e R. Tottoli, Napoli, Università degli Studi di Napoli “L’Orientale”, 2023, pp. 443–470; A. Canton, “A Harmony of Intent: Bishop Gregorio Barbarigo (1625–1697) and Ludovico Marracci (1612–1700)”, in *The Qurʾān in Rome: Manuscripts, Translations, and the Study of Islam in Early Modern Catholicism*, a cura di F. Stella e R. Tottoli, Berlin, De Gruyter, 2023, pp. 403–412; L. Salerno, “The Role of Greek and Latin *Auctores* in Ludovico Marracci’s *Alcorani Textus Universus*”, *ibid.*, pp. 413–432; A. Pitrimalli, “From *dīn*, *milla*, *umma* to *religio*, *secta*, *superstitio*: Marracci’s Latin-Arabic for ‘Religion’. A Lexical Analysis within the Historical Framework of the European History of the Modern Concept of Religion”, *ibid.*, pp. 433–446; F. Stella, “Introduction”, *ibid.*, pp. 1–28; S. Fani, “Printing the Qurʾān in Rome. From the Typographia Medicea to Marracci’s Paduan Edition”, *ibid.*, pp. 79–122; R. Tottoli, “Ludovico Marracci”, in *Encyclopaedia of the Qurʾān Online*, Supplement 2024, Leiden, Brill, <https://referenceworks.brill.com/display/entries/EQO/EQCOM-060298.xml> (26 ottobre 2025); F. Stella, “Ludovico Marracci’s *Alcorani textus universus* (1698)”, in *Qurʾān 12–21/Contexts/Introductory note to Ludovico Marracci’s Latin Translation (1698)*, <https://quran12-21.org/en/contexts/marracci> (26 ottobre 2025).

ulteriore passaggio, dopo quello dalla polemica alla filologia, che inaugura l'approccio scientifico al testo coranico e allo studio dell'islam.²⁷

La pubblicazione fu particolarmente travagliata, in parte a causa della generale opposizione papale alla diffusione del testo coranico e, a quanto pare, anche per un'iniziale incomprensione tra Marracci e la congregazione dell'Indice: alla prima stampa per i tipi della Propaganda Fide di una dettagliata introduzione alla confutazione del testo coranico nel 1691 fece seguito, soltanto nel 1698, l'edizione integrale del testo arabo accompagnata dalla traduzione latina di Marracci e dalle *refutationes*.²⁸

L'influsso di Marracci sulle successive traduzioni vernacolari europee e, più in generale, sulla storia degli studi coranici italiani ed europei è impressionante.²⁹ Anche se la ricostruzione delle dinamiche di ricezione di tale influsso non rientra fra gli scopi di questo contributo, è comunque interessante, in relazione a quanto si viene dicendo, seguire la traccia lasciata da alcune osservazioni relativamente marginali di Marracci sul contenuto e sulla forma stessa del Corano: "Vix dici potest quid determinate contineat Alcoranus: est enim *miscella* et *farra-go* innumerarum rerum, et plerumque inconexarum; ut merito Arabes dicant Alcoranum ex omnibus scientiis particulas habere, et nullam ex integro continere" (è quasi impossibile dire con precisione che cosa contenga il Corano: esso è infatti un *miscuglio* e un *guazzabuglio* di innumerevoli cose, per lo più sconnesse; tanto che, a ragione, gli Arabi stessi dicono che il Corano possiede frammenti di tutte le scienze, ma non ne contiene nessuna per intero).³⁰

²⁷ Girard, "Teaching and Learning Arabic"; Tottoli, "Ludovico Marracci", in *Christian-Muslim Relations*; Stella, "Introduction", Fani, "Printing the Qur'an in Rome"; Tottoli, "Ludovico Marracci", in *Encyclopaedia of the Qur'an Online*.

²⁸ L. Marracci, *Prodromus ad refutationem Alcorani*, 4 voll., Rome, Typis Sacrae Congregationis de Propaganda Fide, 1691; Id., *Alcorani textus universus ex correctionibus Arabum exemplaribus summa fide atque pulcherrimis characteribus descriptus, eademque fide ac pari diligentia ex Arabico idiomate in Latinum translatus; appositis unicuique capiti notis atque refutatione: his omnibus praemissus est Prodromus totum priorem tomum implens*, 2 voll., Padua, Ex Typographia Seminarii, 1698. Su tutta la questione si veda *Il Corano e il pontefice*; Gleis e Tottoli, *Ludovico Marracci at Work*.

²⁹ Si veda, giusto a titolo di esempio, Bevilacqua, "The Qur'an Translations of Marracci and Sale"; A. Hamilton, "After Marracci: The Reception of Ludovico Marracci's Edition of the Qur'an in Northern Europe from the Late Seventeenth to the Early Nineteenth Centuries", *Journal of Qur'anic Studies* 20/3 (2018), pp. 175–192.

³⁰ Marracci, *Prodromus*, vol. I, p. 225. Qui e a pagina seguente i corsivi sono dell'autore.

Un calco evidente delle parole di Marracci compare, ben tre secoli dopo, in *A Literary History of the Arabs* di Reynold A. Nicholson (1868–1945): “The opinion almost unanimously held by European readers that it is obscure, tiresome, uninteresting; a *farrago* of long-winded narratives and prosaic exhortations”.³¹

Un’eco lontana delle parole di Marracci (lat. *farrago*, it. “guazzabuglio”) persiste ancora ne *La letteratura araba* di Francesco Gabrieli (1951), in cui il Corano viene definito senza mezzi termini “un testo che a noi appare così spiritualmente povero, nella ripetizione all’infinito dei suoi pochi motivi fondamentali, così rozzo e impacciato nell’espressione, caotico nell’attuale ordinamento, in una sola e franca parola ‘noioso’”.³² In riferimento all’organizzazione delle sezioni tematiche all’interno della sura della caverna (Q 18), infatti, Gabrieli ci informa che “difetto capitale della narrativa coranica è inoltre l’oscurità e frammentarietà [...]. Cosa significa tutto questo *guazzabuglio*, che mette a non minor prova la pazienza del lettore?”.³³

In questo senso, è notevole che il termine *farrago*, proprio in riferimento a Q 18, entri addirittura in *The Apocalypse of Islam* di Norman O. Brown, un testo che cerca in realtà di rivendicare l’originalità e la modernità dello stile coranico attraverso un paragone nientemeno che con il *Finnegans Wake* di James Joyce, partendo, però, sempre dall’instirpabile idea che il Corano sia, per il povero e frastornato lettore europeo, un incomprensibile, intollerabile e disordinato guazzabuglio: “In the *farrago* of sura 18 the bewildered Western mind discerns and fastens onto three mysterious episodes – one cannot call them narratives – (1) The Sleepers in the Cave (vs. 9–26), (2) Moses’ journey (vs. 61–83), and (3) Dhu’l-Qarneyn’s wall against Gog and Magog (vs. 84–99)”.³⁴

È infine incredibile, per tornare al panorama italiano, che addirittura Alessandro Bausani, autore di una delle più importanti traduzioni italiane del Corano del XX secolo, vi faccia francamente ricorso, arrendendosi, implicitamente, all’evidenza di un testo la cui più profonda

³¹ R.A. Nicholson, *A Literary History of the Arabs*, Abingdon-New York, Routledge, 1993 (London, Fisher Unwin, 1907¹), p. 161.

³² F. Gabrieli, *La letteratura araba*, Florence, Sansoni, 1951, p. 65.

³³ *Ibid.*, pp. 80–81.

³⁴ N.O. Brown, “The Apocalypse of Islam”, in *Apocalypse and/or Metamorphosis*, Berkeley-Los Angeles-Oxford, University of California Press, 1991, pp. 69–94, qui 77 (originariamente pubblicato in *Social Text* 8 [1983–1984], pp. 155–171).

struttura egli stesso ammette, dunque, di non capire quando, nella pur pregevole *Introduzione* alla sua traduzione del Corano, afferma, con una nota di orgoglio erudito: “Del contenuto del Corano si può ancora con piena ragione ripetere, coll’antico nostro Marracci: ‘*Vix dici potest quid determinate contineat Alcoranus: est enim miscella et farrago innumerarum rerum*’”.³⁵

2.2. Le traduzioni italiane del Corano

All’incirca nello stesso periodo in cui gli umanisti romani inauguravano la grande stagione degli studi coranici, ponendo le basi dello studio scientifico dell’islam in Europa, e il cardinale agostiniano Egidio da Viterbo commissionava in Spagna una delle più innovative traduzioni latine del Corano esistenti all’epoca, Andrea Arrivabene pubblicava, a Venezia, la prima traduzione integrale del Corano in una lingua vernacolare europea, dando alle stampe, nel 1547,³⁶ *L’Alcorano di Macometto, nel qual si contiene la dottrina, la vita, i costumi, et le leggi sue: Tradotto nuovamente dall’Arabo in lingua Italiana*.³⁷

Nonostante si trattasse della prima versione del Corano in una lingua europea,³⁸ il libro, dopo un primo successo di pubblico dovuto alla novità della resa volgare del Corano, è stato presto dimenticato dalla comunità scientifica, quando è emerso che non si trattava di una nuo-

³⁵ A. Bausani, “Introduzione”, in Id., *Il Corano*, pp. XV-LXXIX (LV).

³⁶ Sempre a Venezia, dieci anni prima, Alessandro Paganino pubblicava inoltre la prima edizione a stampa del Corano (1537/1538). Cf. A. Nuovo, “Il Corano arabo ritrovato (Venezia, Paganino e Alessandro Paganini, tra l’agosto 1537 e l’agosto 1538)”, *La Bibliofilia* 89 (1987), pp. 237–271; Ead., *Alessandro Paganino (1509–1538)*, Padua, Antenore, 1990.

³⁷ *L’Alcorano di Macometto, nel qual si contiene la dottrina, la vita, i costumi, et le leggi sue: Tradotto nuovamente dall’Arabo in lingua Italiana: Con Gratie, et Privilegii*, a cura di A. Arrivabene, Venice, s.n., 1547. Su tutta la vicenda si veda P.M. Tommasino, *The Venetian Qur’an: A Renaissance Companion to Islam*, trad. a cura di S. Notini, Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, 2018 (ed. or. *L’Alcorano di Macometto: Storia di un libro del Cinquecento europeo*, Bologna, Il Mulino, 2013).

³⁸ In realtà si tratterebbe della prima versione integrale del Corano in lingua italiana. Versioni parziali e antologiche circolavano già da tempo, come il volgarizzamento realizzato da Niccolao di Berto a partire dalla versione latina di Marco da Toledo. Si veda, in proposito, L. Formisano, “La più antica (?) traduzione italiana del Corano e il *Liber Habentomi* di Ibn Tūmart in una compilazione di viaggi del primo Cinquecento”, *Critica del testo* 7 (2004), pp. 651–696.

va traduzione fatta direttamente dall'arabo, come l'editore astutamente asseriva nel frontespizio, ma di una versione italiana della traduzione latina di Roberto di Ketton, riprodotta a stampa proprio pochi anni prima da Theodor Bibliander a Basilea.³⁹

Per secoli si è ritenuto che l'autore del volgarizzamento fosse lo stesso Arrivabene e il libro è stato trascurato, relegato al rango di testo apocrifo, spurio o addirittura eretico, accusato di plagio e trattato al massimo come una curiosità erudita.⁴⁰ Studi recenti hanno però dimostrato in maniera convincente che l'autore del volgarizzamento era in realtà l'umanista, dantista e poligrafo bellunese Giovanni Battista Castrodardo, restituendo il testo al contesto dell'umanesimo veneziano e ai profondi legami della città con il mondo arabo e islamico e con i circoli eruditi europei.⁴¹ Ciò nondimeno, dal punto di vista puramente traduttivo, è chiaro che la versione di Castrodardo non può dirci nulla in merito alle specificità del passaggio dall'arabo all'italiano.

Dopo questa prima edizione si apre un vuoto di ben tre secoli nel panorama editoriale italiano. Sorprende, per certi versi, l'assenza di versioni italiane paragonabili a quelle francesi di André Du Ryer (1647)⁴²

³⁹ T. Bibliander, *Machumetis Saracenorum principis, eiusque successorum vitae, ac doctrina, ipseque Alcoran*, Basel, Johannes Oporinus/Nikolaus Brylinger, 1543.

⁴⁰ Tommasino, *The Venetian Qur'an*, p. 9. Cf. C.A. Nallino, "Recensione a *Il Corano. Nuova versione letterale italiana con una prefazione e note critico-illustrative del dott. Luigi Bonelli*", *Oriente Moderno* 8/12 (1928), pp. 592–594, qui 592; Piemontese, "Il Corano latino di Ficino"; P. Branca, "Italian Translations of the Qur'an / الترجمات الإيطالية للقرآن", *Journal of Qur'anic Studies* 2/2 (2000), pp. 103–112, qui 103–104; Bobzin, "Translations of the Qur'an [2005]", pp. 345–346; P. Branca, "Il Corano: traduzioni in italiano e studi", *Nuova informazione bibliografica* 1 (2008), pp. 35–48, qui 35–36.

⁴¹ P.M. Tommasino, "Giovanni Battista Castrodardo bellunese traduttore dell'*Alcorano di Macometto*", *Oriente Moderno* 88/1 (2008), pp. 15–40; Id., "Giovanni Battista Castrodardo dantista e divulgatore del Corano", *Nuova Rivista di Letteratura Italiana* 13/1–2 (2010), numero monografico, *Saggi danteschi per Alfredo Stussi a cinquant'anni dalla sua laurea*, pp. 329–356; Id., "Reading Machiavelli, Translating the Qur'an. Muhammad as a Lawgiver in the *Alcorano di Macometto* (Venice, 1547)", *Al-Qanṭara* 23/2 (2012), pp. 271–296; Id., "Frammenti ritrovati di Giovanni Battista Castrodardo (ca. 1517–ca. 1588) storico dei vescovi di Belluno", *Studi Veneziani* 65 (2012), pp. 87–132; Id., "Piccolo prologo a Giovanni Battista Castrodardo (1517c.–1588c.) e al suo *Alcorano di Macometto*", *Archivio Storico di Belluno Feltre e Cadore* 84/351 (2013), pp. 413–466; Id., *The Venetian Qur'an*; Pink et al., "Translations of the Qur'an [2025]".

⁴² A. Du Ryer, *L'Alcoran de Mahomet: Translaté d'arabe en François*, Paris, Antoine de Sommaville, 1647. Sulla traduzione di Du Ryer si veda, giusto a titolo di esempio, A. Hamilton e F. Richard, *André Du Ryer and Oriental Studies in Seventeenth-Century France*, London-Oxford, The Arcadian Library/Oxford University Press, 2004; Bob-

e di Claude-Étienne Savary (1783),⁴³ o a quella inglese di George Sale (1734),⁴⁴ o al limite anche solo di versioni mediate attraverso il francese o il latino,⁴⁵ ma se è vero, da un lato, che nell'Italia postconciliare lo studio del Corano era fortemente limitato, se non proprio osteggiato, come testimoniato, fra l'altro, sia dalla messa all'indice dell'edizione di Bibliander e delle sue traduzioni in volgare, sia dalle difficoltà stesse incontrate da Marracci nella pubblicazione dell'*Alcorani textus universus*, è anche ipotizzabile, dall'altro, che l'edizione e la traduzione latina di Marracci abbiano finito per monopolizzare lo spazio culturale italiano, assorbendo e in parte modellando le aspettative stesse del pubblico erudito.⁴⁶

È soltanto nel 1847, esattamente tre secoli dopo la pubblicazione dell'*Alcorano di Macometto*, che viene data alle stampe, in Corsica,⁴⁷

zin, "Translations of the Qur'an [2005]", p. 246; S. Larzul, "Les premières traductions françaises du Coran (XVII^e-XIX^e siècles)", *Archives de sciences sociales des religions* 147 (2009), pp. 147-165, qui 148-153; A. Hamilton, "André Du Ryer", in *Christian-Muslim Relations: A Bibliographical History*, vol. IX, pp. 453-465; Pink *et al.*, "Translations of the Qur'an [2025]".

⁴³ C.-É. Savary, *Le Coran, traduit de l'arabe, accompagné de notes, et précédé d'un abrégé de la vie de Mahomet, tiré des écrivains orientaux les plus estimés*, 2 voll., Paris, Knapen & Fils/Onfroy, 1783. Sulla traduzione di Savary si veda, giusto a titolo di esempio, Bobzin, "Translations of the Qur'an [2005]", p. 349; Larzul, "Les premières traductions"; Z. Elmarsafy, *The Enlightenment Qur'an: The Politics of Translation and the Construction of Islam*, London, Oneworld Publications, 2009, pp. 143-157; A. Hamilton, "Claude-Étienne Savary: Orientalism and Fraudulence in Late Eighteenth-Century France", *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 82 (2019), pp. 283-314; Id., "Claude-Étienne Savary", in *Christian-Muslim Relations: A Bibliographical History*, vol. XIII, (1700-1800), a cura di D. Thomas e J. Chesworth, Leiden, Brill, 2019, pp. 745-756; Pink *et al.*, "Translations of the Qur'an [2025]".

⁴⁴ G. Sale, *The Koran, Commonly Called The Alcoran of Mohammed: Translated into English Immediately from the Original Arabic, with Explanatory Notes, Taken from the Most Approved Commentators, to Which Is Prefixed a Preliminary Discourse*, London, Ackers/Wilcox, 1734. Sulla traduzione di Sale si veda, giusto a titolo di esempio, Bobzin, "Translations of the Qur'an [2005]", pp. 348-349; Elmarsafy, *The Enlightenment Qur'an*, pp. 37-63; Bevilacqua, "The Qur'an Translations of Marracci and Sale"; Id., *The Republic of Arabic Letters: Islam and the European Enlightenment*, Cambridge, MA, The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2018; Pink *et al.*, "Translations of the Qur'an [2025]".

⁴⁵ Vi furono in realtà due traduzioni parziali condotte a partire dalla versione francese di Du Ryer a cavallo fra il Seicento e il Settecento, ma non venne prodotta nessuna traduzione integrale che offrisse un riferimento sistematico al pubblico dei lettori italiani. Cf. Tommasino, *The Venetian Qur'an*, p. 11.

