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IBN SAB'ĪN'S *SICILIAN QUESTIONS:* THE TEXT, ITS SOURCES, AND THEIR HISTORICAL CONTEXT

LAS *CUESTIONES SICILIANAS* DE IBN SAB'ĪN: EL TEXTO, SUS FUENTES Y SU CONTEXTO HISTÓRICO

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The *Sicilian Questions* are the earliest preserved text of the philosopher and Sufi Ibn Sab'īn of Murcia (c. 614/1217-668/1270). Even though the prologue of the text claims that it is a response to questions sent by Frederick II to the Arab world, it seems more likely that it was an introductory manual for Arab students of philosophy, dealing with four specific and controversial problems as a way of presenting general concepts of Aristotelian philosophy. This article analyses the structure and way of argumentation in the *Sicilian Questions.* Particular attention is being paid to the relationship between mysticism and philosophy and the sources of the text, above all the philosophical writings of Ibn Rushd. Ibn Sab'īn and his *Sicilian Questions* are interpreted as reflecting the intellectual milieu of late Almohad Spain. The text might have been originally composed in a *ṭalaba* context, and it also reflects some of the key concerns of Almohad ideology.

Key words: Ibn Sab'īn; Almohads; Philosophy; Sufism; Ibn Rushd.

Las *Cuestiones Sicilianas* son el primer texto conservado del filósofo y sufí Ibn Sab'īn de Murcia (c. 614/1217-668/1270). Aunque el prólogo del texto pretende que se trata de respuestas a preguntas mandadas por Federico II al mundo árabe, parece más probable que se trate de un manual introductorio para estudiantes árabes de filosofía, discutiendo cuatro problemas específicos y controvertidos como manera de presentar conceptos generales de la filosofía aristotélica. Este artículo analiza la estructura y la manera de argumentar en las *Cuestiones Sicilianas.* Dedica su atención en particular a la relación entre el Sufismo y la filosofía y a las fuentes del texto, sobre todo los textos filosóficos de Ibn Rušd. Interpreta a Ibn Sab'īn y sus *Cuestiones Sicilianas* como un reflejo del ambiente intelectual en el Oeste del Mediterráneo durante los últimos años de los Almohades. El texto fue posiblemente compuesto en un contexto que tenía que ver con los *ṭalaba,* y refleja también unos aspectos claves de la ideología Almohade.

Palabras clave: Ibn Sab'īn; Almohades; filosofía; sufismo; Ibn Rušd.

Introduction

Louis Massignon included in his *Recueil de textes inédits concernant l'histoire de la mystique en pays d'Islam* a short charac-

* I would like to thank Maribel Fierro, Charles Burnett and Salvador Peña Martín for their comments on previous versions of this article.

terisation of the philosopher and Sufi ʻAbd al-Ḥaqq b. Sabʻīn of Murcia (*c.* 614/1217-668/1270) which would be repeated many times in subsequent literature on intellectual culture in the Muslim West. Massignon presented Ibn Sabʻīn in the following terms:

> Philosophe andalou, aristotélicien sagace, mais d'esprit amer et tourmenté, il construisit une critique psychologique de l'histoire de la philosophie musulmane; et aboutit à une doctrine mystique hylémorphiste, où Dieu serait la "forme" des esprits et de tous les êtres. Il se serait, dit-on, suicidé à la Mekke, par désir de s'unir à Dieu. [1]

From this statement as well as from those of other authors it is evident that Ibn Sabʻīn's peculiar character as well as his ideas aroused a certain fascination among Orientalists. Ibn Sabʻīn's attractiveness for western scholarship was increased by the fact that he was identified as the author of a reply to philosophical questions sent by the emperor Frederick II to the Muslim world. [2] This text, entitled *The Sicilian Questions* (*al-Masāʼil al-Ṣiqilliyya*), its author and the context of its composition are the subject of this article. [3]

[1] *Recueil de textes inédits* (Paris, 1929), 123.

[2] Cf. Amari, M., "Questions philosophiques adressées aux savants musulmans par l'empereur Frédéric II", *Journal Asiatique,* 5, sér. 1 (1853), 240-274. [Reprint in Sezgin, F. (ed.), *Ibn Sabʻīn [d.c. 1269] and his Philosophical Correspondence with the Emperor Frederick II: Texts and Studies,* Frankfurt am Main, 1999]; Mehren, A. F., "Correspondance du philosophe soufi Ibn Sabʻīn Abd oul-Haqq avec l'empereur Frédéric II de Hohenstaufen, publiée d'après le manuscrit de la Bibliothèque Bodléienne, contenant l'analyse générale de cette correspondance et la traduction du quatrième traité sur l'immortalité de l'âme", *Journal Asiatique,* 7, sér. XIV (1879), 341-454. [Reprint in Sezgin, *Ibn Sabʻīn*]; Cabanelas, D., "Federico II de Sicilia e Ibn Sab'in de Murcia: las *Cuestiones Sicilianas*", *MEAH,* 4 (1955), 31-64.

[3] My doctoral thesis (Frankfurt am Main, 2005) includes a detailed study of the *Sicilian Questions,* a revised edition of the Arabic text and an annotated German translation. A revised version of my thesis has been published under the title *Philosophie und Mystik in der späten Almohadenzeit:* Die Sizilianischen Fragen *des Ibn Sabʻīn,* Leiden, 2006. A diplomatic edition of *The Sicilian Questions* was published by Şerefeddin Yaltkaya (*Correspondance philosophique avec l'Empereur Frédéric II de Hohenstaufen. Avant propos par Henry Corbin,* Paris, 1941) who also translated the text into Turkish (*Sicilya cevapları İbni Sebin'in Sicilya Kralı 2inci Fredrikin felsefi sorgularına verdiği cevapların tercemesidir,* Istanbul, 1934). An Italian translation has been published by Patrizia Spallino (*Le Questioni Siciliani, Federico II e l'universo filosofico, Introduzione, traduzione e note a cura di Patrizia Spallino, Presentazione di Bakri Aladdin,* Palermo, 2002). Studies of the text and the person have been published by Esteban Lator ("Ibn Sabʻīn de Murcia y su ʻBudd al-ʻārif'", *Al-Andalus,* 9 (1944), 371-417 and *Die Logik des Ibn Sabʻīn aus Murcia,* doctoral thesis, University of Munich, printed in Rome, 1942); George Kattoura (*Das mystische und philosophische System des Ibn Sab'in: Ein Mystiker aus Murcia,* doctoral thesis, University of Tubingen, 1977), Abū l-Wafā al-Taftazānī (*Ibn Sabʻīn wa-falsafatuhu*

Part I: Ibn Sab'īn of Murcia: a tormented spirit in times of trouble

Despite his prominence in the history of intercultural relations, little is known about Ibn Sab'īn himself. He was born in 613/1216 or 614/1217 in the Ricote valley in the area of Murcia in the Andalusian Levant, the *Sharq al-Andalus*. [4] The biographical sources tell us very little about Ibn Sab'īn's family and his education. It seems rather due to his later conduct and fame and possibly also to certain literary models that some medieval authors ascribe a noble descent and an education in secret sciences to Ibn Sab'īn. [5] Almost nothing is known about other members of Ibn Sab'īn's family. His father seems to have been part of the Almohad administration, as Ibn al-Khaṭīb (713/1313-776/1375) reports. [6] The same source records an account of a mission of a brother of Ibn Sab'īn by the name of Abū Ṭālib to the court of the pope in Rome, where he was identified as the brother of "the man who knows more about God than any other Muslim". Due amongst other things to chronological problems this account is highly doubtful and has not yet been convincingly explained in modern research. [7]

Ibn Sab'īn grew up in times of trouble. The 620s/1220s witnessed a rapid collapse of Almohad authority on the Iberian Peninsula. In 625/1228 an anti-Almohad rebellion started in the region where Ibn Sab'īn was born. Under its leader Abū 'Abd Allāh b. Hūd al-Mutawakkil this movement was soon able to bring the *Sharq al-Andalus* almost entirely under its control. [8] When Abū 'Abd Allāh

al-ṣūfiyya, Beirut, 1973) and Vincent Cornell ("The Way of the Axial Intellect: The Islamic Hermeticism of Ibn Sab'in", *Journal of the Muhyiddin Ibn 'Arabī Society,* 22 (1997), 41-79). References here are to the folio numbers of the Oxford manuscript so as to allow comparison with Yaltkaya's edition and other translations.

[4] The precise nature of the relation between Ibn Sab'īn and the Valle del Ricote is uncertain. The name might as well reflect an earlier connection of his family to the area. It seems, however, plausible that Ibn Sab'īn was born somewhere in the greater area of Murcia. I would like to thank Alfonso Carmona for drawing my attention to this problem.

[5] *Philosophie und Mystik,* 8-9.

[6] *Al-Iḥāṭa fī ta'rīkh Gharnāṭa,* M. 'A. 'Inān (ed.), Cairo, 1978, on Ibn Sab'īn iv, 31-38.

[7] For a more detailed discussion cf. my *Philosophie und Mystik,* 14-15, and my "Reading the Prologue of Ibn Sab'īn's *Sicilian Questions*", forthcoming in a volume published by the Officina di Studi Medievali, Palermo, on the occasion of the 25th anniversary of its existence.

[8] This phase of Andalusian history has been explored by Emilio Molina López, for example "Murcia en el marco histórico del segundo tercio del siglo XIII (1212-1258)", in F. Chacón Jiménez (dir.), *Historia de la región murciana,* III, Murcia, 1980, 187-263.

died in 635/1238, Murcia was exposed to a new period of political turmoil. In this year Ibn Sab'īn left the city in the direction of Granada first and then to Ceuta, following the route of many Andalusian emigrants in those years.

Ceuta was the African port closest to the European continent and had to absorb great numbers of refugees from the Iberian Peninsula at that time. Many Muslims sought refuge from the Christian *Reconquista* which showed increasingly brutal traits. Muslims and Jews fled from the Islamic parts of the Peninsula, leaving behind the political oppression of the Almohads as well as the violent opposition against this dynasty. It was in Ceuta that Ibn Sab'īn wrote his two books which deal with philosophical problems: the *Sicilian Questions* and, following that, the *Budd al-'ārif*. The publication of the latter apparently provoked Ibn Sab'īn's expulsion from the city, as al-Bādisī claims (see below).

