



THE MANUSCRIPT TRADITION OF AVICENNA'S *KITĀB AL-ŠIFĀ'*: THE CURRENT STATE OF RESEARCH AND FUTURE PROSPECTS

Introduction

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The Arabic text of Avicenna's (Ibn Sīnā, d. 1037) masterpiece on philosophy, the *Kitāb al-Šifā'* (*Book of the Cure*), is still imperfectly known. The work is a philosophical encyclopedia in four main parts (logic, natural philosophy, mathematics, and metaphysics, with an appendix on practical philosophy) articulated into twenty-two sections (nine sections of logic, eight of natural philosophy, four of mathematics, plus the single section of metaphysics), each of which constitutes an independent unit. The parts on metaphysics and natural philosophy (in this order) were published in lithographic format in Tehran in 1885. The entire work was published in Cairo between 1952 and 1983, a period of time during which each of its sections was printed—in the case of logic and mathematics for the first time—as a self-standing volume. This printing, commonly known as the Cairo edition of the *Šifā'*, was the joint effort of a team of Egyptian scholars and represents until nowadays the standard version of the work: it was reprinted in Tehran in 1983 and in Beirut in 1993. Whereas the manuscript basis of the Tehran lithograph is uncertain, and variants are only occasionally reported (as interlinear or marginal glosses), the Cairo edition approaches the standard of a critical edition, in so far as it provides an *apparatus criticus*. Although an obvious advancement with respect to the Tehran lithograph, the Cairo edition does not meet the basic requirements of a critical edition and remains perfectible in many respects. First of all, its material basis is scanty: both the number of codices employed and their geographical provenience are very narrow with respect to the massive and widespread manuscript tradition of the work. The Cairo editors used at most, in the case of some sections of the *Šifā'*, eleven codices (with a minimum of three codices in other cases): current bibliographical research informs us, by contrast,

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that manuscripts of the work are hundreds. As to the places of preservation of codices, no single section of the *Šifā'* in the Cairo edition relies on manuscripts belonging to more than five different libraries: cumulatively, the funds of seven libraries were consulted, five in Europe (Leiden, London, Oxford, Manchester, Paris) and only two in the Middle East (Cairo, Istanbul). Although the edition of the part on natural philosophy and metaphysics is based on the Tehran lithograph, which is arguably the expression of the Iranian manuscript tradition of the *Šifā'*, the neglect of Iranian manuscripts by Cairo editors is striking. Besides the many material mistakes that jeopardize the text and the apparatus of this edition, the incomplete recourse to manuscripts seriously flaws its reliability as an access to Avicenna's genuine thought. Moreover, the methodology of this edition presents several opaque areas: the preliminary analysis and description of the codices used is cursory; no genealogy of manuscripts and no *stemma codicum* is provided; both the Latin Medieval translation and the indirect tradition of the *Šifā'* in Arabic are disregarded. It comes to no surprise that useful complements for a critical edition are either absent (*apparatus fontium*) or rudimentary (indices, lexica).

During or after the period of publication of the Cairo edition, special editions of single sections of the *Šifā'* by other scholars came to light. It is worth mentioning here Fazlur Rahman's tidy edition of the *Kitāb al-Nafs* (*Book of the Soul*, London [a.o.]: Oxford University Press, 1959), which distinguishes itself from previous and subsequent editions of the *Šifā'* not only for its correctness, but also for the attention paid to the Latin translation, and for the scrutiny of the *loci paralleli* of the *Šifā'* in another work by Avicenna, the *Kitāb al-Nağāt* (*Book of the Salvation*). Unfortunately, in 1959 Rahman could not yet dispose of the critical edition of the Latin translation of the *Kitāb al-Nafs*, published by Simone Van Riet between 1968 and 1972, and he consulted the *Nağāt* in the old Cairo 1938 edition. Furthermore, the Arabic manuscripts on which Rahman bases his edition (seven, from libraries of Cairo, Leiden, London, and Oxford) are not as numerous as one might expect. In general, the additional editions complementing the Cairo printing do certainly remedy, here and there, some of its deficiencies, but do not represent a substantial progress in our knowledge of the original text of Avicenna. This being the case, scholars interested in the natural philosophy and the metaphysics of Avicenna cannot yet dispense from consulting the Tehran lithograph of more than a century ago (also because the readings and variants of this latter are not always completely or precisely reported in the apparatus of the Cairo edition). The same textual uncertainty affects the text of the logic and of the mathematics of the *Šifā'*.