⁴⁶ Cf. *Ibid.*, pp. 11-13.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 13-14.

la versione italiana del cavaliere Vincenzo Calza, console generale pontificio in Algeri, tratta, come lo stesso autore dichiara nella prefazione, dalla traduzione francese di Albert Kazimirski de Biberstein (1840 [1841²]).⁴⁸ Studi recenti hanno dimostrato che la traduzione di Calza non è tratta in realtà dalla prima imperfetta traduzione di Kazimirski, come sostenuto da Carlo Alfonso Nallino e da Paolo Branca,⁴⁹ né, tantomeno, direttamente dall'arabo, come sostenuto, forse a causa di una svista, da Hartmut Bobzin,⁵⁰ ma dalla seconda edizione riveduta e corretta della traduzione francese di Kazimirski.⁵¹ Anche in questo caso, però, è chiaro che si tratta di un testo che non affronta le specificità traduttive dell'arabo, oltre a non essere del tutto privo, come lo stesso autore dichiara francamente nella prefazione, di intenti apologetici.⁵²

Dalla traduzione francese a cura di Savary è tratta invece l'anonima versione de *Il Corano: Nuova traduzione italiana dall'arabo con note dei migliori commentatori orientali, preceduto dalla Leggenda di Maometto e dal sommario della religione turca*, pubblicata nel 1882 a Milano da Giovanni Panzeri con un titolo evidentemente ingannevole.⁵³ Anche

⁴⁸ V. Calza, *Il Corano: Versione italiana del Cav. Commend. Vincenzo Calza, con commenti, ed una notizia biografica di Maometto*, Bastia, Cesare Fabiani, 1847. Cf. A. Kazimirski de Biberstein, *Le Koran: Traduction nouvelle faite sur le texte arabe*, Paris, Charpentier, 1840. Sulla traduzione di Calza si veda F. Stella, "A Nineteenth-Century Catholic Translation of the Qur'an into Italian by Vincenzo Calza, Pontifical Consul General of Algiers", *Journal of Qur'anic Studies* 24/3 (2022), pp. 70–88. Cf. Tommasino, *The Venetian Qur'an*, pp. 13–14; Pink *et al.* "Translations of the Qur'an [2025]". Sulla traduzione di Kazimirski si veda, giusto a titolo di esempio, Bobzin, "Translations of the Qur'an [2005]", pp. 340–350; J. Chabbi, "Kazimirski, une traduction du Coran au XIX^e siècle et le curieux destin de ses rééditions au XX^e siècle", in A. Kazimirski, *Le Coran*, Paris, Cerf, 2020 (Paris, Charpentier, 1840¹), pp. 7–16; Pink *et al.* "Translations of the Qur'an [2025]".

⁴⁹ Nallino, "Recensione a *Il Corano*", p. 592; Branca, "Italian Translations", p. 104; Id., "Il Corano: traduzioni", p. 36.

⁵⁰ Bobzin, "Translations of the Qur'an [2005]", p. 350.

⁵¹ Stella, "A Nineteenth-Century Catholic Translation".

⁵² Calza, *Il Corano*, p. V. Cf. Branca, "Il Corano: traduzioni", p. 36; Stella, "A Nineteenth-Century Catholic Translation", pp. 73–75; Id., "Vincenzo Calza", in *Christian-Muslim Relations: A Bibliographical History*, vol. XXI, *South-western Europe (1800–1914)*, a cura di D. Thomas e J.A. Chesworth, Leiden, Brill, 2024, pp. 641–646, qui 644–645.

⁵³ Anon., *Il Corano: Nuova traduzione italiana dall'arabo con note dei migliori commentatori orientali, preceduto dalla Leggenda di Maometto e dal sommario della religione turca*, Milano, G. Panzeri, 1882. Si veda F. Badini, "The Italian Qur'an: A Preliminary Analysis of the Panzeri Translation (1882)", *Journal of the International Qur'anic*

in questo caso si tratta di una “traduzione di qualche altra traduzione straniera”, come avrebbe annotato con sdegno d’arabista un giovane Leone Caetani sulla sua copia personale del volume,⁵⁴ del tutto inutile in relazione a quanto si viene dicendo.

Ancora dalla versione francese di Kazimirski è tratto *Il Corano: Versione tolta direttamente dal testo arabo da Eugenio Camillo Branchi*, che si colloca nella fase di più intensa proliferazione di traduzioni del Corano, proprio a cavallo della guerra italo-turca (1911–1912).⁵⁵ Al di là del titolo altisonante e di alcune affermazioni inserite nell’introduzione, sembra che l’autore non conoscesse neppure l’arabo, e in effetti dal risultato emerge chiaramente che non ha contezza del testo originale. Anche la sua traduzione è dunque priva di valore traduttologico, almeno in riferimento alle specificità della lingua araba.⁵⁶

La prima traduzione italiana che si confronti direttamente con il testo arabo, presentato a fronte nella stampa, è quella di Aquilio Fracassi, professore di arabo presso le Regie Scuole Tecniche di Milano, intitolata *Il Corano: Testo arabo e versione letterale italiana*.⁵⁷ Riprendendo una pratica in uso nelle traduzioni bibliche a partire dalla prima metà del XVI secolo,⁵⁸ che già Marracci e dopo di lui Sale avevano

Studies Association 10/1 (2025), pp. 300–323. Cf. Nallino, “Recensione a *Il Corano*”, p. 592; Branca, “Italian Translations”, p. 104; Id., “Il Corano: traduzioni”, p. 37.

⁵⁴ Tommasino, *The Venetian Qur’an*, p. 14. Cf. Badini, “The Italian Qur’an”, pp. 9–11.

⁵⁵ E.C. Branchi, *Il Corano: Versione tolta direttamente dal testo arabo da Eugenio Camillo Branchi*, Rome, M. Carra, 1912. Cf. Nallino, “Recensione a *Il Corano*”, pp. 592–593; Branca, “Italian Translations”, p. 104; Id., “Il Corano: traduzioni”, p. 37; E. Colombo e V. Lavenia, “Introduction: Italy before and after Unification: Islam, Orientalism, Colonialism”, in *Christian-Muslim Relations: A Bibliographical History*, vol. XXI, pp. 25–55, qui 53; Badini, “The Italian Qur’an”, pp. 2, 12–13.

⁵⁶ Cf. Nallino, “Recensione a *Il Corano*”, pp. 592–593; Branca, “Italian Translations”, p. 37.

⁵⁷ A. Fracassi, *Il Corano: Testo arabo e versione letterale italiana*, Milan, Hoepli, 1914. Nallino, “Recensione a *Il Corano*”, p. 593; Branca, “Italian Translations”, p. 105; Id., “Il Corano: traduzioni”, p. 37; Tommasino, *The Venetian Qur’an*, p. 15; Colombo e Lavenia, “Introduction”, pp. 44, 53; Badini, “The Italian Qur’an”, pp. 2, 12–13, 20.

⁵⁸ L’uso del corsivo, o comunque di un carattere tipograficamente distinto, per segnalare i termini aggiunti dal traduttore, ma privi di un corrispondente diretto nel testo ebraico o greco, è stato introdotto per la prima volta da Sebastian Münster nella sua traduzione latina della Bibbia ebraica (1534–1535), e da Pietro Olivetano nella sua traduzione francese della Bibbia (1535). In inglese, la pratica è stata introdotta da Myles Coverdale nella sua edizione di *The Great Bible* (1539), cf. W.F. Specht, “The Use of Italics in English Versions of the New Testament”, *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 6 (1968), pp. 88–93.

adottato nelle traduzioni coraniche, Fracassi introduce l'uso del corsivo per segnalare i termini italiani aggiunti dal traduttore e privi di un corrispondente diretto in arabo.

Secondo Nallino, Fracassi si sarebbe basato essenzialmente sulla versione latina di Marracci, ma avrebbe condotto un attento studio sul significato dei singoli termini arabi, nel tentativo di offrire una resa quanto più possibile letterale e fedele al testo originale.⁵⁹ Francesca Badini, sulla base di un *case study* limitato alla sola *sūrat al-fātiḥa* (Q 1), suggerisce che egli possa aver tenuto conto anche della traduzione francese di Savary, come, prima di lui, sia Eugenio Camillo Branchi sia l'anonimo traduttore della versione pubblicata dall'editore Panzeri nel 1882.⁶⁰

La traduzione di Fracassi si inserisce nel contesto del progetto coloniale sabaudo e mostra un evidente cambio di paradigma: il quadro non è più quello della polemica o dell'apologetica, ma quello dello studio e della ricerca di una reciproca comprensione, seppur non del tutto scevra di un certo paternalismo.⁶¹ Nonostante le buone intenzioni dell'autore, che si era rivolto ai maggiori arabisti dell'epoca per ottenere consigli e far correggere gli errori, senza tuttavia riuscire a eliminarli del tutto, il risultato è piuttosto deludente sul piano letterario e poco efficace su quello traduttivo, anche a causa dell'introduzione arbitraria di parafrasi e sinonimi, spesso difficilmente giustificabili. A seguito della pubblicazione della traduzione del turcologo Luigi Bonelli da parte dello stesso editore Hoepli, la traduzione di Fracassi scomparirà del tutto dal mercato editoriale italiano.⁶²

Pubblicata nel 1929 con il titolo *Il Corano: Nuova versione letterale italiana con una prefazione e note critico-illustrative del dott. Luigi Bonelli*, la traduzione realizzata da Bonelli è la prima versione italiana del Corano condotta secondo criteri scientifici e concepita come uno strumento di studio.⁶³ I meriti della traduzione, se confrontata con le

⁵⁹ Nallino, "Recensione a *Il Corano*", p. 593.

⁶⁰ Badini, "The Italian Qur'an", pp. 12–13.

⁶¹ Cf. Tommasino, *The Venetian Qur'an*, p. 15; Colombo e Lavenia, "Introduction", p. 44.

⁶² Nallino, "Recensione a *Il Corano*", p. 593; Branca, "Italian Translations", p. 105; Id., "Il Corano: traduzioni", p. 37.

⁶³ L. Bonelli, *Il Corano: Nuova versione letterale italiana con una prefazione e note critico-illustrative del dott. Luigi Bonelli*, Milan, Hoepli, 1929. Cf. Nallino, "Recensione a *Il Corano*", pp. 593–594; F. Gabrieli, *Saggi orientali*, Caltanissetta-Rome, S. Sciascia, 1960, pp. 39–40; Branca, "Italian Translations", p. 105; Bobzin, "Translations of the Qur'an [2005]", p. 352; Branca, "Il Corano: traduzioni", pp. 37–38.

precedenti, sono evidenti: per la prima volta veniva offerta al pubblico italiano una versione letterale e fedele del testo coranico tradotta a partire dalla versione araba e condotta con grande scrupolo linguistico, anche se il risultato, dal punto di vista letterario, non era ancora all'altezza delle ambizioni. Nallino la recensisce in termini molto lusinghieri, pur segnalando alcuni errori e mancanze,⁶⁴ mentre Gabrieli, che pur ne loda il rigore e l'aderenza al testo arabo, la definisce "una scrupolosa letterale traduzione, vera 'brutta fedele', priva di ogni simpatia con il testo tradotto, e di ogni letterario pregio".⁶⁵

Come già Fracassi prima di lui, anche Bonelli segnala attraverso l'uso del corsivo i termini italiani privi di corrispondente diretto in arabo e inserisce numerosi incisi tra parentesi per segnalare il significato letterale o chiarire il senso dei passaggi dubbi.⁶⁶ La traduzione, corredata da un apparato di note molto tecnico, ha forse un tono eccessivamente didascalico che ne compromette a tratti la fluidità e la godibilità, soprattutto nelle sure più lunghe, dove la lettura risulta effettivamente macchinosa. Ciò nondimeno, la sua traduzione sarà la prima che verrà analizzata nella sezione conclusiva del contributo.

La situazione cambia radicalmente nel 1955 con la pubblicazione, presso l'editore Sansoni, della traduzione a cura di Alessandro Bausani, destinata a imporsi, sotto diversi aspetti, come la traduzione di riferimento del Corano in lingua italiana, non foss'altro per il ruolo che ha avuto nella storia degli studi islamici in Italia.⁶⁷ Non solo Bausani riesce a coniugare fedeltà al testo e resa letteraria, evitando sia l'estrema rigidità delle versioni puramente letterali, come quella di Bonelli, sia l'approccio ideologico e teologicamente orientato delle traduzioni di impronta cristiana e cattolica, come quella di Calza, sia infine l'approccio empatico ma paternalistico delle traduzioni di epoca coloniale, come quella di Fracassi, ma riesce addirittura nell'impresa di creare un linguaggio e uno stile immediatamente riconoscibili e affascinanti per il lettore italiano, pur mantenendo una notevole aderenza al testo e

⁶⁴ Nallino, "Recensione a *Il Corano*", pp. 593–594.

⁶⁵ Gabrieli, *Saggi orientali*, pp. 39–40. Cf. Branca, "Italian Translations", p. 105; Id., "Il Corano: traduzioni", p. 38.

⁶⁶ Branca, "Italian Translations", p. 105; Id., "Il Corano: traduzioni", p. 38.

⁶⁷ Bausani, *Il Corano*. Cf. Gabrieli, *Saggi orientali*, pp. 40–41; B. Scarcia Amoretti, "La traduzione del Corano di Alessandro Bausani e le sue implicazioni in campo islamistico", *Oriente Moderno*, n.s. 17, 78/3 (1998), pp. 513–519. Branca, "Italian Translations", p. 105; Bobzin, "Translations of the Qur'an [2005]", p. 354; Branca, "Il Corano: traduzioni", pp. 38–39; Pink *et al.*, "Translations of the Qur'an [2025]".

una profondità semantica rara, grazie anche alla sua straordinaria conoscenza della tradizione islamica, dell'esegesi coranica e delle tradizioni letterarie del mondo islamico.

La sua formazione gioca indubbiamente un ruolo centrale in questa situazione: proveniente da un ambiente cattolico e animato da un'evidente simpatia per il mondo musulmano che culminerà ben presto in una conversione al baha'ismo, Bausani aveva una cultura letteraria che potremmo definire prodigiosa. Professore di lingua e letteratura persiana, indonesiana, urdu e hindi presso l'Istituto Universitario Orientale di Napoli, successivamente insegnò islamistica alla Scuola Orientale della Sapienza di Roma e fece parte, con Raffaele Pettazzoni, Angelo Brelich e Dario Sabbatucci, del gruppo di studiosi che diede origine alla cosiddetta Scuola romana di Storia delle religioni. Busani possedeva una cultura e una conoscenza straordinarie di quelle lingue e letterature che lui stesso definì "islamiche", a significare l'esistenza di un legame bidirezionale fra il Corano e le letterature delle varie lingue parlate nella *dār al-islām*, arabo *in primis*, ma anche persiano, turco, indonesiano e così via, per cui, se da un lato la poesia e la letteratura tutta delle lingue in questione subiscono evidentemente l'influsso del Corano, dall'altro il testo rivelato stesso sembra poter brillare di tutta la sua vera luce solo se compreso e riflesso nel prisma caleidoscopico del mondo multilingue e plurale che lo ha recepito.

Come ha giustamente osservato Biancamaria Scarcia Amoretti:

Il primo merito della traduzione di Bausani è letterario. Il libro si dipana senza caduta di tono. Se ne può godere la lettura ad alta voce, così come ci si può fermare su un versetto che ci suona poetico ancor prima di svelarci il suo contenuto. È accattivante e, come tale, permette a chi vi si accosta un iniziale incontro con l'Islam che non è ancora tecnico e specialistico, ma che illustra quella che è la percezione e la fruizione del musulmano, anche comune, nei confronti del Libro sacro, dando la misura, anche allo sprovvisto, di qualche cosa di inimitabile e di unico: il Corano deve essere recitato come pratica collettiva, può essere letto individualmente e andrebbe conservato a memoria nel profondo del cuore.

La famosa abilità di Bausani come traduttore letterario, insieme alle sue altrettanto note conoscenze linguistiche, sta certamente alla base della sua felice traduzione, sebbene, se si vuole essere precisi e tener conto dell'evoluzione dei suoi interessi letterari e scientifici, vada osservato che il percorso è inverso rispetto a quanto sarebbe ragionevole aspettarsi. Partendo dal Corano, e non viceversa, Bausani sperimenta e affina la sua tecnica; del

Corano, cioè, egli fa il suo banco di prova per affermarsi come traduttore di poesia da tutte le lingue che mutuano dal Corano, e più generalmente dall'arabo, una parte del loro lessico colto.⁶⁸

Infine, è doveroso dire qualcosa anche a proposito dell'introduzione e dell'apparato di note che accompagna la traduzione, a lungo considerati un modello di equilibrio tra profondità dottrinale, chiarezza espositiva e sensibilità religiosa. L'introduzione da sola è da considerarsi una vera e propria *summa* degli studi coranici, di gran lunga superiore a quanto fosse possibile reperire all'epoca in Italia. Anche le note al testo, grazie alla straordinaria conoscenza di Bausani dell'esegesi coranica tradizionale, contribuiscono a far emergere una visione pluralistica e storicamente documentata dell'islam, che rende la sua traduzione non solo un'opera letteraria, ma anche un prezioso strumento per la comprensione del Corano e dell'islam.⁶⁹

Il solo, relativo, limite della traduzione di Bausani risiede, forse, proprio nelle conseguenze della sua sincera adesione alla fede baha'i, che lo porta, in alcuni casi, a forzare il testo, come quando traduce Q 13:38 ("li-kulli 'ağalin kitābun") con "c'è un Libro Divino a ogni fine di un'Era", facendo di fatto predire al Corano l'apertura di un nuovo ciclo profetico, cosa che, almeno in termini così espliciti, il testo non dice. Si tratta, tuttavia, di aspetti marginali, e l'apparato di note non manca di segnalarne con rigore la problematicità. Tali scelte vanno intese piuttosto come il risultato di una strenua fedeltà, un'adesione al testo che, laddove l'ambiguità dello stesso lo consenta, si traduce in una presa di posizione esplicita, mai mascherata, ma anzi sempre rigorosamente rivendicata e segnalata. La sua traduzione sarà analizzata nella sezione conclusiva del contributo.