What followed in Ibn Sab'īn's biography was a whole series of changes of residence. Time and again, it seems, he triggered suspicions, confrontations and open hatred among the local political authorities and *'ulamā',* and he was forced to continue his journey further eastwards. The last station of his travels was Mecca where he succeeded in gaining a certain influence over the Sharīf, Abū Numayy (reg. 652/1254-702/1301). In approximately 668/1270 Ibn Sab'īn died in the holy city, apparently under suspicious circumstances. Some sources mention that he committed suicide by cutting his wrists, a version adopted by Massignon. [9] Al-Bādisī claims that Ibn Sab'īn was poisoned on the order of the king of Yemen or his *wazīr*.

It is difficult to reconstruct a coherent picture of Ibn Sab'īn's career and especially to explain why exactly he was forced to leave his place of residence so many times – unless one dismisses these elements in the biographies as literary fiction that stylises Ibn Sab'īn as an ingenious spirit persecuted by stubborn orthodox theologians. Ibn Sab'īn's two books which deal with philosophy and which are particularly important for this article were both written in a relatively early phase of his life, in Ceuta. Most modern authors agree that Ibn Sab'īn

[9] This version can be traced back to Dhahabī (*Ta'rīkh al-Islām,* 'U. 'A. Tadmurī (ed.), Beirut, 1987-2004, here XLIX [1419/1999], 283-287 = n. 313) and is quoted by Kutubī (*Fawāt al-wafayāt,* I. 'Abbās (ed.), Beirut, 1973, on Ibn Sab'īn II, 253-255) and Fāsī (*al-'Iqd al-thamīn fī tārīkh al-balad al-amīn,* F. Sayyid (ed.), Cairo, 1385/1966, here v, 326-335).

composed his other writings in North Africa, after his departure from the Iberian Peninsula, but before his arrival in Mecca. There are many texts written by or attributed to Ibn Sab'īn which have not yet been explored, let alone been subject of an in depth analysis. [10] Nobody has attempted yet to date any of Ibn Sab'īn's writings apart from the two philosophical writings and a letter of recognition he wrote for Abū Numayy to the Ḥafṣid Caliph. [11] Yet we have an overall impression of the ideas Ibn Sab'īn developed in his later texts, which reveal a quite distinct, "radical" mysticism. [12] These ideas appear at times rather obscure, but they had a certain impact on other mystics in North Africa. Ibn Sab'īn's most famous disciple was Abū l-Ḥasan al-Shushtarī (612/1212-667/1269) who is today best known for his poems. [13] According to Shushtarī the meeting with his future master took place in Bougie in 646/1248. [14] Shushtarī was an adherent of the *ṭarīqa* of Abū Madyan at that time, but Ibn Sab'īn succeeded in gaining him as a follower. He became the leader of the Sab'īniyya in Egypt, while the supporters of Ibn Sab'īn in Damascus were led by Badr al-Dīn b. Hūd (633/1236-699/1300), a nephew of the above mentioned Andalusian rebel Abū 'Abd Allāh b. Hūd al-Mutawakkil. [15]

[10] For a complete list of Ibn Sab'īn's writings cf. the forthcoming Fierro, M. (dir.), *Historia de Autores y Transmisores Andalusíes* and my article in Lirola Delgado y Puerto (eds.) *Biblioteca de al-Andalus* 5, Almería, 2007, 29-38. The ideas of Ibn Sab'īn are currently analysed by Vincent Cornell, cf. "The Way of the Axial Intellect".

[11] Preserved by Ibn Khaldūn in his *Kitāb al-'ibar,* Beirut, 1959, VI, 634ff.

[12] See for example the texts presented by 'Abd al-Raḥmān Badawī, "Ibn Sab'īn y la oración mental", *RIEEI,* 4 (1956), 131-135, "El panteísmo integral de Ibn Sab'īn", *RIEEI,* 6 (1958), 103-108, and "Testamento de Ibn Sab'īn a sus discípulos", *RIEEI,* 5 (1957), 249-253; and Serguini, M., "Monorreligionismo y su significación unicitaria divina en los dos místicos murcianos, Ibn 'Arabī e Ibn Sab'īn", in A. Carmona González (ed.), *Los dos Horizontes (Textos sobre Ibn al-'Arabí), Trabajos presentados al Primer Congreso Internacional sobre Ibn al-'Arabī (Murcia, 12-14 de noviembre de 1990),* Murcia, 1992, 387-396 (Spanish) and 397-406 (French).

[13] Massignon, L., "Investigaciones sobre Šuštarī, poeta andaluz, enterrado en Damietta", *Al-Andalus,* 14 (1949), 29-57; El Nashar, A. S., "Abu-l Ḥasan al-Šuštarī místico andaluz y autor de zéjeles y su influencia en el mundo musulman", *RIEEI,* 1 (1953), 122-155 (Spanish) and 129-161 (Arabic). An edition of Shushtarī's Dīwān (*Dīwān Abī l-Ḥasan al-Shushtarī shā'ir al-ṣūfiyya al-kabīr fī l-Andalus wa l-Maghrib*) was published in Alexandria in 1960 by 'Alī Sāmī al-Najjār whose PhD thesis (University of Cambridge, 1965) contains an English translation of the poems. See also the translations by F. Corriente, *Poesía estrófica: (cejeles y/o muwaššaḥāt) atribuida al místico granadino Aš-Šuštarī,* Madrid, 1988.

[14] Massignon, "Investigaciones sobre Šuštarī", 33.

[15] Kraemer, J. L., "The Andalusian Mystic Ibn Hūd and the Conversion of the Jews",

Ibn Sab'īn's influence in North Africa, Egypt, the Levant and the Arabian Peninsula remained almost insignificant if compared with the overwhelming impact of his slightly older compatriot Muḥyī al-Dīn b. 'Arabī. Yet there are a certain number of people who were associated with Ibn Sab'īn and his ideas, among them for example 'Afīf al-Dīn al-Tilimsānī (610/1213-690/1291). Future research might reveal further detail about these followers of the *ṭarīqa sab'īniyya,* and it might also reveal how wide spread his ideas were and how far the (albeit limited) success of his school was founded upon his personal charisma. Some contemporary authors suggest for instance that Ibn Sab'īn might have been venerated as a Mahdī. [16]

Until today Ibn Sab'īn owes his fame in the West to his earliest known text, the *Sicilian Questions,* preserved in a unique manuscript in the collection of the Bodleian Library at Oxford. At the beginning of the *Sicilian Questions* Ibn Sab'īn addresses the recipient of his text with the words: *Ayyuhā l-za'īm al-mustarshid,* "o leader who is searching the right path". Conclusions regarding the identity of this leader can be gained from the prologue to the *Sicilian Questions.* According to this prologue, the king of the Romans or Byzantines (*malik al-Rūm*), the Emperor (*al-ambirṭūr*), the ruler over Sicily (*ṣāḥib Ṣiqilliya*), had sent questions to the Arab world without having received satisfying answers. Finally he was told about a man in the West, Ibn Sab'īn, to whom he sent his questions through the Almohad caliph al-Rashīd (reg. 630/1232-640/1242) and his governor in Ceuta, Ibn Khalāṣ (reg. since 636/1237-8). Not surprisingly, the answers removed every doubt of the Christian ruler.

On the basis of the Arab rulers and the titles of the emperor mentioned in the prologue the latter was identified with Frederick II (1194-1250). Sending questions to the Arab world is indeed in harmony with the emperor's fervent interest in Aristotelian and Arabic philosophy

IOS, 12 (1992), 59-73. See also Pouzet, L., "Maghrébins à Damas au VIIe/XIIIe siècle", *Bulletin d'Études Orientales,* 28 (1975), Damascus, 1977, 167-199.

[16] Fierro, M., "Opposition to Sufism in al-Andalus", in F. de Jong and B. Radtke (eds.), *Islamic Mysticism Contested: Thirteen Centuries of Controversies and Polemics,* Leiden, 1999, 174-206, here 197-198; Ferhat, H. and Triki, H., "Faux prophètes et mahdis dans le Maroc médiéval", *Hespéris-Tamuda,* 26-27 (1988-1989), 5-23, 23. For a discussion of this possible Mahdism of Ibn Sab'īn see my "The *Muḥaqqiq* as Mahdi? Ibn Sab'īn and Mahdism among Andalusian Mystics in the 12th/13th Centuries", in W. Brandes and F. Schmieder (eds.), *Endzeiten,* (Millennium Studies) Berlin/New York, 2008 (forthcoming).

and several other examples can be named for such a practice. Frederick used his stay in the Levant during his Crusade (1228/9) as an opportunity for conveying philosophical questions to Arab scholars. His court was home to some of the most important translators and authors of the thirteenth century and one of the most outstanding centres for the transmission of Arabic philosophy and science into the Latin West. [17]

Ever since Michele Amari called attention to the Oxford manuscript in an article published in 1853, [18] the *Sicilian Questions* have counted as one of the most impressive testimonies of intercultural intellectual contacts in the Middle Ages. Yet the contact between the Sufi-philosopher from Spain and the Christian emperor is not corroborated by any document from Frederick's side. As a matter of fact, the only testimony we possess for any contact between the two men is Ibn Sab'īn's statement in the prologue of the *Sicilian Questions* which he repeats in his *Budd al-'ārif.* [19] Among the biographical sources, it is only Ibn al-Khaṭīb who mentions that Ibn Sab'īn was challenged during his stay in Ceuta by Christian scholars who sent questions to the Muslim world. [20]

Is it plausible or even likely that Ibn Sab'īn invented this contact? Was it a manner of increasing his authority by demonstrating that his expertise was sought after even at the court of the great Christian ruler? Or possibly a clever and desperate method of justifying philosophical thought in an atmosphere that was hostile to the Aristotelian tradition in Islam? A closer look at the time and place of the composition of the *Sicilian Questions* reveals just how problematic the assumption of an authentic enquiry from Frederick might be. [21]

According to the prologue of the *Sicilian Questions* Ibn Sab'īn was commissioned during his stay in Ceuta, in around 638/1240, by the Almohad caliph to compose answers to Frederick II's philosophical questions. Doubts regarding such a version arise from several circum-

[17] Stürner, W., *Friedrich II,* Darmstadt, 1992-2000, on the intellectual life at court and contacts with the Muslim world, II, 342-457. See also Burnett, Ch., "Master Theodore, Frederick II's Philosopher", in *Federico II e le nuove culture, Atti del XXXI convegno storico internazionale,* Todi, 9-12 ottobre 1994, Spoleto, 1995, 225-285 and the issue of *Micrologus* on intellectual life at Frederick's court: 2 (1994).

