

**Al-Farabi's Commentary and Short Treatise on Aristotle's De Interpretatione**



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(M. Abdul Haq Ansari) and the "Doctrine of Redemption" (Muzammil Siddiqui), as well as "Reflections on the Roles and Educational Desiderata of the Islamist" (Ismail Ibrahim Nawwab), and a study by S. H. Nasr on the use of terms like Decadence, Deviation and Renaissance in the context of contemporary Islam. But for me, the most impressive chapter of the whole book is Ishtiaq Hussain Qureshi's outcry "Lost Opportunities. The Musing of a student of History," in which the Pakistani historian, who was always in the forefront of the Pakistan movement and whose works give witness of his unflinching commitment to the freedom of the Muslim community of the Indo-Pakistan Subcontinent, speaks about the problems which Pakistan and its cultural life have faced from its very beginning, and which grew worse after the breakup of the country, the tragic loss of East Pakistan. No one who loves Pakistan can read this beautifully written piece without being deeply moved.

The Festschrift is a worthy gift for Maulana Maududi, and the Western reader will learn much from it and find enough food for thought, even if he will miss references to many modern Western studies of Islamic culture and may not agree with all the formulations.

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*Al-Farabi's Commentary and Short Treatise on Aristotle's De Interpretatione*. Translated with an Introduction and Notes by F. W. ZIMMERMANN. Pp. clii + 237. (The British Academy, Classical and Medieval Logic Texts, III.) London: OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS. 1981. \$145.00.

This book represents a comprehensive study of al-Fārābī's expositions of Aristotle's logical treatise, the *De Interpretatione*. It includes a substantial Introduction, a translation of al-Fārābī's lengthy commentary and his much shorter treatise on the *De Interpretatione*, extensive notes and pertinent appendices and indices. The main text studied and translated, the *Commentary*, is one of al-Fārābī's very important works. It is also a difficult text, not without its share of the problematic. The *Short Treatise* is also important, particularly as it complements and sheds light on the former.

Al-Fārābī wrote different kinds of commentaries on Aristotle, including several of the type sometimes referred to as "large" or "great," in which the translated text is quoted and commented on section by section. The *Commentary* on the *De Interpretatione* is the only one of al-Fārābī's works of this type that is known to have survived. The translation of Aristotle's text it includes is that of Ishāq Ibn Hunayn (d. A.D. 910) and in its comments it offers expansions that go

considerably beyond Aristotle. This is seen, for example, in al-Fārābī's pursuance of the view that logic is concerned with the form of propositions, not their content, and that logical and linguistic forms are not identical. It is also seen in his comments on the notorious Chapter 19 of the *De Interpretatione* where he gives expression to one tradition of interpreting Aristotle on the truth status of statements about future contingents. According to this interpretation, a pair of contradictory statements about a future possible event must be exclusively either true or false. This, however, does not mean that one of the statements rather than the other is true. Their division of truth and falsity remains indefinite. Thus their truth value remains unknowable—unknowable to man, that is, not to God, al-Fārābī maintains. He then offers a discussion in which he argues that God's knowledge of future possible events deprives neither the events of their intrinsic contingency nor man of his freedom of the will.

Dr. Zimmermann's comprehensive Introduction includes discussions of al-Fārābī's theory of propositions, his logical vocabulary, the Greek background to his *Commentary*, his relations to his contemporaries and of the editions and manuscripts used for the translation. It provides correctives to some current views, for example that al-Fārābī's interpretation of Aristotle on future contingents was the earliest of its kind. It also calls for some adjustments to the view regarding the continuity of the philosophical tradition of the philosophical school of Alexandria in 10th century Baghdad. At the same time, however, it suffers from a tendency to offer the speculative interpretation as though expressing an established fact. We meet some of this, for example, in the discussion of al-Fārābī's relation to the Baghdad Christian logicians. There is also a tendency to be selective in its data. For example, references are made to al-Fārābī's negative attitudes to Islamic theology (*kalām*) in *Kitāb al-Hurūf*, but not to the passage (*Hurūf*, p. 133) indicating that *kalām* can have a proper function. Again, in discussing al-Fārābī's views on law (*fiqh*), no account is taken of its important discussion in *Kitāb al-Milla*. In general, the treatment of al-Fārābī's relation to Islamic law and theology does not give sufficient attention to his political philosophy. It also abounds with the speculative.

The printed Arabic text of the *Commentary* edited by W. Kutch and S. Morrow (Beirut, 1960) is based on one manuscript (Ahmad III, 439), dated A.D. 1144. In preparing the translation, the author examined this manuscript, comparing it with the printed text and two other much later ones (Tehran, Majlis 949 and Tehran Melli 370 ʿayn) that are very closely related. He has also examined the text of the translation of the *De Interpretatione* (without the commentary) in two other manuscripts (Paris, BN, 2346 and Ahmad III, 3362). His emendations to the printed edition include rehabilitating whole passages misplaced by the copyist. The

Arabic text of the *Short Commentary* was first edited by Dr. M. Küyel-Türker (Ankara, 1960). It is based on four manuscripts. In choosing the best readings for the translation, the author has carefully examined this edition and used a photographic copy of one of the manuscripts (Bratislava, 231). The corresponding pages of the above printed Arabic texts are given in the margins of the translations.