Di notevole interesse è anche la traduzione del Corano realizzata dal diplomatico e semitista Martino Mario Moreno e pubblicata postuma a Torino nel 1967. In realtà la traduzione era stata completata già nel 1955, cioè a dire lo stesso anno in cui Sansoni dava alle stampe a Firenze la traduzione di Bausani, destinata a un successo editoriale straordinario e dei cui meriti si è già ampiamente detto. Tale coincidenza ha certamente contribuito a relegare in una posizione relativamente

⁶⁸ Scarcia Amoretti, "La traduzione del Corano", p. 514.

⁶⁹ Cf. Gabrieli, *Saggi orientali*, pp. 40–41; Scarcia Amoretti, "La traduzione del Corano", pp. 515–519; Branca, "Italian Translations", p. 105; Id., "Il Corano: traduzioni", p. 38.

marginale, nella storia delle traduzioni italiane del Corano, un lavoro che è invece indubbiamente pregevole e non privo di significative intuizioni traduttologiche, pur senza raggiungere la ricchezza letteraria e la profondità religiosa e interpretativa della versione di Bausani.⁷⁰ Il percorso che conduce Moreno alla traduzione del Corano è in un certo senso simmetrico e inverso rispetto a quello di Bausani: se per Bausani, infatti, la traduzione del Corano era venuta prima di tutta la sua ulteriore opera di traduttore ed era servita come una forma di legittimazione agli inizi di una carriera straordinaria, per Moreno la traduzione del Corano costituisce piuttosto l'epilogo di una carriera di traduttore magari non eclatante come quella di Bausani, ma certamente professionale e rigorosa. Anche la sua traduzione sarà analizzata nella sezione conclusiva del contributo.

Molto meno rigorosa è invece la traduzione a cura di Federico Peirone e pubblicata con il titolo *Il Corano: Introduzione, traduzione e commento di Federico Peirone*.⁷¹ La traduzione, redatta in uno stile colloquiale e inappropriato alla sacralità del testo coranico, abbonda di errori interpretativi anche gravi e si segnala per il frequente ricorso alla traslitterazione anche per termini arabi comuni, l'uso ingiustificato di parafrasi e sinonimi, il ricorso al latino e altre scelte terminologiche di impronta cristiana, del tutto immotivate sul piano linguistico e dottrinale. Non verrà analizzata nella sezione conclusiva.⁷²

Più interessante e sistematica la versione di Cherubino Mario Guzzetti, corredata di utili titoli tematici aggiunti dal traduttore per indicare il contenuto delle varie sezioni delle sure lunghe e aiutare il lettore a riconoscerne l'organizzazione interna.⁷³ Non particolarmente originale rispetto alle traduzioni pubblicate in precedenza, ma indubbiamente molto equilibrata nella resa linguistica, non verrà comunque analizzata nella sezione finale poiché non propone soluzioni particolarmente originali in relazione ai casi studiati.

⁷⁰ M.M. Moreno, *Il Corano*, Turin, UTET, 1967. Cf. F. Gabrieli, "Premessa", *ibid.*, pp. VII–VIII; Branca, "Italian Translations", p. 106; Id., "Il Corano: traduzioni", p. 39.

⁷¹ F. Peirone, *Il Corano: Introduzione, traduzione e commento di Federico Peirone*, 2 voll., Milan, Mondadori, 1979. Cf. Branca, "Italian Translations", pp. 106–107; Id., "Il Corano: traduzioni", pp. 39–40.

⁷² Cf. Branca, "Italian Translations", pp. 106–107; Id., "Il Corano: traduzioni", pp. 39–40.

⁷³ C.M. Guzzetti, *Il Corano: Introduzione, traduzione e commento*, Turin, LDC, 1989. Cf. Branca, "Italian Translations", p. 108; Id., "Il Corano: traduzioni", p. 40.

Merita di essere segnalata la traduzione promossa dal movimento ahmadiyya, pioniere nella diffusione di traduzioni del Corano in lingue europee, e intitolata *Il Sacro Qur'an*.⁷⁴ Pur provenendo da un gruppo relativamente minoritario, tale traduzione si colloca già all'interno di quelle che potremmo definire traduzioni confessionali, cioè a dire prodotte dalla comunità musulmana italiana per l'uso interno nel contesto della pratica religiosa.⁷⁵ Non verrà analizzata nella sezione finale, così come la traduzione a cura di Angelo Terenzoni, secondo Branca derivata direttamente da qualche edizione inglese.⁷⁶

La traduzione forse più diffusa all'interno della comunità musulmana italiana è quella realizzata da Hamza Roberto Piccardo, un convertito italiano particolarmente attivo nella divulgazione religiosa.⁷⁷ Pubblicata per la prima volta nel 1994 dalla casa editrice Al Hikma con il titolo *Il Corano*, è stata ristampata dall'editore Newton Compton nel 1996, dopo una revisione dell'UCOII che ha supervisionato l'intero progetto sotto il profilo dottrinale. Quest'ultima versione ha attirato l'attenzione per la sua pretesa adesione a criteri religiosi sunniti ed è stata successivamente ristampata dal Complesso di Re Fahd per l'edizione del Generoso Corano (*Mağma' al-Malik Fahd li-ṭibā'at al-Muṣḥaf al-ṣarīf*) nel 2010/2011 (1432 H) con il titolo *Il Nobile Corano e la traduzione dei suoi significati in lingua italiana*, in accordo con la moderna concezione sunnita della traduzione come semplice trasposizione dei significati del testo rivelato in un'altra lingua. La seconda edizione della traduzione di Piccardo è stata infine rivista anche dalla Direzione degli Affari religiosi della Turchia (Türkiye Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı) e ripubblicata nel 2015 con il titolo *Il Sacro Corano: Traduzione interpretativa in italiano*.⁷⁸

⁷⁴ V. Gatti e A. De Rosa, *Il Sacro Qur'an*, London, al-Sharikatul Islamiyyah, 1986. Cf. Branca, "Italian Translations", p. 108; Id., "Il Corano: traduzioni", p. 40; Pink *et al.* "Translations of the Qur'an [2025]".

⁷⁵ Cf. Badini, "The Italian Qur'an", p. 2.

⁷⁶ A. Terenzoni, *Il Corano*, La Spezia, Fratelli Melita, 1993. Cf. Branca, "Italian Translations", p. 108; Id., "Il Corano: traduzioni", p. 40.

⁷⁷ H.R. Piccardo, *Il Nobile Corano e la traduzione dei suoi significati in lingua italiana*, Rome, Newton Compton, 1996 (Imperia, Al Hikma, 1994). Cf. Branca, "Italian Translations", pp. 108–110; Id., "Il Corano: traduzioni", pp. 41–42; Yakubovych, *The Kingdom and the Qur'an*, pp. 134–136.

⁷⁸ Yakubovych, *The Kingdom and the Qur'an*, pp. 135–136.

Il volume si presenta come uno strumento pensato per i convertiti italiani e ha avuto una notevole diffusione anche grazie alla distribuzione capillare all'interno delle moschee e dei centri culturali islamici. Branca, che recensisce la seconda edizione del 1996, lamenta la presenza di un apparato di note fortemente catechetico, con toni polemici e commenti che riflettono una visione dogmatica e limitata dell'islam, affermazioni discutibili su cristiani, ebrei e donne e frequenti giudizi dottrinali che prendono il posto dell'analisi esegetica o filologica, all'interno di un approccio certamente più orientato alla formazione interna che al dialogo interreligioso.⁷⁹

Mykhaylo Yakubovych, che ha invece studiato le varie edizioni, ritiene ci sia un'evoluzione dalle prime edizioni italiane, che mostrano un approccio di tipo ideologico e missionario, rivolto a un pubblico prevalentemente cristiano, all'edizione saudita, che sviluppa soprattutto la dimensione storica, teologica e rituale del Corano, fino alle più recenti edizioni turche, che mirano a produrre un manuale completo che presenti il testo rivelato anche avvalendosi di materiale storico ed esegetico tradizionale.⁸⁰

In ambito accademico, sono state talvolta sollevate perplessità sull'effettiva padronanza dell'arabo da parte di Piccardo, sebbene manchino valutazioni documentate in tal senso. La traduzione, pur non esente da errori, ha un approccio marcatamente catechetico che ne compromette almeno in parte il valore sul piano scientifico e letterario, ma, anche in ragione della sua notevole diffusione, sarà la quarta traduzione analizzata nella sezione conclusiva del contributo.

Le ultime tre traduzioni che verranno analizzate sono state tutte pubblicate nei primi vent'anni del XXI secolo. La prima è la traduzione a cura di Gabriele Mandel Khan, edita da UTET e presentata con un utile testo arabo a fronte.⁸¹ Figura colta e poliedrica, Mandel Khan è stato islamista, psicoanalista, storico dell'arte e maestro sufi, oltre che autore di numerose opere dedicate alla cultura islamica. La sua traduzione, piuttosto aderente alla lettera del testo, propone spesso soluzioni originali e di notevole efficacia letteraria. Secondo Branca, l'apparato di note, pur meno invadente e polemico rispetto a quello

⁷⁹ Branca, "Italian Translations", pp. 109–110; Id., "Il Corano: traduzioni", pp. 41–42.

⁸⁰ Yakubovych, *The Kingdom and the Qur'an*, p. 136.

⁸¹ G. Mandel Khan, *Il Corano*, Turin, UTET, 2004. Cf. Branca, "Il Corano: traduzioni", p. 42.

di Piccardo, risulterebbe talvolta superficiale e segnato da una visione tradizionalista, in particolare per quanto riguarda temi sensibili come la gerarchia di genere.⁸² Difficilmente la traduzione di Mandel Khan potrebbe essere annoverata senza riserve fra le traduzioni confessionali: non tanto per l'erudizione dell'autore e l'originalità delle scelte interpretative, sicuramente non in linea con le aspettative maggioritarie in seno alla comunità, quanto perché, per quanto è dato sapere, non risulta che essa sia effettivamente utilizzata da membri della comunità nel contesto della pratica religiosa.

La seconda è la traduzione pubblicata da Einaudi a cura di Ida Zilio-Grandi.⁸³ Il volume, di taglio accademico e filologicamente rigoroso, si distingue per l'attenzione alla resa semantica e alla dimensione letteraria del testo ed è corredato da un ampio apparato di note critiche e da una prefazione che espone con chiarezza le scelte metodologiche. La traduttrice adotta un approccio attento alla complessità e all'ambiguità del Corano, evitando semplificazioni ideologiche e mantenendo un equilibrio tra fedeltà filologica e scorrevolezza. Nonostante le premesse di grande rigore, tuttavia, la resa stilistica non raggiunge, a giudizio di chi scrive, la forza evocativa della versione di Bausani e, nei passaggi più significativi, le soluzioni proposte appaiono meno efficaci rispetto a quelle adottate dai traduttori precedenti.

Come ultima traduzione da analizzare nella sezione conclusiva del contributo si è scelta una delle molteplici traduzioni confessionali prodotte nei primi vent'anni del XXI secolo, quella a cura di Sheikh Abu-Abdullah Othman e pubblicata dal Centro Culturale Islamico di Fondi (LT).⁸⁴ Il volume si apre con una breve introduzione ed è corredato da un apparato di note e commenti estremamente contenuto, concepito per facilitare la pratica religiosa del fedele di lingua italiana. La traduzione, di impostazione fortemente letterale, adotta un linguaggio sobrio ed evita, a differenza di altre edizioni confessionali, un

⁸² Branca, "Il Corano: traduzioni", p. 42.

⁸³ I. Zilio-Grandi, *Il Corano*, Turin, Einaudi, 2010.

⁸⁴ S. Othman, *Traduzione italiana dei significati del Generoso Corano*, ed. riveduta, Fondi, Centro Culturale Islamico, 2018. Fra le altre traduzioni confessionali pubblicate nel XXI secolo si segnalano, almeno, F. Kabazi, *Glorioso Corano*, Tripoli, World Islamic Call Society, 2007; A. Pasquini, *Sublime Corano in lingua italiana*, Milan, Centro Islamico di Milano e Lombardia, 2017; A. Yusuf Ali, *Il significato del Sacro Corano*, a cura di S. Lei, Rome, Tawasul International, 2020 (ed. or. *The Meaning of the Holy Qur'an*, Lahore, S. Muhammad Ashraf, 1934).

ricorso eccessivo alla traslitterazione. È stata inoltre selezionata per la sua ampia diffusione e accessibilità, essendo disponibile gratuitamente anche in formato elettronico.⁸⁵

3. Forma e radice: problemi di traducibilità dall'arabo all'italiano. Sette traduzioni italiane del Corano a confronto

Un problema evidente nelle traduzioni del Corano in italiano⁸⁶ risiede nella difficoltà a rendere in maniera efficace il legame intrinseco che la lingua araba in generale mantiene, e il Corano in particolare enfatizza e sfrutta allo scopo di ottenere una proliferazione del senso, fra la radice trilittera (*al-ğadr al-tulāṭi*) con i suoi significati di base e le varie forme testuali concrete, si tratti poi di diverse forme derivate (*ʿafāl mazīda*) della stessa radice, o di forme nominali e verbali (*al-ism wa-l-fiʿl*) riconducibili alla medesima forma derivata o comunque allo stesso nucleo semantico della radice.⁸⁷

⁸⁵ La traduzione di Sheikh Othman è disponibile online sul sito <https://www.libriislam.it/prodotto/traduzione-italiana-dei-significati-del-generoso-corano-a-cura-di-sheikh-othman/> (26 ottobre 2025).

⁸⁶ Le traduzioni sono state selezionate a campione, in modo da rappresentare le principali tendenze presenti nella tradizione italiana di traduzione del Corano. Non si è naturalmente tenuto conto delle versioni realizzate a partire da lingue diverse dall'arabo. Anche se già precisato all'interno del presente articolo, si ripetono qui a mo' di sintesi le traduzioni scelte: la prima è quella di Luigi Bonelli, comunemente ritenuta la prima versione rigorosa e scientifica del Corano in lingua italiana. Seguono le traduzioni di Alesandro Bausani e Martino Mario Moreno, espressione della produzione accademica del secondo dopoguerra. Sono poi incluse due traduzioni di carattere confessionale: quella di Hamza Roberto Piccardo, rappresentativa delle versioni novecentesche e forse la più diffusa all'interno della comunità islamica italiana, e quella di Sheikh Abu-Abdullah Othman, scelta come esempio di traduzione confessionale del XXI secolo per la sua ampia diffusione e accessibilità. Completano il campione le versioni di Gabriele Mandel Khan e Ida Zilio-Grandi, espressione di un approccio erudito e accademico e realizzate entrambe nei primi due decenni del XXI secolo.

⁸⁷ Cf. J.W. Morris, "Qur'an Translation and the Challenges of Communication: Towards a 'Literal' Study-Version of the Qur'an", *Journal of Qur'anic Studies* 2/2 (2000), pp. 53–67, qui 60–61.

3.1. “*Al-Raḥmān al-raḥīm*”

Un esempio di ciò si ha nella nota coppia di nomi di Dio *al-raḥmān al-raḥīm* (cinque occorrenze oltre alle centotredici nel contesto della *basmala* iniziale).⁸⁸

Sul piano fonetico e della musicalità, gli effetti di allitterazione e assonanza prodotti dalla coppia *raḥmān* e *raḥīm* sono determinati da un particolare tipo di paronomasia (*taḡnīs qarīb*), in cui due termini praticamente identici nella sequenza consonantica si susseguono immediatamente, distinguendosi solo per lo schema vocalico da cui dipendono le differenze morfologiche e semantiche.

Sul piano semantico, i due aggettivi derivano entrambi dal significato di base della radice *raḥima* “avere o provare pietà, compassione, misericordia, clemenza”, sennonché, mentre il primo è di forma *fa'lān*, il secondo è di forma *fa'īl*. Ora, nella lingua araba, gli aggettivi di forma *fa'lān* denotano caratteristiche o qualità che appaiono e poi scompaiono ed esprimono sempre il fatto di possedere una qualità in maniera molto intensa, ma non duratura, come ad esempio nel caso di *ḡaw'ān* (affamato), *aṭṣ'ān* (assetato), o *ḡaḍbān* (arrabbiato). Gli aggettivi di forma *fa'īl*, invece, denotano caratteristiche o qualità stabili e certe ed esprimono sempre il fatto di possedere una qualità in maniera duratura, ma eventualmente anche in una forma non particolarmente intensa, come nel caso di *ḡamil* (bello), *qabiḥ* (brutto), *ṭawīl* (lungo), *qaṣīr* (corto), *karīm* (generoso), *baḥīl* (avaro).⁸⁹

Il Corano unisce quindi in un'unica formulazione le due forme aggettivali, quella di forma *fa'lān* che denota l'intensità senza denotare la persistenza e quella di forma *fa'īl* che denota invece la persistenza senza denotare l'intensità e il continuo rinnovamento, e descrive l'essenza di Dio per il fatto di possederle entrambe. Se si fosse limitato alla forma *raḥmān*, infatti, si sarebbe potuto pensare che si trattasse di una

⁸⁸ Q 1:3; 2:163; 27:30; 41:2; 59:22. Se si esclude la *sūrat al-fātiḥa* (Q 1) in cui la *basmala* (*bi-smi-lāhī r-raḥmānī r-raḥīm*) è contata come un vero e proprio versetto, una *basmala* introduttiva si trova al principio di tutte le sure del Corano a eccezione della *sūrat al-tawba* (Q 9), nota appunto anche come *sūrat barā'atun* proprio a causa dell'assenza della *basmala* iniziale.