[18] "Questions philosophiques", 240-274.

[19] Kattūra, J. (ed.), Beirut, 1978, 157.

[20] Ibn al-Khaṭīb, *al-Iḥāṭa.*

[21] For a more detailed discussion of the authenticity of the questions see my *Philosophie und Mystik,* 107-124 and my "Reading the Prologue".

stances: in 638/1240 Ibn Sab'īn was a young man in his early twenties. According to some of the biographical sources he had been able to attract a few disciples with his mystical ideas, [22] but there are no traces of an engagement in philosophical debates. Furthermore his place of origin was the Andalusian Levant, a region which harboured more than any other successful rebellions against the Almohads. Ibn Sab'īn might have been associated with the revolt of Abū 'Abd Allāh b. Hūd —after all, it was this leader who is reported to have sent Ibn Sab'īn's brother on a mission to Rome. Even though the circumstances are suspicious and might indeed be fictitious, the association with Ibn Hūd might betray a certain loyalty between these two families. The role of Badr al-Dīn b. Hūd as a leader of the *sab'īniyya* could be further evidence of a connection between the family of Ibn Sab'īn and the Banū Hūd.

During the last days of the Almohad regime Ceuta had to cope with a massive influx of immigrants from the Iberian Peninsula. The city was overcrowded and tensions grew between the local population and the Andalusian expatriates. According to al-Ghubrīnī (d. *c.* 704/1304) Ibn Sab'īn gathered poor and simple people. [23] Al-Bādisī (d. after 722/1322) reports that when Ibn Sab'īn's reputation as a philosopher spread in Ceuta, he was banished from the city by its governor, the very Ibn Khalāṣ who is supposed to have commissioned Ibn Sab'īn to compose the *Sicilian Questions.* This banishment by Ibn Khalāṣ is hardly in harmony with the version of the prologue, or, at least, requires further explanation.

Why, on the other hand, should Ibn Sab'īn have invented such an enquiry from the Christian ruler? There are several possible answers to such a question; two have already been suggested above. Furthermore, "questions and answers" are a popular genre of scientific literature in medieval Islam. There are several examples in philosophy and natural science, [24] and also in medicine, [25] where they may even have

[22] Ibn al-Khaṭīb, *al-Iḥāṭa.*; the passage about Ibn Sab'īn and his disciples in Kutubī (*Fawāt al-wafayāt*) refers to a later event, after the departure from Ceuta.

[23] *'Unwān al-dirāya,* ed. Beirut, 1979, on Ibn Sab'īn 237-238. The *fuqarā'* mentioned in this account might very well be literally poor people and not Sufis. For an impression of Ibn Sab'īn's possible "clientele" in Ceuta cf. Lozano, I., "La Hierba de los derviches y los mendigos, droga maldita en el islam", in C. de la Puente (ed.), *Identidades marginales, EOBA,* 13, Madrid, 2003, 329-346, 334-35.

[24] Cf. the article on "Masā'il wa-adjwibah" by H. Daiber in *EI*^{2}.

[25] Leiser, G. and al-Khaledy, N. (eds. and transl.), *Questions and Answers for Physicians: a Medieval Arabic Study Manual by 'Abd al-'Aziz al-Sulamī,* Leiden, 2004.

fulfilled a very practical purpose as examinations for physicians, whereas in other disciplines they were primarily intended for teaching. Generally speaking, questions and answers offer a good opportunity to simulate a classroom situation and structure the explanation of complex ideas according to didactic principles. They are an excellent and popular mnemotechnical device. Narrative contexts such as a Muslim sage answering questions of a non-Muslim ruler increased the attractiveness of the genre. Not least, an author capable of instructing a ruler deserved high respect. Finally, intellectuals in the Middle Ages subsisted as little on their thoughts alone as they do today. Many of them had to sell their knowledge in order to make a living. Ibn Sab'īn lived in one of the most vibrant trading centres of the Mediterranean. Maybe he learned from Italian merchants in Ceuta that Christian rulers were interested in Aristotelian philosophy and suspected a good deal.

Part II: *The Sicilian Questions:* structure and sources

The question of fiction or authenticity of the circumstances described in the prologue of the *Sicilian Questions,* interesting as it may be, should not stand in the way of an analysis of the contents of the text. Even if we cannot take its quality as an intercultural document for granted, it certainly is an important source for Arabic philosophy in the Muslim West after the death of its greatest son, Abū l-Walīd b. Rushd, in 595/1198.

Ibn Sab'īn deals with four of the most urgent problems of medieval philosophy: the eternity of the world, the divine science, the categories and the immortality of the soul. [26] The structure of his discussions reveals a well developed sense of philosophical methods and a certain training in the composition of texts. Ibn Sab'īn begins with a methodological critique of the questions. He admonishes his addressee, the sender of the questions, not to presuppose something which the question itself is directed at. He should for example not

[26] For reasons of its style, contents and position within the text I believe that the "fifth question" (a discussion of the *ḥadīth* "The heart of man is between God's fingers") is not part of the original text. The passage might very well have been written by Ibn Sab'īn, but at a certain stage the order of the pages of the manuscript containing the *Sicilian Questions* became mixed up with pages of the same or another manuscript.

take initially for granted that Aristotle was convinced of the eternity of the world and subsequently enquire about his demonstrative proofs for this claim (299b). Afterwards Ibn Sab'īn discusses the key terms of each problem and explains how they are used in various scholarly traditions (300a-304b). He continues expounding on the Aristotelian doctrines and their interpretations by authors of late antiquity and Islam. In this context Ibn Sab'īn uses the term *muqaddimāt,* i.e. "premises" (304b), yet "premise" needs to be understood here in a fairly ample sense. [27] In the answer to the question about the eternity of the world the general contents of the *Physics* and *De caelo* form the premises, interestingly not the ones of the *Metaphysics.* The problem of the eternity of the world serves here as a starting point to give a far more general introduction into Aristotle's *Physics.* Finally Ibn Sab'īn lists proofs for or against a certain doctrine (304b-307b) and concludes the chapter with a few remarks of his own, some of which possess a rather obscure character (307b-308b). Other chapters follow a similar order.

Altogether the *Sicilian Questions* can be read as an introduction into contemporary, i.e. medieval philosophy, structured according to clear didactic principles. [28] Logic, physics and metaphysics are represented by concrete problems. The way the critique is formulated seems to suggest as an audience or readership a student who might have learned one thing or another about Aristotelian philosophy, but who still does not have a clear idea of its terms and concepts and who is not yet able to apply them independently. Such a didactic character is confirmed by Ibn Sab'īn's repetition of the same general admonition with different concrete examples. One of the most important lessons the reader of the *Sicilian Questions* should learn is how to formulate a question and how not to presuppose the answer in the question itself. Ibn Sab'īn explains this principle in his critique of the

[27] The *muqaddimāt* also comprise the terminology involved in the discussion of a particular problem (301b); in the second question the use of *muqaddimāt* is somewhat more accurate (310b).

[28] One can very well imagine the success of an introduction to contemporary modern philosophy among first year students which is structured according to similar principles. One could, for example, take the problem of equal opportunity in a society without an equal distribution of wealth as a starting point and present an answer based on contemporary American liberalism. Following Ibn Sab'īn's understanding of *muqaddimāt* the author of such an introduction could present for instance John Rawls' theory of justice and his idea of a veil of ignorance as comparably ample "premises".

question about the eternity of the world referred to above. Similarly he criticises the manner in which the question about the categories is formulated (320b-322a): after the sender of the questions states that there are ten categories, he enquires about their number. Ibn Sab'īn follows Aristotelian principles in discussing the key terms before dealing with the problem in itself or in mentioning the interpretations of other authorities before expounding his own opinion.

On closer inspection however the impression of a clear structure of the *Sicilian Questions* requires reconsideration. If one tries for instance to follow Ibn Sab'īn's explanations regarding the immortality of the soul in detail, one can hardly fail to notice a certain lack of consistency. At the beginning Ibn Sab'īn distinguishes clearly five souls: the vegetable, the animal, the rational, the philosophical and the prophetic soul. Soon afterwards he mentions other souls without establishing their relation to these five souls, a sensitive soul and a nourishing soul for example. Without explaining the relevance for the problem in question, he addresses furthermore the problem of the intellects: the active and the passive intellect, the acquired, the material, the second intellect – or even: the second intellects. This lack of consistency is particularly irritating in view of Ibn Sab'īn's alleged audience and in view of the almost impertinent reproaches Ibn Sab'īn directs against the sender of the questions and his scanty knowledge of precise philosophical terminology.

Alongside the macrostructure which is based on clear didactic principles we find thus a sometimes rather confused microstructure. Overall the *Sicilian Questions* could be described as combining the principles of a mosaic (seemingly unrelated information in detail; only seeing the complete argument reveals a coherent picture) and of association (keywords give an opportunity for discussing issues without relevance for the general question).

Might there be any further explanation for this inconsistent microstructure? Might Ibn Sab'īn have introduced these uncertainties, inconsistencies and even contradictions deliberately? After all, the macrostructure of the *Sicilian Questions* suggests a certain talent for composing texts as well as knowledge of methodological principles. Ibn Sab'īn's talent may have had its limits, but there are also other possible explanations for his failure to explain philosophical problems in more consistent and coherent terms.