Turning to the translations, Dr. Zimmermann states that his primary aim is clarity, an objective which by and large he achieves effectively. What is implicit or not clear is made explicit and clear, the translation carrying within itself, as it were, an exegesis of the text. This, however, means that one encounters paraphrase and wide departures from the sentence flow and syntax of the original. Nuance is ignored (or missed) and one is left with an impression—probably a very erroneous one—that the author is unconcerned that al-Fārābī has a very personal Arabic style. Here we can only give a few brief examples. (All will be taken from the *Commentary*, the page and line numbers referring to the Arabic printed edition.)

In translating *fa inna al-jawhara laysa yumkinu an yakūna lahu mawḏūʿun aṣlan al-lāhumma illā an yushtaqqā li-l-jawhari . . .* (34, 406), the pivotal *al-lāhumma illā*, “unless,” is not translated. Its stylistic force and its function of intimately connecting the first sentence with the sentence that succeeds it are thus ignored. In fact, in the translation, the second sentence initiates a new paragraph. The construction here is destroyed, quite needlessly. The simplicity and verve of *wa hum anfusuhum yamtaniʿāna min dhālika* (84, 13), literally, “They themselves refrain from this,” is lost in its translation as “Their own principles would oblige them to reject this.” The gain in brevity when translating *hādhihi qaḏiyya kulliyya ṣaḥīha binafsihā* (85, 12) as “This universal statement is self-evidently valid,” is so slight that it hardly justifies departure from the more accurate, “This is a universal statement that is self-evidently valid.” *Wa-l-mufasssirūna yukthirūna fī hādha l-bāb* (70, 22) does not quite mean, “The commentators have more to say about this chapter.” The idea al-Fārābī wants to convey is that the commentators have discussed the subject at too great a length. The suggestion here is that they have belabored the point.

There are places where the translation goes astray because something is amiss with the original text. One suspects that the *fa innamā* in *fa matā wujida shayʿun fa innamā yūjadu ʿan sababīn . . .* (86, 27) should read *fa in mā*. There is probably a copyist’s omission of the word *min* after *istaʿzama* (223, 13); the word preceding the latter should probably read *limā*, not, as the author has it, *lammā*. Moreover, *istaʿzama* in this context means “to deem a serious error,” or its equivalent, rather than the author’s “thinks it a matter of importance.” The sentence would then read: *lajaʿalnā hādha-l-faṣla faṣlan yunāqīdu fīhi Arisṭūṭālisu Aflāṭūna limā istaʿzama [min] dhālika*.

It should be stressed, however, that as far as conveying the substance of al-Fārābī’s logical discussion is concerned, the translation is authoritative. Moreover, the Introduction and notes contain a wealth of important historical information on the Greek background to the *Commentary* as well as perceptive analyses. Although vulnerable to criticism, the book’s contribution to the history of medieval Arabic logic remains very significant.

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*Studien zur Komposition der mekkanischen Suren*. By ANGELIKA NEUWIRTH. Pp. 453. (Studien zur Sprache, Geschichte, und Kultur des islamischen Orients, Neue Folge, Band 10.) Berlin and New York: WALTER DE GRUYTER. 1981. DM 276; \$162.55.

Since the time of the publication of Richard Bell’s two-volume analysis of the composition of the Qurʾān (*The Qurʾān, Translated, with a critical re-arrangement of the Surahs*, Edinburgh, 1937, 1939), scholarly opinion has been divided on even the most basic questions regarding the chronology, composition, and history of the Arabic text of the Qurʾān. Critical scholars have long felt the need for a fresh approach and thorough reappraisal of these basic questions. Thus it has been with considerable anticipation that we have awaited the publication of this major literary analysis of the Qurʾān by Angelika Neuwirth, which was accepted in 1976 as a *Habilitationsschrift* by the Philosophical Faculty of the University of Munich. By any standards this is a major piece of research that will attract the attention of Qurʾān scholars for many years. After a ten-page introduction that presents the author’s approach, presuppositions, and some of her conclusions, this volume is divided into four long chapters and a thirty-five page excursus on accents in Classical Arabic poetry and in the Qurʾān. There are also bibliographies and indices, and sixty pages of transliterations of the Arabic texts of twenty-two complete suras.

The first chapter, on verse divisions (pp. 11–63), begins with a useful introduction to the traditional systems of verse divisions of the Qurʾān, based on Anton Spitaler’s 1935 study, *Die Verszählung des Koran nach islamischer Überlieferung*. This is followed by an explanation of the criteria used by the author for determining “the proper verse divisions”—rhyme, verse structure, and semantics. Then most of this chapter is devoted to a “critical examination” of the traditional systems of verse divisions (pp. 21–63). For each of the 85 suras treated in this volume, Neuwirth lists every verse division attributed to the Qurʾān reciters of Basra, Damascus, Mecca, Medina, and about six other systems