⁸⁹ Cf. F.Š. al-Sāmarrā'ī, *al-Ta'wīr al-Qur'ānī*, Amman, Dār 'Ammār, 2006 (Baghdad, Wizārat al-Ta'līm al-Ālī, 1988'), pp. 39–40; R. Villano, “Ḥayrukum man ta'allama al-Qur'ān wa-'allahahu: Lo studio del Corano e la didattica dell'arabo”, in *Didattica dell'arabo e certificazione linguistica: Riflessioni e iniziative*, a cura di G. Lancioni e C. Solimando, Rome, Roma Tre Press, 2018, pp. 73–98, qui 91–92.

caratteristica accidentale che talora svanisce, come la sete nel caso di colui che è assetato o dissetato (“‘id law iqtāṣara ‘alā raḥmān la-ẓunna ‘anna hāḍihi ṣifa tāri’a qad tazūlu ka-‘aṣṣān wa-rayyān”), mentre se si fosse limitato alla forma *raḥīm* si sarebbe potuto congetturare che, pur trattandosi di una qualità stabile, il suo significato non esprimesse comunque l’idea di una continua elargizione e rinnovamento della misericordia, giacché anche a colui che è generoso possono ben capitare dei momenti in cui non elargisce con generosità e così anche colui che è misericordioso potrebbe, in linea teorica, attraversare dei momenti di questo tipo (“wa-law iqtāṣara ‘alā raḥīm la-ẓunna ‘anna hāḍihi ṣifa ṭābita wa-lākin laysa ma’nāhā istimrār al-raḥma wa-ṭaḡaddudiḥā”). In questo modo, invece, il Corano chiarisce che fra gli attributi di Dio vi è la misericordia e che essa è una qualità stabile, certa e duratura, e al tempo stesso chiarisce anche che si tratta di una caratteristica che si rinnova continuamente e che non si interrompe mai (“anna ṣifatahu al-ṭābita hiya al-raḥma wa ‘anna raḥmatahu mustamirra mutaḡaddida lā tanqaṭi’u”), descrivendo in questo modo gli attributi di Dio e le caratteristiche della sua essenza nella maniera più completa e inequivocabile possibile.⁹⁰

La resa italiana ideale dovrebbe dunque cercare di restituire la derivazione dei due aggettivi da una stessa base lessicale, da un lato per cercare di riprodurre almeno in parte l’effetto di allitterazione e assonanza prodotto in arabo dalla paronomasia, dall’altro per esprimere appieno la specificità semantica dei due aggettivi che, all’interno di un medesimo significato di base, esprimono intensità in un caso e persistenza e durata nell’altro.

Le traduzioni italiane

Vediamo che soluzioni propongono le sette traduzioni analizzate, attraverso l’occorrenza di tale coppia di termini nella *basmala* che costituisce il primo versetto della *sūrat al-fātiḥa* (Q 1:1), “bi-smi llāhi r-raḥmāni r-raḥīm”:⁹¹

⁹⁰ Al-Sāmarrāī, *al-Ta’bīr al-Qur’ānī*, pp. 39–40; Cf. Villano, “Ḥayrukum man ta’allama”, p. 92.

⁹¹ È interessante osservare le soluzioni proposte dai traduttori latini del Corano posti di fronte allo stesso problema. Roberto di Ketton traduceva “pii et misericordis”, mentre Marco da Toledo provava a rendere i due aggettivi attraverso il ricorso a una medesi-

Bonelli (1929)

Nel nome di Dio, misericordioso e compassionevole.

Bausani (1955)

Nel nome di Dio, clemente misericordioso!

Moreno (1967)

Nel nome di Dio Clemente e Misericordioso.

Piccardo (1996)

In nome di Allah, il compassionevole, il misericordioso.

Mandel Khan (2004)

Nel Nome di Dio, Misericordioso, Misericorde.

Zilio-Grandi (2010)

Nel nome di Dio, il Clemente, il Compassionevole.

Othman (2018)

Col Nome di Allāh il Compassionevole, il Misericordioso.

Analisi delle traduzioni italiane

Come si può vedere, la resa italiana è deludente nella maggior parte delle traduzioni. Sei traduzioni su sette (Bonelli, Bausani, Moreno, Piccardo, Zilio-Grandi, Othman) non provano neppure a riprodurre in qualche modo la derivazione dei due termini arabi dalla stessa radice, facendo evidentemente ricorso a una coppia di sinonimi privi di qualsiasi altro legame.

ma base lessicale: “Misericordis, miseratoris”. Nella traduzione di Egidio da Viterbo si incontrano diverse opzioni: Juan Gabriel, il primo traduttore a cui Egidio si rivolge, adotta, in riferimento alla *basmala*, tre soluzioni differenti: “Misericordis et clementis”, “pii, pietatoris”, “pii, misericordis”, mentre Leo Africanus, il secondo revisore della traduzione di Egidio, propone due soluzioni particolarmente interessanti: “Misericordioris et misericordissimi” e “misericordis, misericordioris”, che mantengono non solo la connessione etimologica fra i due aggettivi, ma cercano di riprodurre anche la relazione di grado fra la forma positiva *rahīm* e la forma intensiva *rahīmān* (cf. Rivera Luque, “Translatological Remarks”, p. 135). Marracci opterà invece per “Miseratoris Misericordis”, riprendendo, ma invertendola, la soluzione di Marco da Toledo.

L'uso dell'articolo determinativo, come proposto da Piccardo, Zilio-Grandi e Othman, risulta pleonastico e appesantisce inutilmente il sintagma in italiano.⁹² Molto più fluida in italiano e comunque aderente con il senso del testo arabo è la soluzione adottata da Bonelli, Bausani, Moreno e Mandel Khan, che preferiscono non riportarlo in traduzione.

La scelta delle diverse coppie di sinonimi (misericordioso/compassionevole; clemente/misericordioso; compassionevole/misericordioso; clemente/compassionevole) sembra rispondere principalmente a esigenze di musicalità, la cui valutazione è però troppo soggettiva perché possa essere affrontata in questa sede, oppure, più semplicemente, al desiderio di distinguersi dai traduttori precedenti. Notevole, in questo caso, la coincidenza lessicale, oltre che temporale, fra le soluzioni adottate da Bausani e Moreno.

La soluzione più efficace è senza dubbio quella proposta da Mandel Khan, che sfrutta l'alternanza di due formazioni lessicali connesse sul piano etimologico e derivate da un medesimo tema nominale ("Misericordioso, Misericorde"), restituendo, almeno in parte, l'effetto fonetico della paronomasia araba.

Sul piano semantico, inoltre, "Misericordioso" corrisponde sufficientemente bene a *rahmān* grazie al significato parzialmente intensivo che trasmette il suffisso -oso, che ha, fra le sue varie funzioni, quella di formare, appunto, da una determinata qualità o entità, un aggettivo che significhi "pieno di [quella qualità o entità]", come nel caso di ambizioso, bisognoso, muscoloso, boscoso, sassoso,⁹³ o può anche esprimere, a volte, una tendenza o una propensione particolarmente intensa a qualcosa, come nel caso di frettoloso, freddoloso, pauroso, lagnoso, geloso.⁹⁴

"Misericorde" rappresenta invece una voce dotta, derivata direttamente dal latino *misericordem*, ed è oggi lemma di uso raro o lettera-

⁹² Volendo a tutti i costi rendere in traduzione l'articolo determinativo presente nei nomi divini arabi, si dovrebbe allora optare per "Iddio", e non semplicemente "Dio", quando si traduce l'arabo *allāh*. A margine va segnalata, nelle traduzioni di Piccardo e di Othman, la scelta discutibile di non rendere l'arabo *allāh* con il suo corrispettivo italiano "Dio", o "Iddio", appunto, optando invece per l'improbabile traslitterazione "Allah", o "Allāh", con il rischio di generare un'inopportuna confusione in merito alla reale identità del referente. Inoltre, volendo ragionare secondo questa prospettiva, ci si potrebbe allora chiedere, trattandosi comunque di nomi divini, perché non lasciare dunque inalterati anche *ar-Rahmān* e *ar-Raḥīm*, giusto a titolo di esempio.

⁹³ Cf. *La formazione delle parole in italiano*, a cura di M. Grossmann e F. Rainer, Tübingen, Max Niemeyer Verlag, 2004, p. 397.

⁹⁴ Cf. *Ibid.*, p. 400.

rio. Pur nella distanza strutturale tra le due lingue, il termine risulta efficace nel rendere la qualità stabile e persistente espressa in arabo da *raḥīm*. Proprio in virtù della sua origine classica e del suo registro elevato, inoltre, conserva una sfumatura di solennità e intensità affettiva che si adatta bene alla traduzione di un attributo divino come *raḥīm*. Infine, la sua forma non marcata da suffissi moderni suggerisce un carattere più essenziale, riflettendo la semplicità morfologica e la stabilità semantica del termine coranico.

La proposta di Mandel Khan si rivela dunque molto curata e straordinariamente aderente alla lettera e al significato profondo del testo arabo, riproducendo inoltre un'interessante assonanza sul piano fonetico e musicale.

Tutte le altre traduzioni, partendo forse dal presupposto che l'effetto di assonanza possa risultare ripetitivo o pesante in italiano, ricorrono invece a una coppia di sinonimi, finendo però per alterare o quanto meno mancare di riprodurre il significato vero del testo.

3.2. Derivativi della radice ‘B-D nella “*sūrat al-kāfirūn*”

Un altro caso di studio particolarmente interessante, in relazione a quanto si viene dicendo, è l'alternanza di ben otto forme nominali o verbali derivate dalla stessa I forma della radice trilittera ‘B-D, cioè ‘*abada* (u) (adorare, venerare) nell'arco di soli quattro versetti nella *sūrat al-kāfirūn* (Q 109:2–5):

- 1) *qul yā-‘ayyuhā l-kāfirūn*
- 2) *lā ‘a‘budu mā ta‘budūn*
- 3) *wa-lā ‘antum ‘ābidūna mā ‘a‘bud*
- 4) *wa-lā ‘anā ‘ābidun mā ‘abadtum*
- 5) *wa-lā ‘antum ‘ābidūna mā ‘a‘bud*
- 6) *lakum dīnukum wa-liya dīn*

Sul piano fonetico e della musicalità, bisogna anzitutto osservare come la ripetizione (*takrīr*) di otto varianti morfologiche tratte dalla stessa forma derivata, concentrate nell'arco di soli quattro versetti al centro della sura (vv. 2–5), generi un effetto allitterante e quasi ipnotico che andrebbe considerato con attenzione e che il traduttore dovrebbe cercare, per quanto possibile, di rendere anche in italiano. Sul piano semantico, non è del tutto corretto parlare esclusivamente di ripetizione

(*takrīr*) perché, a un'analisi più attenta, tali espressioni mostrano, al di là di una superficiale similarità, differenze di significato anche molto importanti.⁹⁵

I versetti citati costituiscono un notevole esempio di alternanza di forme verbali e nominali riconducibili alla stessa radice. L'alternanza di tali forme è sempre possibile in arabo⁹⁶ e costantemente impiegata nel Corano con scopi retorici e semantici. Secondo Fāḍil Šāliḥ al-Sāmarrāʾī, questo tipo di alternanza nella lingua araba in generale, e nel Corano in particolare, deve essere sempre ricondotta a una regola generale secondo cui le forme verbali denotano l'avvenimento e il rinnovamento [di un'azione], mentre le forme nominali servono a denotare piuttosto la certezza e la stabilità ("al-fi'l yadullu 'alā al-ḥudūt wa-l-tağaddud wa-l-ism yadullu 'alā al-tubūt wa-l-istiqrār").⁹⁷

Il profeta, in Q 109:2–5, dichiara dunque di non adorare gli idoli attraverso il ricorso a una forma verbale al v. 2 ("lā 'a'budu") e attraverso il ricorso a una forma nominale al v. 4 ("wa-lā 'anā 'ābidun"), e in riferimento a entrambi gli aspetti del verbo, l'imperfetto ("mā ta'budūn") e il perfetto ("mā 'abadtum"), e dichiara invece che i negatori non adorano Dio attraverso il ricorso alla sola forma nominale usata due volte ai vv. 3 e 5 ("wa-lā 'antum 'ābidūna"), e sempre in riferimento a un unico aspetto del verbo, cioè a dire l'imperfetto ("mā 'a'bud").⁹⁸

Questo espediente permette di raggiungere la più completa chiarezza espositiva, poiché il profeta nega di adorare gli idoli attraverso il ricorso a entrambe le forme (verbale e nominale) e in riferimento a tutti i possibili tempi verbali ("wa-ma'nā ḍālika 'annahu nafa' 'ibādat al-'aṣnām 'an nafsihī fī al-ḥālatayn al-tābita wa-l-mutağaddida fī ḡamī' al-'azmina wa-hāḍā ḡāyat al-kamāl").⁹⁹

Se si fosse limitato all'uso della sola forma verbale, infatti, si sarebbe potuto insinuare che il suo rifiuto di adorare gli idoli potesse essere qualcosa che è capitato in un dato momento, ma che potrebbe altresì svanire in un altro ("iḍ law iqtāṣara 'alā al-fi'l la-qīla 'inna hāḍā

⁹⁵ Si veda, a titolo di esempio, 'A.R.Ḥ. Ḥabannaka al-Maydānī, *al-Balāgha al-'arabiyya*, vol. II, Damascus, Dār al-Qalam-Beirut, al-Dār al-Shāmiyya, 1996, p. 76.

⁹⁶ Si veda, sempre a titolo di esempio 'Amr ibn 'Uṭmān ibn Qanbar Sībawayhi, *al-Kitāb*, a cura di 'A.S. Ḥārūn, vol. I, Cairo, Maktabat al-Ḥanḡī, 1988³, p. 13.

⁹⁷ Al-Sāmarrāʾī, *al-Ta'bir al-Qur'ānī*, p. 22.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 28; Cf. Villano, "Ḥayrukum man ta'allama", p. 84.

⁹⁹ Al-Sāmarrāʾī, *al-Ta'bir al-Qur'ānī*, p. 28; Cf. Villano, "Ḥayrukum man ta'allama", pp. 84–85.

'amr ḥādīṭ qad yazūlu”), mentre se si fosse limitato all’uso della sola forma nominale si sarebbe potuto forse congetturare che, se da un lato questa sua caratteristica appariva come certa e stabile, dall’altro non era detto che avrebbe continuato a descriverlo senza che egli se ne distaccasse (“wa law iqtaṣara ‘alā al-ism la-qīla ṣaḥīḥ ‘anna ḥādīhi ṣifa ṭābita wa-lākin laysa ma’nāhu ‘annahu mustamirr ‘alā ḥādā al-waṣf lā yufāriquhu”). In certi casi, infatti, può capitare che una caratteristica si separi per un certo tempo da colui che la possiede abitualmente, anzi, spesso il significato delle forme aggettivali è proprio quello di descrivere una persona per come essa effettivamente è nella maggior parte dei casi, e anche a colui che è normalmente mite e mansueto può ben capitare di arrabbiarsi con qualcuno (“fa-’inna al-waṣf qad yufāriqu ṣāḥibahu ‘aḥyānan bal ma’nāhu ‘anna ḥādā waṣafahu fī ḡālib ‘aḥwālīhi fa-l-ḥalīm qad yaḡḍabu”), e così anche a colui che è normalmente generoso possono ben capitare dei momenti in cui non elargisce affatto, giacché la sua generosità non è certo una condizione che lo definisca in modo continuo, senza alcuna possibilità di separazione, neanche temporanea (“wa-l-ḡawād qad ya’tīhi waqt lā yaḡūdu fīhi ‘id huwa laysa fī ḥālat ḡūdin mustamirr lā yanqaṭi”).¹⁰⁰

E così il Corano, affinché nessuno potesse mai insinuare una cosa del genere a proposito del profeta, lo istruisce su come dichiarare la propria più completa estraneità all’adorazione degli idoli attraverso il ricorso a entrambe le forme, quella nominale che denota la certezza e la stabilità e quella verbale che denota l’avvenimento e il rinnovamento, e in riferimento a tutti i possibili tempi verbali, il passato, il presente e il futuro, attraverso l’utilizzo alternato di entrambi gli aspetti del verbo arabo, il perfetto e l’imperfetto (“tumma ‘innahu istaḡraqa al-zaman al-māḍī wa-l-ḥāl wa-l-istiqbāl bi-stī’mālīhi al-fi’l al-māḍī wa-l-muḍārī”), mentre, per quanto riguarda i negatori, la ripetizione letterale della stessa formula per due volte finisce per suggerire che la perseveranza del profeta sia più intensa della loro e che la sua condizione sia più completa della loro e che il suo rifiuto di adorare gli idoli sia oggettivamente più radicato e persistente del loro rifiuto di adorare Dio (“fa-’iṣrāruhu huwa ‘alā ṭarīqat ‘aqwā min ‘iṣrārihim wa-ḥāluhu ‘akmal min ḥālihim wa-l-nafī ‘anhu ‘adwam wa-’abqā min al-nafī ‘anhum”).¹⁰¹

¹⁰⁰ Al-Sāmarraʿī, *al-Taʿbīr al-Qurʿānī*, pp. 28–29; Cf. Villano, “Ḥayrukum man taʿallama”, p. 85.

¹⁰¹ Al-Sāmarraʿī, *al-Taʿbīr al-Qurʿānī*, p. 29; Cf. Villano, “Ḥayrukum man taʿallama”, p. 86.

Sul piano strutturale, infine, si può ancora osservare come i quattro versetti costituiscano una coppia di composizioni speculari del tipo a, b/b', a' (Io–voi/voi–io) che si ripetono una dietro l'altra e sono racchiuse a loro volta da una cornice caratterizzata da una perfetta *munāsaba* (collegamento) fra il significato del primo e dell'ultimo versetto: (Di: “O Negatori [a, b/b', a'; a, b/b', a'] voi avete la vostra religione, io la mia”) a formare una composizione concentrica caratterizzata da una simmetria perfetta del tipo: Profeta–negatori/Io–voi/voi–io/Io–voi/voi–io/voi–io (a, b/c, d/d', c'/c'', d''/d''', c'''/b', a').¹⁰²

Le traduzioni italiane

Vediamo adesso che soluzioni propongono le sette traduzioni italiane analizzate per la sura in questione:

Bonelli (1929)

1. Di: o miscredenti.
2. Io non adorerò *mai* ciò che *voi* adorare,
3. E voi non adorerete ciò che *io* adoro.
4. Nè io servirò ciò cui *voi* servite,
5. Nè voi servirete ciò cui *io* servo
6. Voi abbiatevi la vostra religione, io la mia.

Bausani (1955)

1. Di: “O negatori!
2. io non adoro quel che voi adorare,
3. né voi adorare quel che io adoro;
4. ed io non venero quel che voi venerare,
5. né voi venerare quel ch'io venero:
6. voi avete la vostra religione, io la mia”.

Moreno (1967)

1. Di': “O miscredenti,
2. io non adoro ciò che adorare voi
3. e voi non adorare ciò che adoro io
4. Né mai io adorerò ciò che adorare voi;

¹⁰² Sulla terminologia relativa alla retorica semitica e la divisione delle strutture retoriche coraniche in composizioni parallele, speculari e concentriche si veda, a titolo di esempio, M. Cuypers, *La Composition du Coran*, Pendé, Gabalda, 2012, pp. 61–92.