As is evident from his later writings and the biographical sources, Ibn Sab'īn was a convinced Sufi. Certain remarks in his *Sicilian Questions* and more lengthy expositions of his own mystical ideas (*taḥqīq*) in his *Budd al-'ārif* suggest that there was no sudden rupture in his intellectual development which turned a philosopher into a Sufi, even if his mystical ideas became more pronounced over the years. It is difficult to reconcile the esoteric tradition of Sufism, which takes much of its power from the personal experience of the *ṭarīqa,* with the speculative tradition of Aristotelianism which operates with the rational mind. [29] Muslim philosophers who followed the Greek tradition were usually not too keen on spiritual experiences. Ibn Rushd somehow appreciated certain Sufis, whereas their way of attaining knowledge was harshly rejected by Ibn Bājja. [30] The same is true the other way around: it is not easy to find a Sufi who sincerely valued the rationalist approach to truth. Ibn Sab'īn also expresses certain doubts regarding philosophy in his *Sicilian Questions.* In the answer to the question about the eternity of the world he states for example: "Had you enquired about truth in itself, I had explained it to you according to its own method. But you asked about the words of the Wise, i.e. Aristotle." [31] In a later mystical treatise Ibn Sab'īn points out that it is a requirement of the Sufi path to leave the terminology of the Peripatetics behind. [32] In the *Budd al-'ārif,* a work very similar to the *Sicilian Questions,* he even makes fun of the Peripatetics when he mentions in how many questions regarding soul and intellect the philosophers contradicted each other. [33]

Ibn Sab'īn was not the only author who suggested that the divergence of opinion among the philosophers pointed to a general weakness in the Aristotelian tradition of Islam. The same argument was employed by the "orthodox" author Ibn Taymiyya as an argument

[29] Other authors have adopted a more ample definition of philosophy and suggested that there were attempts to harmonise philosophy and Sufism. These claims are often based on esoteric interpretations of Ibn Sīnā in the tradition of Henry Corbin. Cf. for example Chittick, W., "Mysticism versus Philosophy in Earlier Islamic History", *Religious Studies,* 17 (1981), 87-104.

[30] Altmann, A., "Ibn Bājjah on Man's Ultimate Felicity", in *Harry Austryn Wolfson Jubilee Volume on the Occasion of his Seventy-Fifth Birthday,* Jerusalem, 1965, i, 47-87.

[31] 308b. In the second question he says that the Sufis came closer to the truth than the ancient philosophers because they understood the true nature of *tawḥīd* (310a).

[32] *Iḥāṭa,* in *Rasā'il,* 'A. Badawī (ed.), Cairo, 1965, 131.

[33] Kattūra (ed.), 145-146. See also *Philosophie und Mystik,* 166.

against the philosophical tradition of Islam in itself. [34] Ibn Sab'īn does not go as far as this in his *Sicilian Questions.* The text is clearly not a refutation of philosophy in itself, and Ibn Sab'īn finds an interesting way of dealing with these differences of opinion, as will be discussed below.

There is a long tradition of combining philosophy and mysticism in the Arab West. Ibn Sab'īn is part of this tradition. Especially in his later writings and in the polemical tradition he appears as a representative of a radical ontology with distinct mystical traits, often referred to as *waḥdat al-wujūd* or "unity of being". [35] According to this ontology there is only one real being, God. The created world is not only not necessarily existent (as Ibn Sīnā claimed), but possesses no real existence of its own. From an absolute point of view every concept of this world is a mere illusion, including the most important religious distinctions such as the one between believer and unbeliever. It is not surprising that Ibn Sab'īn became the target of fervent criticism from contemporary and later authors, above all Ibn Taymiyya (see below).

But are these convictions the key for understanding Ibn Sab'īn's attitude to philosophy? In spite of all their flaws the *Sicilian Questions* take philosophical premises, terminologies and arguments seriously. According to Ibn Sab'īn there are right and wrong ways of

[34] Abrahamov, B., "Ibn Taymiyya on the Agreement of Reason with Tradition", *Muslim World,* 82 (1992), 256-273. To Yossef Rapoport I owe the reference to the following article which throws new light on the role of philosophy in Ibn Taymiyya's thought: Hoover, J., "Perpetual Creativity in the Perfection of God: Ibn Taymiyya's Hadith Commentary on God's Creation of this World", *JIS,* 15 (2004), 287-329.

[35] The *waḥdat al-wujūd* plays almost no role at all in the *Sicilian Questions.* It is not unlikely that the term has more foundation in the polemical tradition than in Ibn Sab'īn's writings. It is attributed to a large group of "radical" mystics from al-Andalus, the most prominent of whom is Ibn 'Arabī. Even though Ibn 'Arabī defended a concept of a "unity of being" of creation and creator (the most extensive study on the subject has been published by W. Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge: Ibn 'Arabī's Metaphysics of Imagination,* Albany, 1989), he apparently never used the term. Both Ibn Sab'īn and Ibn 'Arabī might reflect with their concerns about *wujūd* the influence of Ibn Sīnā's metaphysics, as was the case with Ibn 'Arabī's disciple and adoptee al-Qūnawī (see G. Schubert's introduction and summary in her edition of *al-Murāsalāt bayna Ṣadr al-Dīn al-Qūnawī wa-Naṣīr al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī / Annäherungen: Der mystisch-philosophische Briefwechsel zwischen Ṣadr ud-Din-i Qonawi and Naṣīr ud-Dīn-i Ṭūsī,* Beirut, 1995). For a more detailed discussion of the relation of philosophy and Sufism in the *Sicilian Questions* see my "The al-Ghazālī Conspiracy: Reflections on the Inter-Mediterranean Dimension of Islamic Intellectual History", forthcoming in the proceedings of a conference on post-Avicennian philosophy and science held at Bar Ilan University, 21-23 November, 2005.

reading Aristotle. Even if philosophy is according to its subject matters on an ontologically and according to its methods on an epistemologically lower level than mysticism, one can lower oneself to this level of philosophy and argue according to its own methods. The contradictions in the *Sicilian Questions* are not a cunning method to alienate the reader from philosophical doctrines, nor are they a comparably cunning method to show a secret truth hidden between the lines and discernible only to experts as some interpreters read Maimonides. [36] In part unfortunately the explanation for inconsistencies in the *Sicilian Questions* might be very simple: they betray a certain negligence in the composition of philosophical texts and a lack of thorough knowledge of philosophical terminology on the side of their author.

Sources

Another explanation for the lack of inner consistency in the *Sicilian Questions* is the number of sources that Ibn Sab'īn used for his text which is in large part not an original composition but rather a compilation. Ibn Sab'īn does not try to harmonise the various sources or to establish hierarchies among them. Needless to say, he hardly mentions any of them by name. The most important sources fit into two categories: earlier eastern and later western authors.

1. *Eastern authors*

By far the most important source is al-Fārābī's *Falsafat Arisṭūṭālīs*. Several folia of the Oxford manuscript (302a-304b and 310b-313a) are an excerpt of this text. In explaining the premises of the Aristotelian doctrines, for example, Ibn Sab'īn does not follow the texts by Aristotle himself, but the "Second Teacher" al-Fārābī. Not surprising is the appearance of two quotations from the *Kitāb fī khayr al-maḥḍ* (the Arabic *Liber de Causis*) and that another quotation with

[36] Neither employed Ibn Sab'īn the skilful techniques of Ibn 'Arabī which M. Sells has described as "mystical dialectics" ("Ibn 'Arabī's Polished Mirror: Perspective Shift and Meaning Event", *Studia Islamica,* 67 (1988), 121-149).

a Neoplatonic character concerning the order of emanations is taken from the *Rasā'il* of the Brethren of Purity.

All three texts, *Falsafat Arisṭūṭālīs,* the *Kitāb fī khayr al-maḥḍ* and the *Rasā'il* of the Ikhwān al-ṣafā', were written in the ninth-tenth centuries in the heartland of the Arab world and were introduced at an early stage to the Iberian Peninsula where they developed an extensive and long-lasting influence. Numerous testimonies attest to the prominence of these texts in the Arab West. The influence of al-Fārābī's logical works equalled even that of Aristotle's *Organon.* Ibn Bājja's commentaries on logic are not based on Aristotle, but on Fārābī's logical writings. The same applies to Ibn Rushd's *Short Commentary* on the *Organon.* Ibn Rushd strongly recommended Fārābī's texts on logic to the readers of his *Short Commentary* on the *Physics.* Ibn Sab'īn himself confirms this authority in logic in a passage on al-Fārābī in his *Budd al-'ārif.* [37] The influence of the "Second Teacher" stretched beyond logic. Maimonides, who also acknowledged the importance of al-Fārābī in this field, relied significantly on Fārābī's political philosophy. [38]

It is more difficult to assess the impact the other two texts, the *Kitāb fī khayr al-maḥḍ* and the *Rasā'il* of the Ikhwān al-ṣafā', had in the western Mediterranean, given that their character as authorities might be less tangible in explicit references than is the case with al-Fārābī. Richard Taylor has pointed out some of the traces of the Arabic *Liber de Causis,* [39] and several scholars have discussed the influence of the *Rasā'il* of the Ikhwān al-ṣafā' on individual authors such as Ibn Ṭufayl and Ibn Qasī. [40]

In all three cases the importance in the medieval western Mediterranean is corroborated by the fact that the texts were influential not only among Muslim authors, but also among Jews and Christians.

[37] Kattūra (ed.), 143-144.

[38] Berman, L., "Maimonides, the Disciple of Alfārābī", *IOS,* 4 (1974), 154-178. See also Daiber, H., "Das Fârâbî-Bild des Maimonides. Ideentransfer als hermeneutischer Weg zu Maimonides' Philosophie", in G. Tamer (ed.), *The Trias of Maimonides: Jewish, Arabic, and Ancient Culture of Knowledge,* Berlin, 2005.