This regrettable situation elicited the idea of organizing a colloquium expressly devoted to the manuscript tradition of the *Šifā'*, which was held in Scuola Normale Superiore di Pisa on September 22–24, 2010, under the title "The Manu-

script Tradition of Avicenna's *Kitāb al-Šifā'*: The Current State of Research and Future Prospects." Scholars from Europe, North America, and Asia attended the meeting. The aim of the colloquium was two-fold. First, to trace the *status quaestionis* of the current acquaintance with the Arabic text of the *Šifā'*, to point at lines of research conducive to improve our knowledge of the text of this fundamental work, and to coordinate efforts towards shared aims in this direction. The second aim was specifically methodological, and consisted in gathering together the different experts of the field (codicologists, editors of texts, and historians of philosophy), in order to allow interaction and confront of opinions on procedural issues. The space devoted to formal and informal discussions, the presentation of on-going projects and forthcoming publications, and the interplay between senior scholars and young researchers and students, were essential aspects of the initiative.

The present issue of *Oriens* (40.2, 2012) gathers the proceedings of the Pisa colloquium. The contributions cover cumulatively crucial aspects of all the essential phases of the critical study of the text of the *Šifā'*, from its preparatory steps until its implications for *Quellenforschung* and the assessment of Avicenna's doctrinal positions. Thus, the topics treated by the various authors are, in the order, the inventory of manuscripts, the codicological description, the contribution of the indirect tradition to the establishment of the original text, the examination of issues of ecdotic, the critical edition of a part of one of Avicenna's works on logic, and the benefits that a critically established text may offer both for the search of Avicenna's Greek sources and for the reconstruction of his theoretical standpoints. Special attention is devoted conclusively to the Latin Medieval translation of the *Šifā'*. More in detail, in the first article Asad Q. Ahmed presents a comprehensive inventory of the known manuscripts of the *Šifā'* of Indian origin. Jan J. Witkam offers in the second article a full-fledged description of the two famous codices of the *Šifā'* preserved in Leiden. The third article conveys Robert Wisnovsky's exhaustive classification and insightful inspection of the indirect evidence of the work. In the following article, I take into account a delicate issue that the prospective critical editor of the *Šifā'* must consider, namely the question of whether Avicenna's work might have circulated according to more than one recension. The subsequent article contains Alexander Kalbarczyk's critical edition of the part on the *Categories* of Avicenna's *Middle Compendium of Logic*, which can now be usefully compared with Avicenna's treatment of the same topic in the logic of the *Šifā'*, and sheds new light on our author's dependence on Simplicius. In the following essay, Riccardo Strobino selects the section of the *Šifā'* corresponding to the *Posterior Analytics* to document Avicenna's recourse to the two translations of this work of Aristotle preserved in Arabic, and to point to his possible dependence on the exegesis of the *Posterior Analytics* by Themistius and Philoponus. Dimitri Gutas bases on the *Šifā'* his analysis of a crucial issue of

Avicenna's philosophy, which lies at the intersection of epistemology, psychology, and metaphysics, namely Avicenna's doctrine of empiricism. A series of three articles dealing with the Latin Medieval translation of the *Šifā'* concludes the volume. Silvia Di Vincenzo surveys the Latin manuscript tradition of the only section of the logic of this work comprehensively translated into Latin, i.e. the section corresponding to Porphyry's *Isagoge*, comparing it with the Arabic text and evidencing its main features. Gaia Celli studies some *loci* of the Latin translation, extant in fragments, of the section of the work dealing with rhetoric, providing, for the first time, an edition of the Latin text of the fragments considered. Finally, Jules Janssens shows how the Latin translation of the physics of the *Šifā'* should be attentively taken into account in reconstructing the original Arabic text of Avicenna.

To the papers of the participants to the colloquium the present publication adds some further contributions. The editors are particularly grateful to Jules Janssens for having accepted to include in the volume a specimen of his expertise on the Latin translations of Avicenna. Indicative of the progress of the research on Avicenna and of the flourishing of a young generation of Avicennian scholars is the fact that some articles published in the present volume are written by students and young researchers who audited the conference in 2010 (Silvia Di Vincenzo, Gaia Celli, Alexander Kalbarczyk, and Riccardo Strobino) but have now joined the official speakers as contributors to the volume. The talks by Heidrun Eichner (Tübingen University), Mohammad Javad Esmaili (Iranian Institute of Philosophy, Tehran), and Ahmad Hosseini (Tarbiat Modares University, Tehran), from which the participants to the colloquium greatly profited, are not published here. It is the editors' hope that the present publication—the result of the joint efforts of Amos Bertolacci and Cornelia Schöck, with the invaluable assistance of Alexander Kalbarczyk—might foster future research on the issue and contribute concretely to its advancement, by updating our knowledge of relevant aspects of the topic and refining the methodology currently adopted.

The Pisa colloquium was for many participants the last occasion to meet the regretted colleague David C. Reisman, who presented—in his usual style—a convincing, well documented, and very provoking paper entitled “Curing *The Cure*,” after which a lively discussion ensued. Time will hopefully cure our sorrow and sense of loss for David's premature departure: this issue is dedicated to his memory, in loving gratitude for his strenuous promotion of Avicennian studies, his pioneering, outstanding and enlightening scholarship, and his warm and sincere friendship.