5. né mai voi adorerete ciò che adoro io.
6. Voi avete la vostra religione, ed io la mia”.

Piccardo (1996)

1. Di’: “O miscredenti!
2. Io non adoro quel che voi adorate
3. e voi non siete adoratori di quel che io adoro.
4. Io non sono adoratore di quel che voi avete adorato
5. e voi non siete adoratori di quel che io adoro:
6. a voi la vostra religione, a me la mia”.

Mandel Khan (2004)

1. Di’: “O miscredenti!
2. Io non adoro ciò che voi adorate;
3. voi non adorate ciò che io adoro.
4. Io non debbo adorare ciò che voi adorate;
5. voi non dovete adorare ciò che io adoro.
6. A voi la vostra religione, a me la mia religione”.

Zilio-Grandi (2010)

1. Di’: “Miscredenti!
2. Io non adoro quel che voi adorate
3. e voi non adorate quel che adoro,
4. e io non adorerò quel che adorate
5. e voi non adorerete quel che adoro.
6. A voi la religione vostra, a me la mia”.

Othman (2018)

1. Dici: “O miscredenti,
2. non adorerò ciò che adorate,
3. né voi adorate Colui che adoro.
4. né io adoro ciò che voi avete adorato,
5. né voi adorate Colui che adoro:
6. a voi la vostra religione e a me la mia religione”.

Analisi delle traduzioni italiane

Tutte le traduzioni analizzate, a esclusione di Piccardo e di Othman, cercano di riprodurre in italiano una forma di alternanza basata sull’opposizione fra le coppie di versetti 2–3 e 4–5, in un certo senso anche

coerentemente con la struttura stessa del testo arabo, caratterizzata effettivamente da due composizioni speculari, come si è visto.

Bonelli e Bausani ricorrono esplicitamente a due verbi diversi per tradurre le otto occorrenze (adorare/servire–adorare/venerare), nel tentativo di evitare un'eccessiva ripetitività in italiano e, probabilmente, per introdurre una differenziazione tra la prima e la seconda coppia di versetti, sacrificando però il significato profondo del testo arabo e il valore dell'alternanza tra forme nominali e verbali della stessa radice.

Inoltre, la traduzione di Bonelli risulta poco fluida sia sul piano musicale sia su quello grafico a causa dell'uso del corsivo, forse utile sul piano didascalico, ma certamente disturbante sul piano della godibilità linguistica immediata, mentre la versione di Bausani ha sicuramente il pregio di una straordinaria musicalità che la rende estremamente godibile e quasi ipnotica in italiano, pur omettendo tutti gli elementi evidenziati nell'analisi semantica.

Piccardo e Othman traducono il testo arabo in maniera letterale cercando di mantenere una devota aderenza al testo rivelato e fornendo senza dubbio uno strumento utile per la comprensione del significato profondo del testo stesso. Molto interessante, e perfettamente legittima sul piano linguistico, la scelta di Othman di tradurre l'arabo *mā* con l'italiano "ciò" quando il pronome è riferito agli idoli, e con l'italiano "Colui" quando è invece riferito a Dio. Sul piano fonetico e musicale, entrambe le traduzioni risultano un po' macchinose e poco naturali in italiano, almeno a parer di chi scrive, ma va anche detto che tale aspetto non rientrava, con ogni probabilità, tra le priorità dei due traduttori.

Appare difficilmente giustificabile, invece, la scelta di Moreno, Mandel Khan e Zilio-Grandi di introdurre un elemento accessorio nella seconda coppia di versetti (il verbo servile in Mandel Khan e il futuro in Moreno e Zilio-Grandi). Nel caso di Moreno e Zilio-Grandi, poi, la scelta risulta ancor più problematica poiché finisce per tradire il senso più profondo della sura non solo in relazione all'alternanza fra forme verbali e nominali, ma anche per quanto riguarda l'uso dei tempi verbali, rendendo la condizione dei negatori più completa anche sul piano temporale, e di fatto perfettamente assimilabile a quella del profeta.

4. Conclusioni provvisorie

Chiamiamo provvisorie le conclusioni a cui si è giunti poiché sono ricavate da un campione molto esiguo di versetti, e per di più in relazione a una singola, specifica caratteristica della lingua araba. Gli esiti non possono esser certo rappresentativi di un'intera traduzione, ma consentono già di identificare alcune tendenze.

La traduzione di Bausani si distingue per la musicalità e la forza evocativa che la rendono sorprendentemente efficace anche nell'esiguità del campione analizzato: l'effetto ipnotico prodotto dalla recitazione delle due coppie di versetti centrali di Q 109 (2-5) è, a giudizio di chi scrive, impressionante. In riferimento a Q 1, invece, la sua soluzione non risulta particolarmente originale.

Le traduzioni confessionali di Piccardo e Othman si distinguono per una strenua adesione alla lettera del testo rivelato, come era prevedibile, anche se la versione di Othman risulta, a giudizio di chi scrive, leggermente meno macchinosa. Sorprendentemente, mentre nel caso di Q 109 tale adesione si traduce in una fedeltà al dato semantico, nel caso di Q 1 nessuno dei due traduttori sembra prendere minimamente in considerazione la problematica relativa alla derivazione della coppia di termini dalla stessa radice – o base lessicale, in riferimento all'italiano –, questione su cui si erano già arrovellati persino i traduttori latini e cristiani del Corano.

La traduzione di Mandel Khan non condivide nessuna delle tendenze delle altre traduzioni confessionali e si distingue per l'erudizione e la raffinatezza nella scelta della coppia di termini con cui tradurre la coppia di nomi di Dio in Q 1, forse mutuata proprio dalla soluzione latina di Marracci, anche se la somiglianza con la soluzione di Leo Africanus e di Marco da Toledo è sorprendente. In riferimento a Q 109, invece, la sua resa non presenta elementi di particolare originalità.

Le traduzioni di Bonelli, Moreno e Zilio-Grandi, pur muovendo da premesse molto diverse, si rivelano nel complesso poco originali e prive di soluzioni realmente efficaci rispetto alle specifiche problematiche sollevate. Nel caso di Q 109, inoltre, la resa proposta da Moreno e Zilio-Grandi finisce addirittura per alterare il senso stesso della sura, ricorrendo a un espediente che non offre un risultato apprezzabile sul piano della musicalità e appare tutto sommato ingiustificato.

Come già detto, è evidente che i dati ricavati da un campione tanto esiguo non possono in alcun modo essere considerati rappresentativi di un intero volume. È tuttavia interessante osservare come, escluse le

due traduzioni propriamente confessionali (Piccardo e Othman), tutti gli altri traduttori ignorino completamente l'alternanza fra forme verbali e nominali, così come la variazione aspettuale nelle forme verbali di Q 109, concentrandosi invece unicamente sulla struttura a coppie dei versetti centrali e sulla pretesa musicalità della sura, e confermando, in un certo senso, l'impressione che il Corano non sia altro che un vero e proprio guazzabuglio (*farrago*), anche sul piano linguistico, lessicale e morfologico.

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Notes

Due recenti edizioni di *al-Tafsīr al-kabīr* di Abū l-Qāsim al-Quṣayrī

Rosalia Schimmenti

Two Recent Edition of *al-Tafsīr al-kabīr* by Abū l-Qāsim al-Quṣayrī

The *al-Tafsīr al-kabīr* is a classical Qurʾānic commentary attributed to Abū l-Qāsim al-Quṣayrī (d. 465/1072), a noteworthy Nishapurian mainly known for two works: *al-Risāla al-Quṣayriyya fī ʿilm al-taṣawwuf* and the Qurʾānic commentary *Laṭāʾif al-iṣārāt*, characterised by a Sufi exegesis. Since the 1960s a growing interest for this previously lesser known *tafsīr* took place, especially concerning the issue of his possible authorship by Abū l-Qāsim al-Quṣayrī or his son Abū Naṣr. This contribution proposes a *status quaestionis* of the studies on *al-Tafsīr al-kabīr*, with a particular focus on two recently-published editions: the first one, edited by al-Maymūnī al-Muṭayrī, is based on the manuscript preserved in the Süleymaniye Library of Istanbul, MS Laleli 198; the second, edited by Faṭīma al-Qāsimī, is based on the same codex and on another copy, preserved in the Çankırı library and identified by the number 575.

Keywords: al-Quṣayrī, *al-Tafsīr al-kabīr*, Qurʾānic Commentary

1. Introduzione

Abū l-Qāsim ʿAbd al-Karīm ibn Hawāzin al-Quṣayrī (m. 465/1072), figura autorevole della città di Nishapur tra il IV e il V secolo dell'egira, è stato un imam, teologo, giurista, esegeta coranico e maestro della tradizione sufi.¹ È noto in particolare per due delle sue opere: il trattato

¹ Per alcune notizie biografiche su al-Quṣayrī si veda: A.D. Knysh, "Translator Introduction", in Abu 'l-Qasim Al-Qushayri, *Al-Qushayri's Epistle on Sufism/Al-Risala Al-qushayriyya fi 'ilm Al-tasawwuf*, trad. di A.D. Knysh, Reading, Garnet Publishing, 2007, pp. xxi–xxvii; M. Nguyen, *Sufi Master and Qur'an Scholar: Abū l-Qāsim al-Quṣayrī and the Laṭāʾif al-iṣārāt*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2012; F. Chiabotti, "The Spiritual and Physical Progeny of ʿAbd al-Karīm al-Quṣayrī: A Preliminary Study

al-Risāla al-quṣayriyya fī 'ilm al-taṣawwuf e il commentario sufi del Corano *Laṭā'if al-iṣārāt*.² Oltre a quest'ultimo, al-Quṣayrī sembra aver composto anche un altro *tafsīr* che presenta un'esegesi di tipo classico, priva di elementi riconducibili al sufismo, che è stato però in gran parte trascurato, nonostante le attestazioni dei biografhi.³ La prima menzione di quest'opera si trova nel *Kitāb al-siyāq li-tā'riḥ al-Nisābūr*⁴ di suo nipote 'Abd al-Ġāfir al-Fārisī, che riferisce di un commentario coranico dell'autore con il titolo di *al-Tafsīr al-kabīr*.⁵ Una generazione più tardi, al-Hāfiẓ Ibn 'Asākir (m. 571/1176) nel *Tabyīn kaḍib al-muftarī* e Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ (m. 643/1245) nelle sue *ṭabaqāt* riferiscono: “[Al-Quṣayrī] compose il *al-Tafsīr al-kabīr* prima del 410”.⁶

Alcuni biografhi successivi hanno inteso questo riferimento al “grande commentario” (*tafsīr al-kabīr*) come un'indicazione alle *Laṭā'if al-*

in Abū Naṣr al-Quṣayrī's (d. 514/1120) *Kitāb al-Ṣawābid wa-l-amṭāl*, *Journal of Sufi Studies* 2 (2013), pp. 46–77; Ead., *Entre soufisme et savoir islamique: L'œuvre de 'Abd al-Karīm al-Qushayrī (376-465/ 986-1072)*, tesi di dottorato, Aix-Marseille Université, 2014; K.Z. Sands, “Introduction”, in Abū l-Qāsim 'Abd al-Karīm al-Qushayrī, *Laṭā'if al-Ishārāt/Subtle Allusions: Great Commentaries on the Holy Qur'ān, Sūras 1–4*, a cura di K.Z. Sands, Louisville, Fons Vitae, 2017, pp. IX–XXVI.

² Sono entrambe opere della maturità, composte nel 437/1045 o 1046.

³ Nella sua edizione di *al-Tafsīr al-kabīr*, 'Abdullāh ibn 'Alī al-Maymūnī al-Muṭayrī riflette sulle possibili cause dell'assenza di riferimenti a questo commentario nella successiva tradizione esegetica. Una delle ipotesi è che le *Laṭā'if al-iṣārāt* di al-Quṣayrī, insieme al *Taysīr fī al-tafsīr* di Abū Naṣr, possano aver parzialmente oscurato questo commentario precedente. Tra le altre ipotesi indicate considera la possibilità che gli esegeti successivi abbiano attinto a quest'opera senza citarla esplicitamente, oppure che siano stati impossibilitati a farlo perché parti del commentario andarono perdute nel tempo. Si veda l'introduzione di al-Muṭayrī ad Abū l-Qāsim al-Quṣayrī, *al-Tafsīr al-kabīr o al-Taysīr fī 'ilm al-tafsīr*, a cura di 'A. 'A.M. al-Muṭayrī, vol. I, Cairo, Dār al-lū'lu'a, 2022, pp. 11–200, in partic. 127–131.

⁴ 'Abd al-Ġāfir al-Fārisī, *al-Muntaḥab min al-siyāq li-tā'riḥ al-Nisābūr*, a cura di I. ibn Muḥammad al-Ṣarīfīnī, Beirut, Dār al-Fikr, 1993, p. 355.

⁵ Al-Muṭayrī riferisce che in una copia manoscritta del *Kitāb al-Siyāq li-tā'riḥ al-Nisābūr* di al-Fārisī alcune parole che risultano poco leggibili sono state indicate nel *al-Muntaḥab min al-siyāq li-tā'riḥ al-Nisābūr* con la data del 410 dell'egira. *Al-Tafsīr al-kabīr*, a cura di 'A. 'A.M. al-Muṭayrī, vol. I, Cairo, Dār al-lū'lu'a, 2020, p. 118. Si veda 'Abd al-Ġāfir al-Fārisī, *al-Muntaḥab min al-siyāq li-tā'riḥ al-Nisābūr*, selezione dei testi di I. ibn Muḥammad al-Ṣarīfīnī, a cura di M.K. al-Maḥmūdī, Tehran, Safir Ardehal, 2012, p. 525.

⁶ Ibn 'Asākir, *Tabyīn kaḍib al-muftarī fīma' nusiba ilā al-'imām al-'Aṣ'arī*, a cura di A. al-Ṣarafāwī, Damascus, Dār al-Taḥqāwā, 2018, p. 512: “Faṣannafa al-tafsīr al-kabīr qabla al-'aṣar wa-arba'i-mi'a wa-rattaba al-maḡālīs”. Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ, *Ṭabaqāt al-fuqahā' al-ṣāfi'iyya*, a cura di 'A. 'Umar, Cairo, Maktabat al-Taḥāfa al-Dīniyya, 2009, pp. 289–290: “Faṣannafa al-tafsīr al-kabīr qabla al-'aṣar wa-arba'i-mi'a”. Le traduzioni sono dell'autrice, se non diversamente specificato.

iṣārāt. Tuttavia, se la data del 410 dell'egira è corretta, non coinciderebbe con quella di composizione delle *Latā'if*, che è del 437/1045. Inoltre, lo studioso Martin Nguyen ha evidenziato un interessante riferimento presente nella *Risāla al-laduniyya* di Abū Ḥamid al-Ġazālī (m. 505/1111), in cui l'autore distingue il *tafsīr* di 'Abd al-Rahmān al-Sulamī (m. 412/1021), che presenta un'esegesi di carattere sufi del Corano, da altri tre *tafsīr* – di al-Ṭalabī (m. 427/1035), al-Māwardī (m. 450/1058), e al-Quṣayrī –, assimilando quest'ultimo a una tradizione esegetica più classica.⁷ Considerato il tipo di esegesi delle *Latā'if*, questa indicazione di al-Ġazālī avvalorava ulteriormente l'ipotesi dell'esistenza di un altro *tafsīr* di al-Quṣayrī, privo di elementi riconducibili a un'esegesi di carattere sufi.

Il riferimento ad *al-Tafsīr al-kabīr* che ha generato maggiore ambiguità è quello riportato da Ibn Ḥallikān (m. 681/1282), il quale ha affermato: “Egli [al-Quṣayrī] compilò *al-Tafsīr al-kabīr* prima dell'anno 410, chiamandolo *al-Taysīr fī 'ilm al-tafsīr*: esso è uno dei migliori commentari”.⁸ L'autorevolezza delle *Wafayāt al-a'yān* di Ibn Ḥallikān contribuì alla diffusione di questa attribuzione tra i biografi successivi⁹ e poiché *al-Taysīr fī ('ilm) al-tafsīr* è il titolo di un'opera attribuita a uno dei figli di al-Quṣayrī, alcuni studiosi moderni, tra cui Hellmut Ritter, hanno ipotizzato che il commentario noto come *al-Tafsīr al-kabīr* fosse in realtà l'opera di Abū Naṣr (m. 514/1120), denominata *al-Taysīr fī l-tafsīr*.¹⁰ Abū Naṣr fu il quarto figlio di Abū l-Qāsim al-Quṣayrī e, come quest'ultimo, svolse un ruolo significativo nella vita intellettuale e religiosa di Nishapur. Ricevette dal padre una solida formazione nelle discipline di *uṣūl al-fiqh*, *ḥadīth* e *tafsīr* e, dopo la morte di quest'ultimo, ne proseguì l'attività teologica, distinguendosi come promotore dell'aṣarismo presso la madrasa Nizāmiyya di Baghdad e

⁷ M. Nguyen, “*Al-Tafsīr al-kabīr*: An Investigation of al-Quṣayrī's Major Qur'an Commentary”, *Journal of Sufi Studies* 2 (2013), pp. 17–45, in partic. 22–23.

⁸ Ibn Ḥallikān, *Wafayāt al-a'yān wa-anbā' abnā' al-zamān*, a cura di I. 'Abbās, vol. III, Beirut, Dār Ṣādir, 1900, p. 206: “Ṣannafa al-Tafsīr al-kabīr qabla sanat 'aṣar wa-arba'i mi'a, wa-sammā-hu al-Taysīr fī l-tafsīr, wa-huwa min aḡwad al-tafāsīr”. Alcuni biografi successivi hanno riportato anche la variante *al-Taysīr fī al-tafsīr*, senza il termine *'ilm*.

⁹ Tra cui: al-Suyūṭī (m. 911/1505), al-Dāwudī (m. 945/1538), Ṭāṣḡubrī-Zāda (m. 968/1561), al-Zarkālī (m. 1396/1976). Si veda l'introduzione di al-Muṭayrī ad al-Quṣayrī, *al-Tafsīr al-kabīr*, vol. I, pp. 119–120.