[39] "The *Kalām fī maḥḍ al-khair* (*Liber de Causis*) in the Islamic Philosophical Milieu", in J. Kraye, W. F. Ryan and C. B. Schmitt (eds.), *Pseudo-Aristotle in the Middle Ages,* London, 1986, 37-52.

[40] *Philosophie und Mystik,* 324.

Another author who belongs into the group of eastern authorities is al-Ghazālī, who flourished about a century after these first three authorities. Even though it was al-Fārābī who counted as the authority in logic in the Arab West, Ibn Sab'īn used al-Ghazālī's *Maqāṣid al-falāsifa* as a source for a systematisation of premises and syllogisms. The later al-Ghazālī, the convert to Sufism, is also represented in the *Sicilian Questions* with quotations from his *Mishkāt al-anwār.*

2. *Western authors*

The second group of sources comprises those which were written in al-Andalus and had almost no impact beyond the western Mediterranean, among them Ibn Bājja's *Kitāb al-nafs* and Ibn al-Sīd al-Baṭalyawsī's *Kitāb al-ḥadā'iq.* Ibn Sab'īn used both texts in his discussion of the immortality of the soul. Ibn al-Sīd's *Book of Circles* is, after al-Fārābī's *Falsafat Arisṭūṭālīs,* the most important source of the *Sicilian Questions* in terms of quantity. Ibn Sab'īn takes from it not only the descriptions of the three souls, but also major parts of the proofs for the immortality of the soul.

All in all this is a typical Andalusian mixture. The great authority of the East, Ibn Sīnā, is represented by only some short quotations from his *Kitāb al-ḥudūd.* What might be a little surprising is that there are hardly traces of influence of Ibn 'Arabī. There are at least two possible explanations: Ibn Sab'īn might not have regarded him as an authority in Aristotelian philosophy, and he might have thought of him as a rival.

Explaining why Ibn Sab'īn used one particular text and not another to describe a specific issue is not always easy. Ibn Sab'īn gives us some clues as to his appreciation of certain authors in his *Budd al-'ārif* (see below), but there might also have been rather simple reasons involved such as the immediate availability of a text. One should also think about the possibility that Ibn Sab'īn may not always have had complete texts at his disposal as others had them or as we have them now. He may very well have acquired excerpts or collections of quotations from a teacher or from a book trader.

Part III: Ibn Rushd and the Almohad Character of the *Sicilian Questions*

Ibn Sab'īn wrote his *Sicilian Questions* in times of unrest. Muslim Spain fought the Christian armies with increasing despair and decreasing success, and the ruling dynasty of the Almohads lost more and more of its authority among the native Muslim population of the Iberian Peninsula. In 638/1240, approximately the time Ibn Sab'īn wrote his text in Ceuta, they had already lost control over the eastern part of Muslim Spain. Cordoba had fallen to the Christian armies in 1236, Murcia would follow in 1243 and Seville in 1248. The Muslim West had witnessed a century of Almohad rule and was about to welcome a new dynasty from North Africa, the Ḥafṣids. Yet, even though Almohad rule drew its final breaths in those years, it is against this background that we must read the *Sicilian Questions.*

Right from the beginning the Almohads set out as a movement with highly pronounced ideological claims. The key figure of this movement was Ibn Tūmart who was regarded as a Mahdī —an eschatological figure, a revivalist of true Islam, a holy man or simply a charismatic leader. [41] Ibn Tūmart died in 524/1130, well before the Almohad movement took over in the Arab West in 542/1147 (fall of Marrakech), but he seems to have established the basis of an ideology which served the Almohads to legitimise their new position of power against the local population. One of the essential elements of this ideology was the creation of a new unity. [42] The Almohads blamed the former dynasty, the Almoravids, for their adherence to juridical literature composed by human beings, whereas true Muslims should regard as their sole sources the Koran and the traditions of the prophet. They

[41] For the Almohads in general cf. the recently published Cressier, P.; Fierro, M. and Molina, L. (eds.), *Los Almohades: Problemas y perspectivas,* Madrid, 2005; furthermore Fierro, M., "Revolución y tradición: Algunos aspectos del mundo del saber en al-Andalus durante las épocas almorávide y almohade", in M. L. Ávila and M. Fierro (eds.), *Biografías almohades,* II, Madrid, 2000, 131-165; the chapters on the Almohads in *Historia de España,* VIII-II (*El Retroceso territorial de al-Andalus*), Madrid, 1997 and Nagel, T., *Im Offenkundigen das Verborgene. Die Heilszusage des sunnitischen Islams,* (Abhandlungen der Akademie der Wissenschaften zu Göttingen, Philologisch-historische Klasse; Folge 3, 244) Göttingen, 2002.

[42] For concepts of Almohadism and possibilities to employ them in an analysis of the *Sicilian Questions* cf. my *Philosophie und Mystik,* 40-50.

established the *ṭalaba* as an institution for propaganda. [43] On their payroll were Sufis like Abū l-'Abbās al-Sabtī (524/1130-601/1205), but also philosophers such as Ibn Ṭufayl and, as Sarah Stroumsa has suggested in a recent article, Ibn Rushd. [44]

Another feature of the Almohad ideology is the impact of al-Ghazālī and his integration of Greek logic into Islamic theology and jurisprudence. According to an Almohad legend Ibn Tūmart met the famous theologian during a journey to the Arab East. Al-Ghazālī asked the man from the West about the reactions to his opus magnum, *The Revivification of the Religious Sciences,* in al-Andalus, whereupon Ibn Tūmart confessed that the current rulers, the Almoravids, had ordered it to be burned. Al-Ghazālī then asked God to make Ibn Tūmart the instrument of his revenge. [45]

This legend about the meeting of the two men reflects the key role of al-Ghazālī in the propaganda of the Almohads, where he served a double purpose. On the one hand Ibn Tūmart's doctrine was characterised by a rationalist approach. If a Muslim employs the right instruments, i.e. logical principles, he is able to find the one truth (for there is only one truth) in the texts which are fundamental to Islam. This position corresponds with al-Ghazālī's reform of Islamic sciences proper. On the other hand, *The Revivification of the Religious Sciences* reflects the mystical turn al-Ghazālī took later in his life. Even though the Almohads opposed the mystical traditions around holy men their most important ally on the Iberian Peninsula was the Sufi movement of the self-declared Mahdī Ibn Qasī, and mysticism was such a widespread phenomenon that al-Ghazālī played an important

[43] Fricaud, É., "Les *ṭalaba* dans la société almohade (le temps d'Averroès)", *Al-Qanṭara,* 17 (1997), 331-388. For the question of anthropomorphism cf. Serrano, D., "¿Por qué llamaron los almohades antropomorfistas a los almorávides?", in Cressier, Fierro and Molina (eds.), *Los Almohades,* II, 815-52.

[44] Stroumsa, S., "Philosophes almohades? Averroès, Maïmonide et l'idéologie almohade", in Cressier, Fierro and Molina (eds.), *Los Almohades,* II, 1137-62. One should keep in mind with Stroumsa that the relationship between the Almohad rulers and the philosophers was not one of pure harmony and uninterrupted support.

[45] For a recent discussion of reactions to al-Ghazālī and a detailed analysis of these circumstances cf. Garden, K., *Al-Ghazālī's Contested Revival:* Iḥyā' 'ulūm al-dīn *and its Critics in Khorasan and the Maghrib,* PhD thesis (University of Chicago, 2005). Cf. also Griffel, F., "Ibn Tūmart's Rational Proof for God's Existence and His Unity, and His Connection to the Niẓāmiyya *madrasa* in Baġdad", in Cressier, Fierro and Molina (eds.), *Los Almohades,* II, 753-813.

role as a unifying figure for the anti-Almoravid opposition. [46] This double role of al-Ghazālī is also reflected in the *Sicilian Questions* since Ibn Sab'īn used both a mystical text (*Mishkāt al-anwār*) and a philosophical compendium (*Maqāṣid al-falāsifa*), as mentioned above.

This use of al-Ghazālī in the *Sicilian Questions* is not the only reflection of Almohad intellectual culture, and not even the most interesting one. Al-Ghazālī was a prominent author in the western Mediterranean. Two Latin translations of his *Maqāṣid al-falāsifa* (one by Gundissalinus, the other by Ramón Llull) attest to the fact that his popularity went beyond the borders of the *Dār al-Islām.* But Ibn Sab'īn used also the philosophical writings of an author who was, as a philosopher, far more popular in the Latin West than in the Arab world, where his philosophical works remained almost completely ignored, a fact which has been puzzling historians of science for decades. This author is Ibn Rushd, and in what follows I will describe in more detail how Ibn Sab'īn used his philosophical writings in the *Sicilian Questions.*

Ibn Rushd in the *Budd al-'ārif*

Ibn Sab'īn wrote his *Budd al-'ārif* shortly after the *Sicilian Questions.* It may have been the publication of this work which provoked Ibn Sab'īn's banishment from Ceuta on the order of Ibn Khalāṣ, or at least it provided the city's governor with a suitable excuse (see above). The *Budd al-'ārif* is in certain ways similar to the *Sicilian Questions.* Ibn Sab'īn deals with similar problems, such as the categories and the immortality of the soul. Yet the focus of the later work is far more ample and the text is significantly longer than the *Sicilian Questions.* Even though Ibn Sab'īn uses some of the material of the *Sicilian Questions* in the *Budd al-'ārif* and even though there are resemblances in style, [47] the overall structure of the *Budd al-'ārif* is very

[46] Garden (*Al-Ghazālī's Contested Revival*) even suggests that the rise of Sufism in al-Andalus in the twelfth century was a response to the introduction of *Iḥyā' 'ulūm al-dīn.*

[47] Ibn Sab'īn addresses an unknown recipient. Some authors were quick to dismiss this as a literary fiction, but they have never questioned the authenticity of the dialogue in the *Sicilian Questions.*

different from that of the *Sicilian Questions.* In the later work Ibn Sab'īn chose, instead of discussing specific problems, an encyclopaedic style similar to the *Rasā'il* of the Ikhwān al-ṣafā'. The compendium of the Brethren of Purity is one of the sources of the logical discussions in the *Budd al-'ārif,* where its importance clearly exceeds its influence on the *Sicilian Questions.* [48]

Even though the *Budd al-'ārif* was far more prominent among medieval Arab authors and even though it offers a more extensive, comprehensive, intelligible and coherent exposition of Ibn Sab'īn's philosophical and mystical ideas, it was overshadowed in western scholarship by the *Sicilian Questions.* Yet the *Budd al-'ārif* contains a curious passage which has attracted the attention of western historians of philosophy.

