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 ʻĔnanīšōʻ 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 orientalising 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

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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 ʿAbrāhām 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 *tēoriya*. Michelson shows how the term continued to be significant for later writers such as Dadīšōʿ 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 ʿĒnanīšōʿ and with the addition of the commentary of Dadīšōʿ Qaṭrāyē. The problem of the lack of a critical edition for the *Paradise* of ʿĒnanīšōʿ 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 ʿĒnanīšōʿ, 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 Evagrian corpus, such as Dionysius Bar Ṣalībī'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-ītīqōn*) 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* [*Kalām*'s Theory of Body: The Body, Movement, and Causality in al-Ǧuwaynī], Istanbul, M.Ü. İlahiyat Fakültesi Vakfı Yayınları, 2024, 421 pp.

Over the past 20 years, the number of contributions on al-Ǧuwaynī (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-Ǧuwaynī 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-Iršād* (*A Guide to Conclusive Proofs for the Principles of Belief*, Reading, Garnet Publishing, 2000), various works on al-Ǧuwaynī have been produced. Among these are articles by Fedor Benevich ("The Classical Ashʿari Theory of *aḥwāl*: Juwaynī 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-Juwaynī's Theory of *al-Aḥwāl*", *Nazariyat* 7/2 [2021], pp. 55–90), both focusing on al-Ǧuwaynī'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-Ǧuwaynī* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2019), describes and explores al-Ǧuwaynī'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* (*Kalām*'s Theory of Body: The Body, Movement, and Causality in al-Ǧuwaynī), 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-Ǧuwaynī.

In his monograph, Bulgen essentially aims at analysing the theories and concepts that al-Ǧuwaynī 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-Ǧuwaynī's theory by examining the entire body of his work, including *al-ʿAqīda al-Niẓāmiyya*, *al-Šāmil fī al-uṣūl al-Dīn*, *Kitāb al-Iršād*, *Luma' al-adilla*, *al-Burhān fī al-uṣūl al-fiqh*, and *al-Talḫīṣ fī uṣūl al-fiqh*. In this regard, Bulgen divides al-Ǧuwaynī's corpus into "pre-critical" and "critical" works (p. 396): books such as *al-Iršād*, *al-Šāmil*, and *al-ʿAqīda al-Niẓāmiyya*, where al-Ǧuwaynī

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-Ǧuwaynī'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 (*ǧism*) and reviews the theories that preceded al-Ǧuwaynī, 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/qiyās al-ḫalf*) would play in al-Ǧuwaynī's methodology. Bulgen argues that, unlike earlier Aš'arite theologians who demonstrate their theories by interchangeably using different approaches, al-Ǧuwaynī 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-Ǧuwaynī 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-Ǧuwaynī's atomistic theory, stressing in particular two main points. First, he observes that al-Ǧuwaynī 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 (*iǧtimā'*) or adjunction (*ta'līf*) (see R.M. Frank, "Bodies and Atoms: The Ash'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-Ǧuwaynī 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-Ǧuwaynī 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-Ǧuwaynī 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-Ǧuwaynī's theological system.

In chapter 5 the author explains that, in accordance with Aš'arite view, al-Ǧuwaynī 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-Ǧuwaynī refutes al-Naẓẓām's (d. 221–230/836–845) theory of leap (*ṭafra*), a physical conception that rejects atomism and supports the continuity of movement.

Finally, in chapter 7, Bulgen discusses the topic of causality, highlighting al-Ǧuwaynī's refutation of the theory of generation (*tawlīd*; *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 (*tawlīd*) 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-Ǧuwaynī 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-Ǧuwaynī 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-Ǧuwaynī'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-Huḏayl (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-Ǧuwaynī'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-Ǧuwaynī 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-Ǧuwaynī 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-Ǧuwaynī'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-Ǧuwaynī, quotes and comments on some passages from Faḫr al-Dīn al-Rāzī (d. 606/1210). In particular, Bulgen highlights a quote from *Maṭālib al-ʿāliyya* in which al-Ǧuwaynī is described as a firm supporter of atomism, and another from *Nihāya al-ʿuqūl* where al-Rāzī apparently reverses this perspective, stating that many Aš'arite theologians, including al-Ǧuwaynī, 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-Ǧuwaynī adopted an atomistic approach not only in books that, according to Bulgen, conform to the earlier Aš'arite tradition, such as *al-Šāmil* or *al-ʿAqīda 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-Ǧuwaynī 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-Ǧuwaynī's atomism, the problem lies in the limited value of proving this thesis. In fact, arguing that al-Ǧuwaynī adopted an atomistic approach, or noting that *al-ʿAqīda al-Niẓāmiyya* contains such an ontology, represent a very general claim that provides no additional insight on the subject. Al-Ǧuwaynī, 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-Ǧuwaynī 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-Ǧuwaynī in *Maṭālib al-ʿāliyya*, 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-Ǧuwaynī. In other words, al-Rāzī's opinion on al-Ǧuwaynī 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 Faḫr 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-Ǧuwaynī seems to introduce important innovations into the Aš'arite atomistic scenario. Particular attention has been paid to *al-'Aqīda al-Niẓāmiyya*, 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-'Aqīda al-Niẓāmiyya* contains an explanation of human action that clearly deviates from the previous Aš'arite 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-Iršād* al-Ǧuwaynī explicitly denies that the temporally created power to act (*qudra muḥdaṯa*), with which human beings are endowed by God, has a real effect in producing the corresponding action, in *al-'Aqīda al-Niẓāmiyya* 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-ġayb*, where Faḫr al-Dīn al-Rāzī attributes to al-Ǧuwaynī 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-'Aqīda al-Niẓāmiyya*, which al-Rāzī explicitly mentions in his reconstruction of al-Ǧuwaynī's thought. Therefore, these findings suggest that, in the last phase of his life, al-Ǧuwaynī developed a new theory of causality that placed him beyond the boundaries of the previous Aš'arite 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-Ǧuwaynī'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-Ǧuwaynī differs from his predecessors only for his superior epistemological background and for having standardised the Aš'arite theological vocabulary. Aside from that, the Turkish scholar concludes that al-Ǧuwaynī would have totally adhered to the views of his predecessors, including the radical occasionalist cosmology that is usually attributed to the early Aš'arite school. In contrast, other modern scholars have found that the difference between al-Ǧuwaynī and his predecessors is much greater: on the one hand, al-Ǧuwaynī is the first Aš'arite theologian to have truly delved into Avicenna's theory, from which he draws many elements to improve the previous Aš'arite tradition; on the other hand, al-Ǧuwaynī seems to have pioneered important changes in Aš'arite atomistic cosmology. In fact, while in some books he adheres to the pure occasionalist model, in the second part of his life al-Ǧuwaynī 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-Ġazālī's cosmological approach (see Griffel, *Al-Ghazālī's Philosophical Theology*, pp. 216–221, 275–286). Be that as it may, the study on al-Ǧuwaynī and on Aš'arism 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-Ǧuwaynī's physical theory.

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