¹⁰ H. Ritter, “Philologika XIII: Arabische Handschriften in Anatolien und Istanbul”, *Oriens* 3 (1950), pp. 31–107, in partic. 45–47.

contribuendo in modo rilevante alla trasmissione degli scritti spirituali paterni.¹¹ Tra le sue opere, una delle più note è *al-Taysīr fī l-tafsīr*.

Sebbene *al-Tafsīr al-kabīr* e *al-Taysīr* presentino delle similitudini, si tratta di due opere distinte. Nel 2022 sono state pubblicate due prime edizioni di *al-Tafsīr al-kabīr* e una di *al-Taysīr fī l-tafsīr*¹² di Abū Naṣr che hanno chiarito la distinzione tra le due; tra gli elementi più evidenti segnalati dai curatori, c'è il fatto che entrambe le opere presentano un'esegesi classica, ma *al-Taysīr* sembra caratterizzarsi per un approccio più letterale al testo¹³; anche le introduzioni degli autori ai due commentari presentano delle differenze: dei due *al-Tafsīr al-kabīr* si apre con una lunga introduzione metodologica sui principi dell'esegesi coranica. Un elemento interessante riguarda il commento al versetto 2:35, relativo al divieto per Adamo di avvicinarsi a "quest'albero" (*hādīhi al-šağarah*). Nel *Taysīr*, Abū Naṣr riporta un'interpretazione che attribuisce al padre, il quale indicherebbe "quest'albero" come "l'albero della prova" (*šağarat al-miḥnah*). Questa interpretazione è effettivamente presente nelle *Laṭā'if*,¹⁴ mentre *al-Tafsīr al-kabīr* non ne fa menzione.

2. Studi precedenti su al-Tafsīr al-kabīr

Tra i manoscritti¹⁵ catalogati come *al-Tafsīr al-kabīr* di al-Quṣayrī due in particolare sono stati oggetto di studio in quanto ritenuti plausibili

¹¹ R.W. Bulliet, *The Patricians of Nishapur: A Study in Medieval Islamic Social History*, Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press, 1972, p. 155. Chiabotti, "The Spiritual and Physical Progeny of 'Abd al-Karīm al-Quṣayrī". R. Baalbaki, B. Orfali e F. Chiabotti, *Poetry and Spiritual Insights: A Study and Edition of Kitāb al-Šawāhid wa-l-amṭāl by Abū Naṣr al-Quṣayrī (m. 514/1120)*, Beirut, American University of Beirut Press, 2025.

¹² *Al-Taysīr fī l-tafsīr*, a cura di M.Ḥ. al-'Abd Allāh, Beirut, Dār al-Lubāb, 2022.

¹³ Nel suo commento ad alcuni versetti, tra cui 2:1, 2:255 e 4:164, Abū Naṣr sottolinea chiaramente la necessità di attenersi al significato letterale del testo, a meno che non vi siano prove concrete che possano giustificare un'interpretazione metaforica.

¹⁴ *Al-Taysīr fī l-tafsīr*, commento al versetto 2:35: "Wa-kāna al-imām wālīdī raḥimahū Allāh yaqūlu: yu'lamu 'alā al-ğumlah anna-hā kānat šağarat al-miḥnah". al-Quṣayrī, *Laṭā'if al-iṣārāt*, commento al versetto 2:35: "Askana-hu al-ğannah walakin aṭbata ma'a duḥūli-hi šağarat al-miḥnah". Successivamente, un altro commentario che menziona questa espressione è il *al-Tafsīr al-baḥr al-muḥīṭ* di Abū Ḥayyān al-Garnāṭī (m. 745/1344), pur non esplicitandone l'autore: "Wa-qīla: šağarat al-miḥnah"; Abū Ḥayyān al-Garnāṭī, *al-Baḥr al-Muḥīṭ fī al-tafsīr*, a cura di Ṣ.M.J. al-'Aṭṭār, vol. I, Beirut, Dār al-Fikr, 2000, p. 256.

¹⁵ Le informazioni relative ai manoscritti non si basano su un mio confronto diretto, ma su quanto riportato dagli autori indicati.

parti di quest'opera esegetica:¹⁶ il primo, che si trova presso la Biblioteca Universitaria di Leida (MS Leida Or. 811), contiene il commento dal versetto 21 della sura 57 (*al-Ḥadīd*) al versetto 12 della sura 66 (*al-Taḥrīm*), mentre il secondo, originariamente situato nella moschea di Laleli a Istanbul e attualmente conservato presso la Biblioteca Süleymaniye (MS Laleli 198), si snoda dall'introduzione dell'autore sino al commento al versetto 20 della sura 6 (*al-An'ām*). Dal momento che i due manoscritti coprono sezioni differenti del commento al Corano non è stata possibile una comparazione diretta fra di essi.

Il MS Leida Or. 811 è composto da 295 fogli scritti in calligrafia *nashī* obliqua. Il testo è suddiviso in volumi (*muğalladāt*) e al foglio 240v un colofone che segna la fine di un volume indica che quella parte fu copiata da Muḥammad ibn al-Ḥasan ibn Aḥmad al-Sanī¹⁷ il 17 Ġumāda al-awwal 535 (corrispondente al 4 febbraio 1141). Nella pagina di apertura del MS Laleli 198, l'opera è attribuita ad al-Qūṣayrī, sebbene il nome dell'autore non ricorra nel resto della copia.¹⁸ Il testo è suddiviso in sessioni settimanali (*mağālīs*) numerate e datate.¹⁹

¹⁶ Oltre ai manoscritti di Leida e di Istanbul, vi sono altri codici che preservano dei testi erroneamente identificati con le opere *al-Tafsīr al-kabīr* o *al-Taysīr fī l-tafsīr* di al-Qūṣayrī, ovvero il MS 643 H della collezione Garrett di manoscritti arabi preservati presso la biblioteca dell'Università di Princeton, che in realtà conserva parti del commentario di Abū Naṣr; il MS 89 della Biblioteca Fayḍ Allāh Efendi e il MS 160/1 dell'Università di Istanbul, una cui copia fotografica è conservata presso la Biblioteca Nazionale King Fahd. Inoltre, al-Muṭayrī indica la probabile attribuzione dell'opera ad al-Qūṣayrī nel MS 26/1 della Biblioteca di Rampur e nel MS 5265 dell'Accademia delle scienze di Tashkent.

¹⁷ Riguardo al nome del copista Jan Just Witkam legge la sua nisba come "al-Sanī" (J.J. Witkam, *Inventory of the Oriental Manuscripts of the Library of the University of Leiden: Manuscripts*, vol. I, *Manuscripts Or. 1–Or. 1000*, Leiden, Ter Lugt Press, 2007, p. 342), mentre Rashid Ahmad Jullundhry come "al-Bustī" (R.A. Jullundhry, "Abū l-Qāsim al-Qūṣayrī as a Theologian and Commentator", *The Islamic Quarterly* 13 [1969], pp. 16–69, qui 38), e Martin Nguyen ipotizza "al-...[Ba]sanī (?)", sebbene riferisca di non essere riuscito a identificare questo personaggio (Nguyen, "Al-Tafsīr al-kabīr", p. 24).

¹⁸ Witkam, *Inventory of the Oriental Manuscripts of the Library of the University of Leiden*, vol. I, pp. 342–343. P. Voorhoeve, *Handlist of Arabic Manuscripts in the Library of the University of Leiden and Other Collections in the Netherlands*, The Hague, Leiden University Press, 1980, p. 358. Jullundhry, "Abū l-Qāsim al-Qūṣayrī as a Theologian and Commentator", p. 38. Nguyen, "Al-Tafsīr al-kabīr", p. 24. Il manoscritto è integralmente accessibile online: <https://digitalcollections.universiteitleiden.nl/view/item/1934500/pages> (25 ottobre 2025).

¹⁹ Le sessioni vanno dal 2 *Dū al-Ḥiġġa* 413 al 19 *Rābī' al-Awwal* 414 (corrispondenti al periodo dal 25 febbraio al 10 giugno dell'anno 1023). Il testo preservato nel manoscritto di Leida inizia a metà della sessione 461 e si conclude con la sessione 477: da ciò si evince

Il primo studioso ad aver preso in esame il MS Leida Or. 811 e ad aver proposto l'attribuzione ad al-Quṣayrī è stato Rashid Ahmad Jullundhry nel 1968,²⁰ il quale, dopo aver confrontato alcuni codici, giunge alla conclusione che solo il MS Leida Or. 811 possa essere identificato come *al-Taḥṣīn al-kabīr*. La sua analisi si basa sulla datazione del manoscritto, su un confronto con i commentari coranici di Abū Naṣr, Faḥr al-Dīn al-Rāzī (m. 606/1209) e al-Qurṭubī (m. 671/1272) e su un'indagine delle autorità menzionate, da lui identificate prevalentemente come autori mu'taziliti.

Per quanto importante, l'analisi di Jullundhry è stata considerata metodologicamente carente dagli studiosi successivi. Nel 1989, in una recensione alla traduzione tedesca della *Risāla* di al-Quṣayrī, Gerhard Böwering definisce lo studio di Jullundhry come "un'analisi nebulosa".²¹ Nel 2013, in un articolo intitolato *Al-Taḥṣīn al-kabīr: An Investigation of al-Quṣayrī's Major Qur'ān Commentary*, anche Martin Nguyen ha sollevato alcune criticità, a partire dall'assenza di un confronto con il MS Laleli 198. Per quanto riguarda le conclusioni formulate da Jullundhry in merito al rapporto tra il testimone di Leida e i *taḥṣīn* di Abū Naṣr, al-Rāzī e al-Qurṭubī, Nguyen sostiene che le somiglianze riscontrate tra i testi non costituiscano una prova sufficiente per affermare che al-Rāzī o al-Qurṭubī abbiano attinto direttamente da quel commentario. Inoltre, Nguyen rileva la presenza di espressioni soggettive nell'analisi di Jullundhry che ne compromettono l'impar-

che l'insegnamento veniva trasmesso con cadenza settimanale ogni martedì. Witkam, *Inventory of the Oriental Manuscripts of the Library of the University of Leiden*, vol. I, pp. 342–343.

²⁰ Jullundhry ha studiato il manoscritto di Leida nella sua tesi di dottorato: R.A. Jullundhry, *Taḥṣīn in Sūfī Literature with Particular Reference to Abū Al-Qāsim al-Quṣayrī*, Cambridge University, 1968. Una successiva pubblicazione è la già citata Id., "Abū l-Qāsim al-Quṣayrī as a Theologian and Commentator". La pubblicazione più recente di Jullundhry dal titolo *Qur'ānic Exegesis in Classical Literature with Particular Reference to Abū al-Qāsim al-Quṣayrī: A Critique of His Age and His Work on the Qur'ānic Exegesis*, Lahore, Institute of Islamic Culture, 2006, non comprende elementi sul *al-Taḥṣīn al-kabīr*.

²¹ Si veda la recensione di Gerhard Böwering a *Dans Sendschreiben al-Qushayrīs über das Sufitum*, a cura di R. Gramlich, Stuttgart, Franz Stainer Verlag, 1989, pubblicata su *Orientalia* 58/4 (1989), pp. 569–572, qui 571. Altri riferimenti ad *al-Taḥṣīn al-kabīr* si trovano in G. Böwering, *The Mystical Vision of Existence in Classical Islam: The Qur'ānic Hermeneutics of the Sūfī Ṣaḥl Al-Tustarī* (m. 283/896), Berlin, De Gruyter, 1980, p. 31, nota 119; e in Id., "The Light Verse: Qur'ānic Text and Sūfī Interpretation", *Oriens* 36 (2001), pp. 113–144, in partic. 137.

zialità e osserva che i criteri utilizzati per identificare la maggior parte dei nomi menzionati nel *tafsīr* come autorità muʿtazilite non risultano metodologicamente rigorosi.

A proposito del nome Abū ʿAlī, preceduto nel manoscritto dal titolo *ṣayḥunā* (nostro maestro), Jullundhry ritiene che si riferisca quasi sempre al maestro di al-Quṣayrī, Abū ʿAlī al-Daqqāq (m. 405/1015). Tuttavia, ipotizza che in alcuni casi possa riferirsi anche al muʿtazilite Abū ʿAlī al-Ġubbāʾī (m. 303/915 o 916) o al grammatico Abū ʿAlī al-Fārisī (m. 377/987). Jullundhry basa la sua ipotesi su un confronto con il *Mafātīḥ al-ġayb* di Fāḥr al-Dīn al-Rāzī e giustifica la presenza dell'appellativo *ṣayḥunā* riferito a un'autorità muʿtazilite sostenendo che “un vero *ʿālim* o sufi non è vincolato a seguire una scuola teologica”.²² Tuttavia, l'idea che il titolo *ṣayḥunā* possa riferirsi a un muʿtazilite è problematica, considerando che al-Quṣayrī aderì all'aṣʿarismo, pertanto, l'argomentazione di Jullundhry risulta metodologicamente debole.

Nonostante le criticità evidenziate, questo studio sul codice di Leida rappresenta un contributo importante per le ricerche successive su *al-Tafsīr al-kabīr*.

Per quanto riguarda il MS Laleli 198, esso è stato analizzato da al-Muṭayrī nella sua tesi di dottorato, discussa presso l'Università di Umm al-Qurā alla Mecca nel 2006 e intitolata *al-Taysīr fī ʿilm al-tafsīr li-l-Imām ʿAbd al-Karīm b. Hawāzin al-Qushayrī, min awwal al-kitāb ilā nihāyat sūrat al-Baqara: Dirāsa wa-taḥqīq*. La tesi presenta un'edizione parziale dell'opera – sino alla fine della seconda sura (*al-Baqara*) – preceduta da uno studio sulla sua attribuzione preservata, nel codice Laleli, ad al-Quṣayrī. Il manoscritto in questione è composto da 313 fogli e ogni pagina contiene un numero massimo di 21 righe. A differenza del MS Leida Or. 811, questo testo non è suddiviso in sessioni (*maḡālīs*), è copiato in una chiara calligrafia *nashī* con inchiostro nero e, nel complesso, la copia è ben conservata senza segni evidenti di cancellature o omissioni.

Lo studio di al-Muṭayrī si basa sulle testimonianze dei biografi, come Ibn Ḥallikān, sull'esame dei manoscritti che preservano *al-Tafsīr al-kabīr* o *al-Taysīr fī (ʿilm) al-tafsīr* e su un confronto con le citazioni di al-Quṣayrī presenti nel commentario di al-Qurṭubī. L'argomento centrale a sostegno di questa attribuzione si fonda sulla menzione del nome dell'autore nella prima riga dell'introduzione del

²² Jullundhry, “Abū l-Qāsim al-Quṣayrī as a Theologian and Commentator”, p. 43.

tafsīr, che si apre con le parole: “Nel nome di Dio, il Compassionevole, il Misericordioso. L’*Imām*, maestro [e] ornamento dell’Islam (*zayn al-Islām*), Abū l-Qāsim ‘Abd al-Karīm ibn Hawāzin al-Quṣayrī, disse: ‘Lode ad Allah, il Sostenitore della Verità con i Suoi segni evidenti [...]’”²³

Anche in questo caso, Nguyen ha sollevato alcune riserve di natura metodologica nei confronti dell’attribuzione dell’opera proposta da al-Muṭayrī. Il primo punto critico riguarda il titolo della tesi, *al-Taysīr fī ‘ilm al-tafsīr*, che al-Muṭayrī attribuisce al testo preservato nel MS Laleli 198, nonostante non venga riportato. Al-Muṭayrī motiva questa scelta sostenendo che si tratta di uno dei titoli con cui l’opera è conosciuta ed è il titolo indicato da Ibn Ḥallikān.²⁴ Tuttavia, come osserva Nguyen, questo è il titolo di un’opera di Abū Naṣr e, pertanto, in assenza di ulteriori prove, l’attribuzione in questione risulta poco convincente.²⁵ Un altro punto rilevato da Nguyen riguarda l’assenza di riferimenti al codice di Leida e ai pochi studi a esso dedicati.²⁶ In realtà, al-Muṭayrī prende in considerazione il MS Leida Or. 811, ma ne considera errata l’attribuzione ad al-Quṣayrī sulla base di un’affermazione di Qāsim al-Sāmārāʾī, il quale sostiene: “Posseggo una copia del manoscritto di Leida e l’ho già letta attentamente. Ho trovato che questo *tafsīr* non può essere di al-Qāsim al-Quṣayrī, bensì di suo figlio Abū Naṣr ‘Abd al-Raḥīm”.²⁷ A prescindere dall’ipotesi di al-Sāmārāʾī, un confronto con gli studi sul MS Leida Or. 811 sarebbe stato effettivamente pertinente alla sua analisi, poiché avrebbe consentito di mettere in evidenza le differenze tra i due codici. Riguardo all’elemento centrale dell’analisi di al-Muṭayrī – ovvero la presenza del nome Abū l-Qāsim al-Quṣayrī nella prima riga del testo –, Nguyen lo considera

²³ Introduzione dell’autore del *al-Tafsīr al-kabīr*, riportata in al-Muṭayrī, *al-Taysīr fī ‘ilm al-tafsīr li-l-Imām ‘Abd al-Karīm b. Hawāzin al-Qusayrī* (376–465 H), *min awwal al-kitāb ilā nihāyat sūrat al-Baqara: Dirāsah wa taḥqīq*, tesi di dottorato, Mecca, Umm al-Qurā University, 2006, p. 168: “Bismillāh al-Raḥmān al-Raḥīm. Qāla al-imām al-ustād Zayn al-Islām Abū l-Qāsim ‘Abd al-Karīm ibn Hawāzin al-Quṣayrī. Al-ḥamd li-llāh Nāsir al-ḥaqq bi-waḍiḥ a’lāmi-hi”.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 100–101.

²⁵ Nguyen, “*Al-Tafsīr al-kabīr*”, pp. 21–22.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 22. Nguyen si riferisce in particolare agli studi di Jullundhry.