It was Louis Massignon who first called attention to this passage in his article "Ibn Sab'īn et la critique psychologique dans l'histoire de la philosophie musulmane." [49] Even though Massignon's expression "psychological critique" might be an overstatement, the passage is an extraordinary source for attitudes to philosophical authorities in the thirteenth century in the Arab West. What Ibn Sab'īn has to say in this passage about Ibn Sīnā, al-Ghazālī and al-Fārābī resembles in many ways the famous passage in the introduction to Ibn Ṭufayl's *Ḥayy b. Yaqẓān;* it may even have been inspired by it. But Ibn Sab'īn also deals with a philosopher not mentioned by Ibn Ṭufayl, Ibn Rushd. This is how Ibn Sab'īn presents Ibn Rushd:

> This man was absolutely crazy about Aristotle. He worshipped him and followed him almost blindly in his views of sense perception and first intelligibilia. Had he heard that according to the Wise (i.e. Aristotle) one can stand and sit at the same time, he would have repeated this with full conviction. Most of his writings deal with the teachings of Aristotle which he paraphrased or adapted. Ibn Rushd is absolutely incapable, his knowledge is small, he has stupid ideas, and he

[48] Another testimony to the prominence of the *Rasā'il* in the western Mediterranean is Ramón Llull who used them in his *Logica nova.* Charles Lohr interpreted the common elements in the *Logica nova* and the *Budd al-'ārif* as a proof that Llull was familiar with Ibn Sab'īn's text, but it is far more likely that they had common sources. See Akasoy, A. and Fidora, A., "Ibn Sab'īn and Raimundus Lullus - The Question of the Arabic Sources of Lullus' Logic Revisited", in A. Akasoy and W. Raven (eds.), *Islamic thought in the Middle Ages. Studies in Text, transmision and traslation in Honor of Hans Daiber* (Leiden, 2008).

[49] Published in *Mémorial Henri Basset, Nouvelles études Nord-Africaines et Orientales,* II, Paris, 1928, 123-130.

> is unintelligent. Yet he is a good man, who does not interfere (in things which do not concern him), he is just and aware of his limited capacities. Then again, he did not rely on his own endeavour since he followed Aristotle blindly. [50]

It is rather difficult to reconcile this characterisation with Ibn Rushd's image in the Latin West and as the great commentator Averroes. But Ibn Sab'īn's judgement contains some true elements Many of Ibn Rushd's writings deal with Aristotle. It was the intention of the commentator-philosopher as well as that of his patron, the second Almohad Caliph Abū Ya'qūb Yūsuf (reg. 558/1163-580/1184), to illuminate the teachings of Aristotle which were so difficult to understand in their Arabic translations. [51] Ibn Sab'īn's harsh words are also less irritating if we compare them with his critique of other philosophers. In comparison Ibn Rushd even fares quite well.

"Averroism" after Ibn Rushd

Ibn Sab'īn's critical appraisal of his philosophical predecessors is exceptional in medieval Arabic literature and the passage on Ibn Rushd is particularly remarkable. Explicit mention of Ibn Rushd is rare in medieval Arabic literature and corresponds to the lack of transmission of his philosophical texts. This lack —in particular considering the impact of the commentaries in the Latin West and among Jewish authors— has been explained in different ways. Earlier generations of scholars suggested interpretations which are nowadays often labelled "essentialist" or "Orientalist." [52] Yet we are still far from being able to explain why, for example, the number of Arabic manuscripts containing philosophical works by Ibn Rushd is so limited. The lack of transmission certainly had something to do with Ibn Rushd's position at the Almohad court. He was a member of a small

[50] Kattūra (ed.), 143.

[51] Puig, J., "El proyecto vital de Averroes: explicar e interpretar a Aristóteles", *Al-Qanṭara,* 32 (2002), 11-52. For doubts regarding the Almohad rulers' interest in philosophy cf. Stroumsa, "Philosophes almohades?".

[52] A. Ivry stresses on the other hand that it was only the philosophical side of Ibn Rushd (and not his theological writings) that was perceived in the Latin West: "Averroes and the West: The First Encounter/Non-Encounter", in R. Link-Salinger (ed.), *A Straight Path: Studies in Medieval Philosophy and Culture,* Essays in Honor of Arthur Hyman, Washington, 1988, 142-158.

intellectual elite, his works were commissioned by the Caliph, and we have no trace of a significant public diffusion. Furthermore Ibn Rushd's philosophical works fell victim to one of the *miḥan* ("inquisitions") which haunted Muslim Spain. By order of the third Almohad Caliph, Abū Yūsuf Ya'qūb (reg. 580/1184-595/1199), Ibn Rushd was banished from court and his philosophical writings were publicly burnt. [53] Even though Ibn Rushd was allowed back to court shortly before his death, this persecution was not the last one and severely damaged the afterlife of Ibn Rushd's philosophy in the Muslim world. Disciples of the philosopher Ibn Rushd had to suffer from succeeding *miḥan* or the threat of them. [54] The most famous case is that of Ibn Ṭumlūs (d. 620/1223), the author of a logical treatise who does not even once mention his teacher by name. [55] Ibn Sab'īn however seems to have seen no need to disguise the identity of the man he criticised in his *Budd al-'ārif.* Yet this critical tendency should not be interpreted as part of an overall attack on the peripatetic tradition in general or Ibn Rushd in particular. Ibn Sab'īn clearly acknowledges Ibn Rushd's authority in certain domains: unlike other philosophers of late Antiquity and the Middle Ages, he is a reliable source for Aristotle's philosophy who cannot be blamed for distorting it according to his own views.

Ibn Rushd in the *Sicilian Questions*

In what follows I will discuss how far —despite his critical words— Ibn Sab'īn may have been influenced by the philosopher Ibn Rushd. For this discussion I will deal mainly with the *Sicilian Questions.*

[53] For a recent discussion of this subject see Fricaud, É., "Le problème de la disgrace d'Averroès", in A. Bazzana, N. Bériou and P. Guichard (eds.), *Averroès et l'averroïsme (XIIe-XVe siècle): un itinéraire historique du Haut Atlas à Paris et à Padoue,* Lyon, 2005, 155-189.

[54] For Ibn Rushd's disciples see Puig, J., "Materials on Averroes's Circle", *JNES,* 51 (1992), 241-260 and Ibn Sharīfa, M., *Ibn Rushd al-ḥafīd: Sīra wathā'iqiyya,* Casablanca, 1999.

[55] Griffel, F., "The Relationship between Averroes and al-Ghazālī as it Presents itself in Averroes' Early Writings, Especially in his Commentary on al-Ghazālī's *al-Mustaṣfā'",* in J. Inglis (ed.), *Medieval Philosophy and the Classical Tradition in Islam, Judaism and Christianity,* Richmond, 2002, 51-63.

I have traced similarities between the *Sicilian Questions* and several texts by Ibn Rushd, the *Questiones in Physica,* the commentaries, *Faṣl al-maqāl* and *Kashf 'an manāhij al-adilla.* Ibn Sab'īn used these texts in different ways. Some parallels are quite literal whereas others are of a methodological nature. I will present two examples of these parallels from the chapter on the eternity of the world and that on the immortality of the soul.

At the beginning of his discussion of the eternity of the world Ibn Sab'īn declares that Aristotle had clearly expressed his opinion on the subject in a well-known number of books (299a). Ibn Sab'īn fails to mention what this opinion is, but he explains that the homonymous character of the word *qidam* ("eternity") had caused much of the problem and that the expression was attributed to Aristotle by later authors (299a). Ibn Sab'īn may have borrowed this argument from Ibn Rushd's *Quaestiones in Physica.* In his discussion of the views of the Peripatetics and the *mutakallimūn* Ibn Rushd claims that they are in fact similar and that the differences are due to the homonymous character of *qidam* and *ḥudūth.* [56] In his *Faṣl al-maqāl* Ibn Rushd argues much along the same lines:

> As for the question whether the world is eternal or has been generated, the disagreement between the Ash'arite dialectical theologians and the ancient sages almost comes back, in my view, to a *disagreement about naming,* especially with respect to some of the Ancients. [57]

Apart from this shared argument it does not seem that Ibn Sab'īn borrowed any others of Ibn Rushd's own explanations regarding the solution for the problem of the eternity of the world. His exposition so far seems to suggest that he considered Aristotle an adherent of the createdness of the world. However, when Ibn Sab'īn presents a number of proofs for both claims, the proofs for the eternity of the world

[56] Kogan, B., "Eternity and Origination: Averroes' *Discourse on the Manner of the World's Existence*", in M. Marmura (ed.), *Islamic Theology and Philosophy: Studies in Honor of George F. Hourani,* New York, 1984, 203-235; Ibn Rushd, *Averroes' Questions in Physics: From the Unpublished* Sêfer ha-derûšîm ha-tib'îyîm, H. Goldstein (ed. and transl.), Dordrecht, 1991. See also Geoffroy, M., "L'Almohadisme théologique d'Averroès (Ibn Rušd)", *Archives d'histoire doctrinale et littéraire du Moyen Age,* 66 (1999), 9-47.