²⁷ Qāsim al-Sāmārāʾī, “Arba’ rasā’il fī al-taṣawwuf”, *Maḡallat al-maḡma’ al-ilmī al-‘Irāqī* 18 (1969), pp. 242–256, qui 244: “Indī šūra min nuṣḥat Lāydun, wa-qaḍ qara’tu-hā bi-im’ān fa-waḡadtu anna hādā al-tafsīr lā yumkinu ‘an yakūna li-l-Quṣayrī Abī al-Qāsim bal li-ibni-hi Abī Naṣr ‘Abd al-Raḥīm”.

un elemento importante, ma sostiene anche che siano necessarie ulteriori prove per una definitiva paternità di al-Quṣayrī.²⁸

Nguyen attribuisce maggiore rilevanza all'ultima parte dell'analisi di al-Muṭayrī, basata su un confronto tra le citazioni di al-Quṣayrī presenti nel commentario di al-Qurṭubī, nell'opera *al-Taysīr fī l-tafsīr* di Abū Naṣr e nel MS Laleli 198. Al-Muṭayrī distingue le citazioni in cui al-Qurṭubī indica per intero il nome dell'autore, utilizzando la formula "disse Abū Naṣr 'Abd al-Raḥīm al-Quṣayrī", da quelle in cui il riferimento ad al-Quṣayrī è più generico, come nel caso di "disse al-Quṣayrī nel suo *tafsīr*", senza specificare se si tratti del *tafsīr* del "padre" o del "figlio".²⁹ L'autore fornisce alcuni esempi mostrando che in alcuni casi le citazioni sono presenti in entrambi i commentari – sebbene con delle formulazioni diverse –, mentre in altri casi si trovano esclusivamente nel *tafsīr* di Abū Naṣr. Alla luce di questo confronto al-Muṭayrī formula due ipotesi: la prima è che al-Qurṭubī avesse attinto da entrambi i *tafsīr*; la seconda che avesse tratto le citazioni esclusivamente da *al-Taysīr* di Abū Naṣr. Tra le due, al-Muṭayrī propende per la prima, considerando inoltre la presenza di citazioni simili nei due commentari come una prova indiretta dell'attribuzione dei due testi, rispettivamente, al padre e al figlio. Su questo punto, però, Nguyen sostiene che la presenza di elementi comuni nei due *tafsīr* non dimostra necessariamente che Abū Naṣr abbia attinto da quello specifico commentario, poiché è altrettanto plausibile che i due autori si siano riferiti a fonti esegetiche simili o comuni.³⁰ L'articolo di Nguyen, che è l'ultimo studio più completo su *al-Tafsīr al-kabīr*, si conclude con alcune ipotesi speculative. Lo studioso non esclude la possibilità che i manoscritti possano preservare parti dell'opera di al-Quṣayrī, ma mantiene la questione dell'attribuzione cautamente aperta.

3. Due recenti edizioni di al-Tafsīr al-kabīr

Nel 2022 sono state pubblicate le prime due edizioni di *al-Tafsīr al-kabīr* di al-Quṣayrī. L'edizione di al-Muṭayrī, pubblicata dalla casa edi-

²⁸ Nguyen, "Al-Tafsīr al-kabīr", p. 36. Chiabotti, *Entre soufisme et savoir islamique*, p. 400.

²⁹ Al-Muṭayrī, *al-Taysīr fī 'ilm al-tafsīr*, p. 105.

³⁰ Nguyen, "Al-Tafsīr al-kabīr", pp. 36–39. Chiabotti, *Entre soufisme et savoir islamique*, p. 400.

trice Dār al-lū'lu'a, completa il lavoro iniziato dallo studioso con la sua tesi di dottorato del 2006 sul MS Laleli 198. In questa edizione il curatore dà maggiore rilievo al nome *al-Taḥṣīn al-kabīr*, pur mantenendo nel titolo anche il nome *al-Taḥṣīn fī 'ilm al-taḥṣīn*. Per quanto riguarda l'analisi della presunta paternità dell'opera di al-Quṣayrī, risulta la medesima dello studio precedente e al-Muṭayrī sembra non nutrire alcun dubbio al riguardo. L'unica differenza riscontrabile riguarda l'ultima parte dell'analisi, a proposito del confronto delle citazioni di al-Quṣayrī nel commentario di al-Qurṭubī: mentre nella tesi al-Muṭayrī aveva sostenuto maggiormente la prima ipotesi, secondo la quale al-Qurṭubī avrebbe attinto da entrambi i *taḥṣīn*, in questa edizione propende per la seconda. Infatti, nonostante le difformità tra questi due commentari, sia dal punto di vista metodologico sia da quello esegetico, la presenza di elementi comuni costituisce per al-Muṭayrī una prova del fatto che Abū Naṣr abbia attinto dal *taḥṣīn* di suo padre e della corretta attribuzione di entrambe le opere.

L'edizione di *al-Taḥṣīn al-kabīr* curata da Fāṭima al-Qāsimī è stata pubblicata anch'essa nel 2022 dalla Fondazione Ibn al-'Arabī per la ricerca e la pubblicazione (Mu'assasat Ibn al-'Arabī li-l-buḥūṭ wa-l-naṣr). Il testimone principale utilizzato per questa edizione è il MS Çankırı 575, codice G, che si compone di 303 fogli, ciascuno dei quali contiene un massimo di 29 righe di testo, ed è redatto in una chiara calligrafia *nashī* con inchiostro nero. Prima di questa pubblicazione, il codice non era stato menzionato da alcuno studioso, pertanto questa edizione rappresenta il primo studio e confronto di tale copia con il MS Laleli 198, rispetto al quale comprende una sezione più ampia di testo, che inizia con l'introduzione dell'autore e si apre con le parole "lode ad Allah, il Sostenitore della Verità", e si estende fino al commento al versetto 55 della sura 12 (*Yūsuf*). Il codice presenta dei segni di deterioramento causati dall'umidità, che compromettono la leggibilità di alcune porzioni del testo. In particolare, i primi 56 fogli (ff. 1r–56r) mostrano uno sbiancamento nella parte superiore che rende leggibile il contenuto solo parzialmente. Per ovviare a tali problematiche, la curatrice ha fatto ricorso anche al MS Laleli 198.³¹

Fāṭima al-Qāsimī basa l'attribuzione del testo conservato nel MS Çankırı 575 ad al-Quṣayrī su tre elementi: le attestazioni dei biografici, la menzione del nome di al-Quṣayrī nella prima riga del manoscritto

³¹ Si veda l'introduzione di Fāṭima al-Qāsimī ad al-Quṣayrī, *al-Taḥṣīn al-kabīr*, a cura di F. al-Qāsimī, vol. I, Cairo, Mu'assasat Ibn al-'Arabī, 2022, pp. 11–32, in partic. 22.

e un confronto con altre copie. Per quanto riguarda il primo aspetto, vengono riferite le attribuzioni di alcuni autorevoli biografi, tra cui Ibn Ḥallikān, al-Subkī (m. 771/1370), al-Suyūṭī (m. 911/1505), e al-Dāwūdī (m. 945/1538).³² Come al-Muṭayrī, anche la curatrice di questa edizione considera l'attestazione di Ibn Ḥallikān come prova che il commentario intitolato *al-Tafsīr al-kabīr* sia noto anche come *al-Taysīr fī l-tafsīr*, sebbene scelga di pubblicare l'edizione sotto il primo titolo per evitare una possibile confusione con l'omonimo commentario di Nağm al-Dīn al-Nasafī (m. 537/1142).³³ Quanto alla presenza del nome di al-Quṣayrī nell'incipit della copia, anche al-Qāsimī lo considera un elemento probante la paternità del codice. Tuttavia, poiché nell'immagine del foglio 1r del MS Çankırı 575, riprodotta nell'edizione, il nome dell'autore non risulta leggibile, non è del tutto chiaro se si riferisca a questo codice o al MS Laleli 198.

Riguardo al terzo elemento della sua analisi, la curatrice riferisce un processo di ricerca e confronto tra testimoni che l'avrebbe condotta ad attribuire con certezza la paternità ad al-Quṣayrī; al-Qāsimī afferma che la prima copia da lei esaminata inizia con il commento al primo versetto della sura 38 (*Šād*) del Corano, senza però esplicitare di quale manoscritto si tratti. Riferisce inoltre di aver trovato successivamente un codice che inizia dalla sura *al-fātiḥa* e che presenta dei danni a oltre 50 fogli (probabilmente il MS Çankırı)³⁴, e dichiara di aver esaminato i codici raccolti, i quali contengono "l'interpretazione perfetta del Glorioso Corano" (*al-tafsīr al-kāmil li-l-Qur'ān al-Mağīd*).³⁵ Da quanto viene riportato nell'introduzione, sembra che questo confronto sia stato esteso anche ad altri testimoni oltre a quelli preservati a Çankırı e Istanbul, ma purtroppo la curatrice non esplicita ulteriori elementi.

³² *Ibid.*, pp. 12–13.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 14.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 12: "Wa-lammā waqaftu 'alā ūlā maḥṭūṭāt tafsīri-hi al-kabīr, wa-kānat tabda'u bi-tafsīr qawli-hi ta'ālā: 'Šād wa-al-Qur'ān dī al-dīkr' (Šād), lam akun ataşawwaru an a'mala 'alā ḥidmati-hā, wa-bi-ḥāşşa anna-hā lam tataḍamman tafsīrā kāmilā li-l-Qur'ān al-karīm. Tūmma waqaftu 'alā maḥṭūṭa uḥrā, wa-kānat tabda'u bi-al-Fātiḥa, ġayr annī wağadtu bi-hā talafā fī-hā yazīd 'an ḥamsīn lawḥa, mā zāda amr al-i'tinā' bi-naşr al-kitāb şu'ūba, ḥattā tawaffarat al-dawā'ī bi-ṭalab ba'd man yahtammu bi-naşr al-Dīn al-ḥalīş, fa-bada'tu riḥlat ġam' al-maḥṭūṭāt".

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 13: "Wa-lammā ṭabbatat nisbat ḥādā al-tafsīr ilā al-ustād al-kabīr, wa-iṭma'anna al-fu'ād bi-tawāl al-imdād, wa-iğtama'a bayn yadayy mā tayassara min al-maḥṭūṭāt allatī ṭabata bi-faḥşī-hā şumūla-hā 'alā al-tafsīr al-kāmil li-l-Qur'ān al-mağīd".

Complessivamente, rispetto agli studi precedenti, queste due recenti edizioni non sembrano offrire spunti decisivi per l'attribuzione dell'opera ad al-Quṣayrī. Ciononostante, il loro contributo è significativo innanzitutto perché rendono disponibile il testo in esame e in secondo luogo perché l'edizione curata da Fāṭima al-Qāsimī ha portato alla luce un manoscritto fino ad allora sconosciuto, che comprende una sezione di testo più ampia rispetto al MS Laleli 198, aprendo così la possibilità a nuove analisi e ricerche.

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Reviews

D.A. Michelson, *The Library of Paradise: A History of Contemplative Reading in the Monasteries of the Church of the East*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2022, 358 pp.

David Michelson's book makes a profound contribution to our understanding of ascetic reading practices that became established in the Syriac monasteries. While there have been a number of studies on ascetic writers belonging to the East Syriac tradition of the 7th and 8th centuries, the broad scope of this monograph allows the author to come to conclusions about both an ascetic practice and an ascetic theology of reading. Michelson's study also highlights the development of the manuscript traditions that came to define East Syrian ascetic reading, and that this reading was constituted by a canon of ascetic texts and their Syriac commentators. Thus, East Syriac contemplative reading was formed by composite manuscripts that provided a self-contained library of ascetic reading and a set of reading practices. The development of a canonical literature on asceticism is shaped by the commentary of Bābai Rabbā (d. 628) on the corpus of Evagrius of Pontus (d. 399) in Syriac (a corpus known as *Evagriana Syriaca*), and the arrangement by ʿĒnanišō of the sayings of the Egyptian Desert Fathers in the Syriac version of the *Paradise of the Fathers*. Michelson documents how the translation of the foundational texts of Egyptian desert monasticism into Syriac provided the basis for the emergence of a Syriac ascetic reading tradition that took its distinctive shape through its translators, commentators, and editors.

Michelson's book is divided into two parts, namely method and narrative, with the former exploring methodological questions for the study of contemplative reading. In chapter 2, the author makes a robust critique of the orientalist approach of the 19th century scholars to the Syriac monastic collections, an approach which ignored the use of this monastic literature in religious practice and viewed manuscripts in terms of their usefulness for European collections and audiences. Michelson focuses his attention on William Wright and William Cureton, who became responsible for the purchase and cataloguing of Syriac manuscripts for the British Museum. Wright and Cureton constructed a narrative about "the absence of proper reading" (p. 27) in the Syriac monastery of Dayr al-Suryān, a repository of early Syriac manuscripts that was of primary importance for these assistant keepers of the British Museum. The author argues that Syriac ascetic reading culture was invisible in the accounts of their visits to this monastery and their encounters with the monks, due to their idea of rescuing these manuscripts for "the critical aims of scholarly reading" (p. 30). Michelson seeks to retrieve

the medieval monastic reading traditions, entirely overlooked by this scholarly enterprise, through his study of the early ascetic movement of contemplative reading in the Church of the East. Wright's *Catalogue of Syriac Manuscripts in the British Museum* and *A Short History of Syriac Literature* are still foundational reading for the European history of Syriac literature and the collection of Syriac manuscripts now held in the British Library. Therefore, Michelson's study is a reminder that the assumptions of these early Orientalist scholars about the field of Syriac literature, which their work defined, need to be problematised and carefully reconsidered.

Chapter 3 asks whether there was a Syriac *lectio divina*, a contemplative reading practice established by the Benedictine rule. The development of this monastic tradition in the Latin West was explored in Jean Leclercq's classic study, *The Love of Learning and the Desire for God: A Study of Monastic Culture* (New York, Fordham University Press, 1982). Michelson attempts to highlight the development of an ascetic theology of East Syrian reading as a parallel tradition alongside the Benedictine one. The comparison of the *lectio divina* to East Syrian ascetic reading has already been made in Sabino Chialà's 2014 monograph on the importance of the reading of Scripture in the tradition of the Syriac Fathers (S. Chialà, *La perla dai molti riflessi: La lettura della Scrittura nei padri siriaci*, Magnago, Qiqajon, 2014). Michelson argues however that the East Syrian tradition should be seen as distinct from the Western *lectio divina*. He acknowledges the similarities in the contemplative reading traditions of the Eastern and Western monastic traditions and suggests that this reflects their common roots in the scriptural hermeneutics of the Desert Fathers of 4th-century Egypt.

In chapter 4, Michelson demonstrates how the influence and fusion of the ascetic theology of reading in Egypt with the "proto-monastic" Syriac tradition, exemplified by the *Book of Steps*, comes to fruition in the Syriac ascetic tradition of contemplative reading. Michelson emphasises how East Syriac ascetic reading practices had their origin in the reading curriculum of the School of Nisibis, and that the monastic reforms of 'Abrahām of Kaškar were derived from his experience of Egyptian desert monasticism as well as the scholastic culture of exegesis and ascesis at Nisibis. Michelson confines the story of the conflict with the scholastic tradition of exegesis that had been formalised by the School of Nisibis to a more limited role within his book. This would seem quite justified in view of that fact that this is a conflict already traced in studies such as Adam Becker's *Fear of God and the Beginning of Wisdom: The School of Nisibis and the Development of Scholastic Culture in Late Antique Mesopotamia* (Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006). Michelson does explore the nature of the conflict, arguing that East Syriac contemplative reading came out of the scholastic tradition, to form a reading curriculum and set of strategies that came into competition with those of the schools.

Contemplative reading thus takes definitive shape through its confrontation of the East Syrian schools and the scholastic tradition of reading Scripture. Michelson acknowledges that the rivalries of 4th-century Egypt between the classical *paideia* or "education" in Greek culture and the desert training of *paideia* are repeated in the late-6th-century Church of the East. The ascetic reading tradition of Evagrius of Pontus thus transposed into Syriac the ascetic education of the Egyptian Desert Fathers: a desert *paideia* described by Douglas Burton-Christie in his 1993 monograph, *Word in the Desert: Scripture and the Quest for Holiness in Early Christian Monasticism* (New York-Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1993). Michelson's work shows how the East

Syrian ascetic reform comes of the schools movement in “the overlapping domains and practices of old and new forms (philosophy vs. asceticism)” (p. 53).

Michelson devotes chapter 5 to the reading of the ascetic monk from Egypt Evagrius of Pontus in Syriac with Bābai Rabbā, in which he discusses the reception of the former in Syriac literature and ascetic practice. Bābai Rabbā made a definitive commentary on the corpus of Evagrius of Pontus which, Michelson argues, defined the theological framework for East Syrian ascetic reading. Bābai developed this conceptually rich term from Evagrius, *theōria*, for his Syriac readership, and translated it into Syriac as *ḥzātā*, “vision”, or simply transliterated from the Greek *theōria* into Syriac as *tēōriya*. Michelson shows how the term continued to be significant for later writers such as Dadišō‘ Qaṭrāyē. Chapter 6 looks at the maturation stage of East Syrian contemplative reading, through the Syriac version of the *Paradise of the Fathers* made by ʿĒnanišō‘ and with the addition of the commentary of Dadišō‘ Qaṭrāyē. The problem of the lack of a critical edition for the *Paradise* of ʿĒnanišō‘ is overcome with reference to the description of its contents made in the 9th century by Thomas of Margā in his *Book of Governors*, as well as the evidence of the surviving manuscript tradition of the Syriac *Paradise*.

Another question that follows from this study is whether contemplative reading in the West Syrian ascetic tradition followed the East Syrian’s in its general outline or developed a distinct one of ascetic theology from Evagrius of Pontus. Indeed, there are some intriguing insights offered by the scattered pieces of evidence quoted by Michelson from the West Syriac tradition. For example, in his section on “Great Mother of Teachers: Women as Contemplative Readers and Teachers of literacy” (chapter 4.11), he quotes from a Syrian Orthodox monastic rule that allows female ascetics to receive books, as an exception to the rule that men who are not from their immediate family cannot give them gifts. Michelson uses such evidence to argue for the importance of contemplative reading as a practice for ascetic women in the 8th century, and that scholarship has tended to overlook the role of ascetic women as teachers of contemplative reading and readers of ascetic texts. Michelson includes many examples from hagiographical accounts, including the 7th century life of the “spiritual mother” Širin, contained within another East Syrian work of ascetic theology, Sāhdōnā’s *Book of Perfection*.

The West Syrian tradition inherited the same ascetic authorities of Egyptian monasticism as the East Syrians, and they had their own manuscript traditions of the Syriac Evagrius. Indeed, Michelson shows that the earliest extant translation of Evagrius of Pontus in Syriac is of West Syrian provenance, British Library manuscript MS Add. 12,175 (dated to 534), and that there are even earlier citations of Evagrius in the writings of the West Syrian metropolitan, Philoxenus of Mabbug (d. 523). East Syrian ascetic texts of the 7th and 8th centuries, such as the *Paradise* of ʿĒnanišō‘, also appear in the West Syrian canon of monastic anthologies of the 12th and 13th centuries, as Herman Teule’s work has shown. West Syrian ecclesiastical leaders themselves wrote further commentaries on the Evagrius corpus, such as Dionysius Bar Šalībī’s 12th-century one on the *Kephalaia Gnostika*, a commentary which also utilised that of the East Syrian Bābai Rabbā. In the 13th century, Bar Hebraeus also drew on the theology of Evagrius of Pontus in his ascetic instructions of the *Ethicon* (*Ktābā d-iṭiqōn*) for the monastic solitary to withdraw in silence and solitude, to occupy himself in meditative reading and prayer. Following on from Michelson’s study, the connection of West Syrian ascetic reading practices to the East Syrian history of contemplative reading would be a valuable

subject for further research. Finally, Michelson's study puts special emphasis on the development of a Syriac vocabulary of spiritual exegesis and contemplative reading, which is partially incorporated into the general index. However, the creation of a separate and comprehensive glossary of these specialist terms would be a useful addition to Michelson's monograph in a second edition, for both specialists and non-specialists alike.

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M. Bulgen, *Kelâmın Nesne Kuramı: Cüveynî'de Cisim, Hareket ve Nedensellik* [Kalâm's Theory of Body: The Body, Movement, and Causality in al-Ğuwaynî], Istanbul, M.Ü. İlahiyat Fakültesi Vakfı Yayınları, 2024, 421 pp.

Over the past 20 years, the number of contributions on al-Ğuwaynî (d. 478/1085) has significantly increased, beginning to fill a gap in scholarship that has often been considered regrettable, especially given the high standing that al-Ğuwaynî occupies in the history of Islamic tradition. After Tilman Nagel's monograph, *Die Festung des Glaubens: Triumph und Scheitern des islamischen Rationalismus im 11. Jahrhundert* (München, Beck, 1988), and Paul E. Walker's translation of *Kitāb al-Irşād (A Guide to Conclusive Proofs for the Principles of Belief)*, Reading, Garnet Publishing, 2000), various works on al-Ğuwaynî have been produced. Among these are articles by Fedor Benevich ("The Classical Ash'ari Theory of *aḥwāl*: Juwaynî and his Opponents", *Journal of Islamic Studies* 27/2 [2016], pp. 136–175) and Mehmet Aktaş ("The Model of Universals in Kalām Atomism: On al-Juwaynî's Theory of *al-Aḥwāl*", *Nazariyat* 7/2 [2021], pp. 55–90), both focusing on al-Ğuwaynî's theory of states (*aḥwāl*), while the very recent monograph by Sohaira Z.M. Siddiqui, *Law and Politics Under the Abbasids: An Intellectual Portrait of al-Ğuwaynî* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2019), describes and explores al-Ğuwaynî's religious and intellectual project against the background of the historical and political scenario in which he lived.

Among this selection of recent publications, Mehmet Bulgen's work, *Kelâmın Nesne Kuramı: Cüveynî'de Cisim, Hareket ve Nedensellik* (Kalâm's Theory of Body: The Body, Movement, and Causality in al-Ğuwaynî), deserves attention from scholars, at the very least because it deals with a topic that has never been addressed in such specific way. In fact, although modern research has investigated extensively the physical theory of Islamic theology and its atomistic approach, until now no work had been exclusively devoted to al-Ğuwaynî.

In his monograph, Bulgen essentially aims at analysing the theories and concepts that al-Ğuwaynî adopts to explain the ontological status of beings within the physical world, including the nature of the body, movement, and causality. Taking a comprehensive approach, Bulgen reconstructs al-Ğuwaynî's theory by examining the entire body of his work, including *al-Aqida al-Nizamiyya*, *al-Sāmīl fī al-uṣūl al-Dīn*, *Kitāb al-Irşād*, *Luma' al-adilla*, *al-Burhān fī al-uṣūl al-fiqh*, and *al-Talbīs fī uṣūl al-fiqh*. In this regard, Bulgen divides al-Ğuwaynî's corpus into "pre-critical" and "critical" works (p. 396): books such as *al-Irşād*, *al-Sāmīl*, and *al-Aqida al-Nizamiyya*, where al-Ğuwaynî

seems to conform to the standard of his Aš'arite predecessors, fall into the first category, while works in which he effectively departs from the previous paradigm, for instance *al-Burhān*, belong to the second category. In particular, Bulgen observes that al-Ġuwaynī's critical attitude is manifested in the way he systematises the Aš'arite theological framework he inherited by standardising its concepts, vocabulary, and key themes.

In chapter 1, Bulgen addresses the theme of the body (*ġism*) and reviews the theories that preceded al-Ġuwaynī, offering an account of the three main Islamic theological traditions: Mu'tazilism, Aš'arism, and Maṭurīdism. Like several modern scholars have done before him, Bulgen shows how Muslim theologians describe existence and its bodily structures through the theory of atomism, thus funding Islamic theology on a physical and metaphysical model that significantly differs from the Aristotelian framework.

Chapter 2 deals with epistemology, emphasising the primary role that the proof through the impossible or *reductio ad absurdum* (*kalām ilā li-muḥāl/qīyās al-ḥalḥ*) would play in al-Ġuwaynī's methodology. Bulgen argues that, unlike earlier Aš'arite theologians who demonstrate their theories by interchangeably using different approaches, al-Ġuwaynī believes that *reductio ad absurdum* represents the only method that meets the epistemological standard of certainty (*yaqīn*) and can therefore provide necessary knowledge (pp. 112–115). In this respect, Bulgen remarks how al-Ġuwaynī makes extensive use of this type of explanation, particularly in books such as *al-Burhān*, where he sought to standardise the earlier Aš'arite tradition.

In chapters 3 and 4, Bulgen goes to the heart of the matter and analyses al-Ġuwaynī's atomistic theory, stressing in particular two main points. First, he observes that al-Ġuwaynī shows greater consistency in terms of theological vocabulary and uniformity of definitions than previous Aš'arite scholars. In this regard, Richard M. Frank had already underlined that early Aš'arite theologians described the key ontological features of bodies in an inconsistent manner, sometimes alluding to characteristics such as length, width, and depth, while at other times referring to the specific accident of conjunction (*iġtima'*) or adjunction (*ta'lif*) (see R.M. Frank, "Bodies and Atoms: The Aš'arite Analysis", in *Islamic Theology and Philosophy: Studies in Honor of George F. Hourani*, ed. by M. Marmura, Albany, State University of New York Press, 1984, pp. 39–53, esp. 50).

Second, Bulgen explains that al-Ġuwaynī supports and systematises Aš'arite atomistic theory by stressing the absolute discontinuity of the physical universe. Following in the footsteps of previous theological views, al-Ġuwaynī argues that atoms combine with each other, hence forming bodies, performing movements, and acquiring all their other characteristics only due to the constant activity of God, who continually creates the attributes corresponding to these actions. In other words, as Bulgen observes, al-Ġuwaynī shapes his system around the idea that God is the true and only agent who constantly causes all things that happen in the world, thus making something that is not continuous in itself, "continuous". This absolute discontinuity of the entire universe gives the Aš'arite cosmology the connotation of a rigorous occasionalism, a vision that ultimately differs from the Mu'tazilite scenario. Not surprisingly, the rest of the monograph deals with those topics in which this principle of absolute discontinuity emerges not only as a distinctive feature of Aš'arite theology but also, according to Bulgen, as a hallmark of al-Ġuwaynī's theological system.

In chapter 5 the author explains that, in accordance with Aš'arite view, al-Ġuwaynī considers accidents to be discontinuous in themselves: they do not last in time, as most of the Mu'tazilites believe, but are constantly recreated by God. In chapter 6 Bulgen focuses, among other things, on how al-Ġuwaynī refutes al-Nazzām's (d. 221–230/836–845) theory of leap (*tafra*), a physical conception that rejects atomism and supports the continuity of movement.

Finally, in chapter 7, Bulgen discusses the topic of causality, highlighting al-Ġuwaynī's refutation of the theory of generation (*tawlid*; *tawallud*). Although both Mu'tazilite and Aš'arite theologians consider God to be the immediate cause of all natural events, the situation drastically changes when it comes to the field of human action. In fact, while Mu'tazilites maintain that a person can ultimately generate (*tawlid*) a secondary effect in the universe, thereby treating human beings as free agents, Aš'arites reject this approach, stressing instead the crucial role that God plays in determining every human action. In this regard, Bulgen essentially points out that, in order to oppose the concept of generation, al-Ġuwaynī maintains that the principle of causality does not imply a necessary connection between cause and effect. According to Aš'arism, all events that occur in the world, including human actions and their consequences, represent a series of habitual or customary events (*'āda*), ultimately caused by God, which humans interpret as if one event necessarily determines the other. Bulgen observes that, on this point, al-Ġuwaynī anticipates the argument that al-Ġazālī would later develop in the 17th discussion of his *Tahāfut al-falāsifa* (pp. 359–368).

Overall, Bulgen deserves credit for drawing attention to this last point, as well as for his commendable approach that takes into account al-Ġuwaynī's entire corpus. However, despite these positive aspects, the monograph suffers from some significant shortcomings, one of them being the superficial attitude that Bulgen sometimes reveals throughout his analysis. For instance, in addressing the theory of accidents, Bulgen seems to describe an irreconcilable opposition between Aš'arites and Mu'tazilites, whereas current studies in this field provide a different and more nuanced picture. In particular, Ulrich Rudolph ("Occasionalism", in *The Oxford Handbook of Islamic Theology*, ed. by S. Schmidtke, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2016, p. 354) recently demonstrates that while authors such as Abū al-Hudayl (d. 227/842) admit the existence of permanent accidents, other Mu'tazilite theologians argue that, given their transitory ontological nature, accidents cannot last on their own. These antecedents, one for all Aḥmad ibn 'Alī al-Šaṭawī (d. 297/910), demonstrate that the Aš'arites developed their rigid occasionalist view, to some extent, by completing the cosmological theories advanced by their rivals as well as predecessors.

Another example of such superficial methodology is found in the discussion concerning *reductio ad absurdum*. In this case Bulgen could have – and indeed should have – gone a step further and sought the possible origin underlying al-Ġuwaynī's epistemological shift, rather than describing this new approach as if it had occurred in a vacuum. Recent perspectives would have helped Bulgen identify Avicenna as the most likely candidate, and not just because of the lengthy analyses of *reductio ad absurdum* found in his treatises. In *Al-Ghazālī's Philosophical Theology* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2009, pp. 29–30), Frank Griffel observes that al-Ġuwaynī can be considered the first Aš'arite theologian to have seriously addressed Avicenna's books, from which he draws exten-

sively in terms of ontological proof, as well as for several logical and epistemological matters. Perhaps deeming the topic non-essential to his research, Bulgen completely ignores the links between al-Ġuwaynī and *falsafa*, devoting only a brief mention to the subject at the end of his essay (p. 384, notes 23–25).

This choice highlights the second and major flaw in Bulgen's work: the limited scope of his investigation, which in turn derives from having adopted a one-dimensional approach. In fact, due to the exclusive focus on atomistic theory, Bulgen only investigates the general characteristics of al-Ġuwaynī's system, without addressing some important yet complex aspects of his innovative theological approach. This shortcoming becomes evident in the epilogue of the monograph, when Bulgen, in order to express his final position on al-Ġuwaynī, quotes and comments on some passages from Faḥr al-Dīn al-Rāzī (d. 606/1210). In particular, Bulgen highlights a quote from *Maṭālib al-ʿālīyya* in which al-Ġuwaynī is described as a firm supporter of atomism, and another from *Nihāya al-ʿuqūl* where al-Rāzī apparently reverses this perspective, stating that many Ašʿarite theologians, including al-Ġuwaynī, suspended judgment on the actual existence of atoms due to the counterevidence provided by Islamic philosophers (pp. 380–382). Bulgen then attempts to dispel the doubts raised by al-Rāzī's observations, summarising the evidence presented in the monograph. Al-Ġuwaynī adopted an atomistic approach not only in books that, according to Bulgen, conform to the earlier Ašʿarite tradition, such as *al-Šāmil* or *al-Aqida al-Niẓāmiyya*, but even in works in which he deviates from his predecessors, such as *al-Burhān*, where the differences exclusively concern questions of epistemology. In other words, according to Bulgen, there is no doubt that al-Ġuwaynī was seriously committed to atomism and, therefore, al-Rāzī's statements should be considered inaccurate on this point (pp. 384–394).

This analysis, which concludes Bulgen's monograph, reveals the internal flaw of his methodology. In short, although Bulgen is fundamentally correct in defending al-Ġuwaynī's atomism, the problem lies in the limited value of proving this thesis. In fact, arguing that al-Ġuwaynī adopted an atomistic approach, or noting that *al-Aqida al-Niẓāmiyya* contains such an ontology, represent a very general claim that provides no additional insight on the subject. Al-Ġuwaynī, indeed, lived in a period when the atomism/hylomorphism dichotomy was at its peak, and Islamic theologians used the former as a yardstick for their physical and metaphysical inquiry. Atomism therefore represents the general framework in which al-Ġuwaynī operates and not, as Bulgen argues, the most salient feature of his system. Moreover, this bias leads Bulgen to interpret al-Rāzī's words in a superficial manner. In fact, when considering the passages quoted by Bulgen, it must be borne in mind that al-Rāzī's statements are strongly influenced by the context in which they are found: it is no coincidence that al-Rāzī attributes atomism to al-Ġuwaynī in *Maṭālib al-ʿālīyya*, where this ontology is fundamentally accepted, while offering a different judgment in *Nihāya al-ʿuqūl*, a text in which al-Rāzī expresses many doubts on the matter, projecting his own suspension of judgment (*tawaqquf*) onto al-Ġuwaynī. In other words, al-Rāzī's opinion on al-Ġuwaynī tells us much more about the philosophy of the former than about the definitive position of the latter (on al-Rāzī's atomism see A. Dhanani, "The Impact of Ibn Sīnā's Critique of Atomism on Subsequent *Kalām* Discussions of Atomism", *Arabic Sciences and Philosophy* 25/1 [2015], pp. 79–104; E. Altaş, "An Analysis and Editio Princeps of Faḥr al-Dīn al-Rāzī's

Risālah: Al-Jawhar al-Fard”, *Nazariyat* 1/3 [2015], pp. 88–101; B. Ibrahim, “Beyond Atoms and Accidents: Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī and the New Ontology of Postclassical *Kalām*”, *Oriens* 48/1–2 [2020], pp. 67–122).

Instead of adopting such a generic approach, more recent studies have focused on some brief yet fundamental passages in which al-Ġuwaynī seems to introduce important innovations into the Ašʿarite atomistic scenario. Particular attention has been paid to *al-ʿAqida al-Nizāmiyya*, a text that, contrary to what Bulgen’s classification might suggest, presents a truly unique perspective. In addition to the evident traces of Avicenna’s teachings found therein, *al-ʿAqida al-Nizāmiyya* contains an explanation of human action that clearly deviates from the previous Ašʿarite model. In this respect, both Daniel Gimaret (*Théories de l’acte humaine en théologie musulmane*, Paris, J. Vrin, 1980, pp. 120–128), and Griffel (*Al-Ghazālī’s Philosophical Theology*, pp. 129–131) observe that, while in *al-Irṣād* al-Ġuwaynī explicitly denies that the temporally created power to act (*qudra muḥdata*), with which human beings are endowed by God, has a real effect in producing the corresponding action, in *al-ʿAqida al-Nizāmiyya* he seems to admit that the human will plays an active role during the entire process. This hypothesis finds further confirmation in a quotation from *Mafātīḥ al-ḡayb*, where Faḥr al-Dīn al-Rāzī attributes to al-Ġuwaynī a theory that opens to secondary causality, insofar as human will would actively contribute to the occurrence of the action. This latter theory is precisely what could be deduced based on *al-ʿAqida al-Nizāmiyya*, which al-Rāzī explicitly mentions in his reconstruction of al-Ġuwaynī’s thought. Therefore, these findings suggest that, in the last phase of his life, al-Ġuwaynī developed a new theory of causality that placed him beyond the boundaries of the previous Ašʿarite tradition. Unfortunately, Bulgen’s monograph does not deal with these elements, nor does it include the corresponding bibliography.

In conclusion, it can be said that, despite his effort to engage with al-Ġuwaynī’s entire body of work, Bulgen ultimately supports a generic and somewhat outdated thesis, especially when compared to other academic contributions. Bulgen believes that al-Ġuwaynī differs from his predecessors only for his superior epistemological background and for having standardised the Ašʿarite theological vocabulary. Aside from that, the Turkish scholar concludes that al-Ġuwaynī would have totally adhered to the views of his predecessors, including the radical occasionalist cosmology that is usually attributed to the early Ašʿarite school. In contrast, other modern scholars have found that the difference between al-Ġuwaynī and his predecessors is much greater: on the one hand, al-Ġuwaynī is the first Ašʿarite theologian to have truly delved into Avicenna’s theory, from which he draws many elements to improve the previous Ašʿarite tradition; on the other hand, al-Ġuwaynī seems to have pioneered important changes in Ašʿarite atomistic cosmology. In fact, while in some books he adheres to the pure occasionalist model, in the second part of his life al-Ġuwaynī might have modified this latter scenario by introducing the possibility of secondary causality. This element is even more significant when considering the key role that the concept of secondary causes plays in al-Ghazālī’s cosmological approach (see Griffel, *Al-Ghazālī’s Philosophical Theology*, pp. 216–221, 275–286). Be that as it may, the study on al-Ġuwaynī and on Ašʿarism during that period undoubtedly requires further research. Therefore, even if Bulgen’s monograph has some obvious limitations, the publication of this book will

hopefully stimulate further research in this field, and future scholars will benefit from the way in which the author has collected and analysed all the passages concerning al-Ġuwaynī's physical theory.

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