[57] Ibn Rushd, *The Book of the Decisive Treatise Determining the Connection between the Law and Wisdom: and Epistle Dedicatory,* Ch. Butterworth (transl.), Utah, 2001, 14. Italics mine.

are based on Aristotle's works whereas the proofs for the createdness are declared Ash'arite (306b). They clearly resemble a similar list in Ibn Rushd's *Kashf 'an manāhij al-adilla.* [58]

On the whole, Ibn Sab'īn's explanations remain strangely contradictory and one wonders again whether this is a deliberate strategy. Maimonides in his *Guide for the Perplexed* mentions seven possible sources of contradictions. The sixth kind of contradiction arises from the necessity to disguise certain ideas to the uninitiated. [59] According to some interpretations, Maimonides himself employed this strategy in his discussion of the eternity of the world to disguise his real views. [60] Biographical sources as well as a quotation from Ibn Sab'īn himself suggest that the *Guide for the Perplexed* was studied by Ibn Sab'īn and among his followers. [61]

The eternity of the world was, after all, a sensitive issue [62] and Ibn Sab'īn may have not wanted to reveal his real view on the subject. Yet I tend to believe that Ibn Sab'īn did not employ such elaborate techniques of dissimulation here, or in other passages of the *Sicilian Questions.* Such dissimulation would have been at odds with his declared intention to explain philosophical problems to somebody who is confused about the very basics of the Aristotelian tradition, to say the least. There are other ways of explaining the contradictions in the *Sicilian Questions* (for which see above), even if the claim of contradictions as a deliberate strategy would have a stronger case here with

[58] Ibn Rushd, *al-Kashf 'an manāhij al-adilla fī 'aqā'id al-milla,* Beirut, 1998, 105; engl. transl. by I. Najjar, *Faith and Reason in Islam: Averroes' Exposition of Religious Arguments,* Oxford, 2001, 21. See also Wolfson, H., "The Kalam Arguments for Creation in Saadia, Averroes, Maimonides and St. Thomas", in *Saadia Anniversary Volume,* New York, 1943, 197-245, 211-212; Davidson, H. A., *Proofs for Eternity, Creation and the Existence of God in Medieval Islamic and Jewish Philosophy,* New York, 1987, 134ff.

[59] Fox, M., *Interpreting Maimonides: Studies in Methodology, Metaphysics, and Moral Philosophy,* Chicago, 1990, 67-90 ("Maimonides Method of Contradiction: a New View"). Cf. also Stroumsa, S., "The Politico-Religious Context of Maimonides", in G. Tamer (ed.), *The Trias of Maimonides,* 257-265.

[60] Davidson, H. A., "Maimonides' Secret Position on Creation", in I. Twersky (ed.), *Studies in Medieval Jewish History and Literature,* I, Cambridge-Mass., 1979, 16-40; Kraemer, J. L. (ed.), *Perspectives on Maimonides: Philosophical and Historical Studies,* Oxford, 1991.

[61] Cf. my *Philosophie und Mystik,* 90.

[62] Kraemer, J. L., "Heresy versus the State in Medieval Islam", in Sh. R. Brunswick (ed.), *Studies in Judaica, Karaitica and Islamica,* Presented to Leon Nemoy on his eightieth birthday, Ramat-Gan, 1982, 167-180.

Maimonides as a possible parallel. I will return to the problem of contradictions later in my discussion.

One of the other interesting features of the *Sicilian Questions* is that Ibn Sab'īn refers to a number of ancient and medieval philosophers, who are usually not identical with the sources he used. When Ibn Sab'īn refers for instance to the doctrines of Aristotle, much of what he says is taken from al-Fārābī's *Philosophy of Aristotle.* This is far from uncommon in medieval literature, yet some of the combinations Ibn Sab'īn offers are unusual. In his discussion of the immortality of the soul, Ibn Sab'īn mentions several times Themistius and Theophrastus together. He says for example:

> As for Theophrastus and Themistius and the ancient Peripatetics overall, they claimed that the passive faculty of the soul was eternal and that the intellect which is in us is composed out of those two intellects, I mean the intellect in actuality, i.e. the active intellect, and the passive intellect which is in potentiality. [63]

Whereas Themistius is a relatively prominent figure in Arabic philosophical literature, this does not apply to Theophrastus. [64] One of the few authors who discuss his views is Ibn Rushd who mentions Theophrastus together with Themistius in his long commentaries on *De anima* as well as on the *Metaphysics.* In these contexts Ibn Rushd also discusses problems of the material intellect and the active intellect [65] which is another similarity between him and Ibn Sab'īn. Even though I have not discovered any striking literal parallels to the passage in Ibn Sab'īn's text, the mention of Theophrastus is so rare in Arabic literature that we should not discard this as a mere coincidence.

Theophrastus and Themistius are not the only pair who appear in both Ibn Sab'īn's *Sicilian Questions* and Ibn Rushd's writings. An-

[63] Ibn Sab'īn, *Sicilian Questions,* 340a; *Philosophie und Mystik,* 268.

[64] For Theophrastus in Arabic literature see Gutas, D., "Averroes on Theophrastus, through Themistius", in G. Endress and J. A. Aertsen (eds.), *Averroes and the Aristotelian Tradition: Sources, Constitution and Reception of the Philosophy of Ibn Rushd (1126-1198),* Leiden, 1999, 125-144. In general cf. Fortenbaugh, W. W. *et al.* (eds.), *Theophrastus of Eresus, Sources for his Life, Writings, Thought and Influence,* Leiden, 1992.

[65] For example: "Hoc igitur movit Aristotelem ad imponendum hanc naturam que est alia a natura materie et a natura forme et a natura congregati. Et hoc idem induxit Theofrastum et Themistium et plures expositores ad opinandum quod intellectus materialis est substantia neque generabilis neque corruptibilis." (Ibn Rushd, *Averrois Cordubensis Commentarium Magnum in Aristotelis de Anima Libros,* F. S. Crawford (ed.), [CCAA: Versionum Larinarum, VI, 1], Cambridge-Mass., 1953, 388 f.).

other couple in the *Long Commentary* on *De anima* are Alexander of Aphrodisias and al-Fārābī who appear three times together in the *Sicilian Questions*. In this case the contents of the passages allow no further comparison. Yet, if one considers these two pairs, Theophrastus and Themistius, Alexander and Fārābī, together with some of the remaining personal of the *Sicilian Questions* —Ibn Bājja, Plato, Galen, Socrates, Anaxagoras, Diogenes and Ibn Sīnā— the resemblance with the authorities mentioned in Ibn Rushd's long commentaries is more obvious.

The similarities are usually "superficial" insofar as Ibn Sab'īn, except for some key terms, does not repeat the arguments of the long commentaries, but there are also some more substantial analogies. Alexander of Aphrodisias, for example, is criticised by both authors for having distorted Aristotle's teachings in such a way as to make Ibn Sīnā and other later authors incapable of interpreting the texts in the right manner. [66] The similar approach to Ibn Sīnā is also evident in another parallel passage. Ibn Sab'īn says in the chapter on the eternity of the world:

> A group of the Peripatetics —may God forgive them— claimed that an existent which is not a body and subsisting in itself cannot possess a principle for the body. Among the later philosophers Ibn Sīnā —may God be pleased with him— held this position.

It is hardly possible to understand this passage in the context in which it appears in the *Sicilian Questions,* but there is a chance of identifying the context from which it was taken. In his *Quaestiones in Physica* Ibn Rushd says:

> Among those who hold this opinion are many of the modern philosophers we have encountered who follow the doctrine of Avicenna. They think that this is the opinion of Avicenna, and that it is the opinion to which he inclined in the Oriental Philosophy, *and that there is no being which is not a body, subsisting in itself, separate from the celestial bodies, which is itself a principle of those bodies and what exists through them, as was the opinion of the Peripatetics.* [67]

[66] Cf. for example Ibn Sab'īn, *Sicilian Questions,* 301a and Ibn Rushd, *Tafsīr Mā ba'd al-ṭabī'a,* M. Bouyges (ed.), Beirut, 1942-1952, III, 1436.

[67] Ibn Rushd, *Averroes' Questions in Physics,* Goldstein (ed. and transl.), 31. Slightly different Gutas, D., *Avicenna and the Aristotelian Tradition, Introduction to Reading Avicenna's Philosophical Works,* Leiden, 1988, 118f. Italics mine.

Even more remarkable is a certain obsession with Alexander of Aphrodisias in particular and his objections to Aristotle in both Ibn Sab'īn and Ibn Rushd, especially in matters concerning the material intellect. At the end of the chapter on the immortality of the soul Ibn Sab'īn presents a list of questions in which Alexander contradicted Aristotle. Most of these passages have parallels in Ibn Rushd's commentaries. [68]

Ibn Rushd's influence as a source of information about interpretations of Aristotle in late Antiquity and Islamic times is clearly visible in the *Sicilian Questions.* Yet Ibn Rushd's role may stretch further and may also include methodological principles. Here again, the question of contradictions is key. In this case not only those contradictions produced by Ibn Sab'īn himself are at stake, but also the way he deals with contradictory interpretations of Aristotle's philosophy by other authors. Dealing with a divergence of opinion among members of a certain group of scholars was hardly new in Islamic literature. From early on Islamic law witnessed the development of an entire genre of treatises around *ikhtilāf* with explanations about how and why jurists belonging to a particular regional tradition for instance came to different conclusions regarding a juridical problem. In al-Andalus, Ibn al-Sīd al-Baṭalyawsī (whose *Kitāb al-ḥadā'iq* figures among the sources of the *Sicilian Questions*) approached the issue from a new angle and argued in his *al-Inṣāf fī l-tanbīh 'alā l-ma'ānī wa l-asbāb allatī awjabat al-ikhtilāf bayna l-muslimīn fī ārā'ihim* that the differences in opinion among the Muslims were often due to different terminologies. [69]

Even though there are no obvious textual parallels, Ibn Sab'īn may very well have been inspired by this argument. In the *Sicilian Questions* he argues that if one employs a clear terminology, a text can be interpreted only in one correct way. Yet, apart from Ibn al-Sīd, this recurrent idea of Ibn Sab'īn may also betray the influence of Ibn Rushd who with his *Bidāyat al-mujtahid* dedicated a whole book to the problem of *ikhtilāf.* [70] It is a characteristic of his juridical but also of his philosophical writings to criticise the use of ambiguous terms.

[68] For a list of these passages cf. my *Philosophie und Mystik,* 189-214.

[69] Cf. the chapter on religion by M. Fierro in *Historia de España,* VIII-II, 437-546, here 460, n. 11.

[70] Fierro, M., "The Legal Policies of the Almohad Caliphs and Ibn Rushd's *Bidāyat al-mujtahid*", *JIS,* 10 (1999), 226-248.

According to Ibn Rushd and in harmony with Almohad ideology, if one uses the right methods and a clear terminology, one can discover the one truth of a text, whether it is the Koran or Aristotle's *De anima.* As has been argued above, Ibn Sab'īn's approach to the different opinions about Aristotle's view of the eternity of the world clearly resembles Ibn Rushd's arguments, but this impact on the *Sicilian Questions* may go even further and reflect a more general preoccupation with the problem of *ikhtilāf.*

The issue of the *ikhtilāf* occupied not only the minds of Ibn Rushd and Ibn Sab'īn. On the other side of the border, in the Christian realms, it became an object of polemical writings such as the *Contrarietas alfolica,* [71] and Maimonides, as has been said above, made use of contradictions in a very subtle way.

Another curious parallel with Ibn Rushd is that in one instance Ibn Sab'īn quotes a passage from Aristotle's *Metaphysics* and right after that offers an alternative version of the same passage. He introduces this passage with the words "according to another version" (*fī nuskha ukhrā*) (316b). This, as 'Abd al-Raḥmān Badawī has shown, is a characteristic technique of Ibn Rushd. [72] Yet the passage quoted by Ibn Sab'īn is neither in the *Metaphysics* nor in Ibn Rushd's commentaries, and is therefore quite indicative of the level of Ibn Sab'īn's knowledge of the texts he discusses. It corroborates the impression (also suggested by his inaccurate arguments and terminology) that Ibn Sab'īn's familiarity with ancient philosophy is based on second-hand knowledge.

Averroism in the Polemical Tradition

A final piece of evidence I should like to present for Ibn Rushd's influence on Ibn Sab'īn stems from one of the most notorious polemicists, Ibn Taymiyya. Radical Andalusian Sufis such as Ibn 'Arabī and their followers in Egypt were the archenemies of the pious theologian. He accused them of perverting the ascetic tradition of the right-

[71] Burman, Th. E., *Religious Polemic and the Intellectual History of the Mozarabs, c. 1050-1200,* Leiden, 1994, 215ff.

[72] "Averroès face au texte qu'il commente", in J. Jolivet (ed.), *Multiple Averroès: Actes du Colloque International organisé à l'occasion du 850e anniversaire de la naissance d'Averroès,* Paris, 1978, 59-89.

eous early Sufis. [73] One of Ibn Taymiyya's key reproaches is that contemporary mystics contaminated Sufism with philosophy, another accusation that they defended the eternity of the world. These accusations may very well have something to do with the western background of the radical Sufis and the impact of al-Ghazālī as discussed above. Ibn Taymiyya may have identified Ibn Sab'īn in particular with the rationalist philosophical theology of the Almohad Mahdī Ibn Tūmart. [74] The reproach of defending the eternity of the world directed against radical Sufis is usually based on their ontology of *waḥdat al-wujūd* or "unity of being" of creator and creation: if God and the world have the same being, and if God is eternal, the world is also eternal. But there may have been more behind this criticism. After all, Ibn Sab'īn's discussion of the eternity of the world in the *Sicilian Questions* is quite ambiguous, and he used Ibn Rushd's philosophical writings in that section.

Averroism in al-Andalus after Ibn Rushd

One of the key problems in assessing the presence of Ibn Rushd in the Arab West from the thirteenth century onwards and the significance of the traces of the commentaries in the *Sicilian Questions* is how to determine the relation between Ibn Rushd's philosophy and the Almohads. [75] Almohad caliphs both promoted this philosophy and repressed it. Charismatic leaders of local rebellions such as Abū 'Abd Allāh b. Hūd al-Mutawakkil in the region of Murcia ordered the removal of all symbols of Almohad rule, and this order was fervently implemented. [76] But did these anti-Almohad rebels identify philoso-

[73] Knysh, A. D., *Ibn 'Arabi in the Later Islamic Tradition: The Making of a Polemical Image in Medieval Islam,* New York, 1999, in particular 87-111.

[74] He associated Ibn Tūmart with Ibn Sīnā and Ibn Sab'īn in a *fatwā* directed against the Almohad Mahdī. Cf. Laoust, H., "Une *fetwā* d'Ibn Taimīya sur Ibn Tūmart", *Bulletin de l'Institut Français d'Archéologie Orientale,* 59 (1960), 157-184. There he claims that all three authors defended the idea of God as *wujūd muṭlaq* in the sense of being without attributes.

[75] For this cf. the articles by Stroumsa, "Philosophes almohades?" and Fricaud, "Le problème de la disgrace".

[76] This was also recorded in contemporary Christian sources, for instance *Primera crónica general de España que mandó componer Alfonso el Sabio y se continuaba bajo Sancho IV en 1289,* publicada por R. Menéndez Pidal, Madrid, 1955, II, 721b.

phy with the Almohads? Did they identify Ibn Rushd with the Almohads?

Due to a regrettable lack of sources we cannot give certain answers to these questions. However, a small number of documents allow us some glimpses into this time of turmoil. Biographical sources record the name of a certain Sahl al-Azdī as one of the immediate disciples of Ibn Rushd. [77] Sahl is not known for philosophical writings, but he was affected by one of the persecutions in al-Andalus. He escaped from Granada to Murcia during the rule of Ibn Hūd al-Mutawakkil and remained there until that ruler's death in 635/1238 when he returned to his native Granada. As mentioned in the first part of this article, Ibn Sab'īn left his native Murcia in the same year and for the same place, Granada. We do not have any evidence for a connection between the two men, but it may not have been mere coincidence that both of them travelled the same way in the same year and that both of them are, in one way or another, associated with Ibn Rushd. Sahl al-Azdī also offers us an opportunity to explain where Ibn Sab'īn may have obtained some of his sources for the *Sicilian Questions.* The similarities with Ibn Rushd's writings are too striking to be explained as mere coincidence or as owed to the same milieu. Yet Ibn Sab'īn's explanations are too confused and fragmentary to be derived from a thorough first-hand examination of the commentaries. What Ibn Sab'īn had in his hands was probably rather something like excerpts or summaries from Ibn Rushd's works. Ibn Sab'īn could have received such a text from Sahl, a first generation disciple of the man himself or relied on oral teaching; he might have obtained a summary from a book trader or one of the remaining *ṭalaba,* the propaganda institution of the Almohads. He may have had access to Almohad works in a way similar to Maimonides and other Jewish intellectuals who, even if they formally converted to Islam, would not have been admitted to the *ṭalaba.* [78] There is also the possibility that Ibn Sab'īn may have witnessed as a member the last activities of the *ṭalaba.* [79]

[77] For a list of Arabic biographical sources see Penelas, M. and Zanón, J., "Nómina de ulemas andalusíes de época almohade", in M. Fierro and M. L. Ávila (eds.), *Biografías almohades,* I, Madrid, 1999, 11-222, s.v. and Puig, "Materials on Averroes's Circle", 256.

[78] Cf. the articles by Stroumsa, "Philosophes almohades?" and "The Politico-Religious Context".

[79] Cf. my "The *Muḥaqqiq* as Mahdi?"

Conclusion

At the end of this analysis of the *Sicilian Questions,* its sources and its author, the questions for what audience and under what circumstances Ibn Sab'īn wrote his text still remains unanswered. Our sources simply do not provide sufficient information for even a halfway satisfactory explanation. These uncertainties notwithstanding, the *Sicilian Questions* offer remarkable insights into intellectual culture in late Almohad times. Ibn Sab'īn was not an elite philosopher, but a study of the sources of his *Sicilian Questions* reveals which authors and texts may have been considered authorities among more mediocre writers and may have been more influential among more common and less learned people. The Almohad influence should be understood here in an ample sense. Given the nature of the *Sicilian Questions,* it is difficult to recognise traces of Almohad doctrines there, but the text reveals concerns which were typically voiced by intellectuals of Almohad times and which reflect peculiar concerns of the time that Almohad ideology responded to or that it created in the first place.

Ibn Sab'īn is usually not considered one of the "serious" Islamic or Arab philosophers. And indeed it is not easy to see him in that light: no "serious" interpreter of Aristotle's logic will be positively impressed by Ibn Sab'īn's concept of the categories which have in his explanation divine qualities such as necessary existence or pre-existence. Al-Bādisī came to the conclusion that Ibn Sab'īn had failed with his mixture of philosophy and mysticism. But even though Ibn Sab'īn does not fit into the usual pattern of Arabic Aristotelianism, he still forms part of the picture. Only if we take "marginal" authors such as Ibn Sab'īn into consideration we will be able to develop a more comprehensive idea of this larger picture and of what philosophy meant in medieval Islam.

Another conclusion to be derived from an analysis of the *Sicilian Questions* is how important it is to go beyond the strictly philosophical interpretation of historical texts on philosophy, especially when we are dealing with someone like Ibn Sab'īn.

Ibn Sab'īn lived in a time of major ideological clashes inside the Islamic world. These had a direct impact on the intellectual sphere in an abstract sense as demonstrated, as well as in a very concrete sense through the burning of books or institutions of propaganda such as the

ṭalaba under the Almohads. Ibn Sab'īn's access to philosophical texts depended directly on political developments. Using contradictions as an example I have tried to underline the importance of crossing lines in our field. This may be the border to jurisprudence where theory and practice of dealing with texts had immediate political consequences. But there are other borders which should also be crossed. With his use of Ibn Rushd's commentaries and the rather inconspicuous *Kitāb al-ḥadā'iq* by Ibn al-Sīd al-Baṭalyawsī Ibn Sab'īn constitutes an exception among Muslim authors of the Iberian Peninsula, who rarely used these texts. Yet if one compares him with Jewish authors from the same area, among whom the commentaries and the *Kitāb al-ḥadā'iq* were far more popular one recognises a regional pattern.

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