FROM AL-KINDĪ TO AL-FĀRĀBĪ:  
AVICENNA’S PROGRESSIVE KNOWLEDGE OF ARISTOTLE’S METAPHYSICS  
ACCORDING TO HIS AUTOBIOGRAPHY*  

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Avicenna’s autobiography, edited in 1974 by W. E. Gohlman¹ and extensively investigated by D. Gutas in his 1988 monograph on Avicenna,² can rightly be called an “amazing text”.³ It is difficult to overemphasize the importance and interest of this work, which portrays, in general, Avicenna’s life from his birth (ca. 370/980) until his encounter (ca. 404/1014) with the disciple Abû ʻUbayd ʻAbd al-Wâhid al-Ġüzğâni, with particular attention to his elementary instruction and subsequent philosophical training (from about the age of 6 until the age of 18). The autobiography ends with the description of the circumstances surrounding the genesis of Avicenna’s first philosophical writings, and with his departure from Buḥārā and arrival, after many peregrinations, to Ġurğān, where he met al-Ġüzğâni. Al-Ġüzğâni undertook the editing of the autobiography (either from dictation or from an original draft by Avicenna) sometime between 418/1027 and 421/1030,⁴ and added to it, after Avicenna’s death.

* I wish to thank Prof. Dimitri Gutas, Yale University, for having encouraged and supported the research presented in this article and for his insightful comments. My gratitude goes also to Prof. Cristina D’Ancona, University of Padua, for having read and discussed with me a first draft of my work. I am indebted to Dr. David C. Reisman, Yale University, for hisrevision of the style and his remarks on the content. A special thank to Mihaela Aslan, Yale University, for her kind help during the composition of this article. I am, of course, solely responsible for the remaining flaws.


² Gutas, Avicenna, pp. 22-30, 149-98.

³ Gutas, Avicenna, p. 22.

(428/1037), the account of the rest of the master’s life and works, namely the biography. The autobiography and the biography represent, therefore, two parts of the same textual unit, which has been called the “autobiography/biography complex”.

Avicenna’s education, as portrayed in the autobiography, can be divided into four stages. For the sake of brevity, I call them, respectively, “elementary”, “secondary”, “undergraduate” and “graduate education”, adopting D. Gutas’ identification of these stages with the modern Western curriculum of studies. Avicenna’s secondary, undergraduate and graduate education proceeded according to the Aristotelian curriculum, and consisted, in each phase, of the study of logic, mathematics, physics and metaphysics. Two explicit mentions of metaphysics as a discipline (‘ilm ilâhi or ilâhiyyât) occur in the autobiography, the one in the description of the secondary education, the other in the account of the undergraduate education. Metaphysics had a role also in Avicenna’s graduate education, but it is not explicitly referred to in that context. The first mention of metaphysics is very brief (it occupies two lines of the edition) and has not yet received the attention it deserves. The second mention, instead, constitutes the well-known anecdote, in which Avicenna relates his problems in understanding Aristotle’s *Metaphysics* (*Kitâb Mâ ba’d al-tabi‘a*) and his fortuitous – almost providential – encounter with a treatise by al-Fârâbî dealing with this work, which clarified to him the issue.

My aim in this article is to emphasize the significance of the first mention of metaphysics in Avicenna’s autobiography, despite its brevity. As we shall see, it attests to the fact that Avicenna, during his secondary studies, did not read Aristotle’s *Metaphysics* in its entirety, but, rather, knew only the essential parts of it (roughly speaking, its natural theology, as represented by books *Alpha Elatton* and *Lambda*) and consulted some commentaries on these parts. Later on, during his undergraduate education, he faced the entire *Metaphysics* and was puzzled by the extent and complexity of the work.

*Oriental Society*, 111 [1991]: 333-42, p. 336, rejects the dating of the autobiography proposed by Gutas, and asserts that “the date of its writing remains uncertain”. The question of chronology does not affect the interpretation of the autobiography I propose in the present article.


In other words, on closer inspection we detect in the autobiography an evolution in Avicenna’s knowledge of Aristotle’s *Metaphysics*. This evolution can be described in two ways. Doctrinally, it reflects the twofold nature of Aristotle’s *Metaphysics*, which is both a natural theology (an account of the First Being as primary cause, or *metaphysica specialis*), and an ontology (a theory of being-qua-being, or *metaphysica generalis*). Historically, it portrays Avicenna’s passage from al-Kindi’s (d. shortly after 256/870) way of reading Aristotle’s work, with its one-sided emphasis on the theological part of the *Metaphysics* as represented by books *Alpha Elatton* and *Lambda*, to al-Farabi’s (d. 339/950) approach, where both components – theological and ontological – of the *Metaphysics* and all the books of this work are taken into due account. The significance of this process, in either aspect, does not need to be stressed.

I divide the present contribution into seven sections. In the first section, I analyze the first mention of metaphysics in Avicenna’s autobiography, showing that Avicenna at this early stage did not read the entire text of Aristotle’s *Metaphysics*, but only its “essential parts” (*fuṣūṣ*). In the following two sections (§§2-3), I adduce two additional pieces of evidence in favor of this thesis, taken, respectively, from the second mention of metaphysics in the autobiography, and from a passage of Avicenna’s *Letter to Kiyā*. The fourth section is devoted to establishing the identity of such essential parts of the *Metaphysics*; they are, as

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far as I can surmise, chapters 1-2 of book Alpha Elatton and chapters 6-10 of book Lambda. That Lambda 6-10 is one of the essential parts of Metaphysics in Avicenna’s mind is confirmed by the investigation of the commentaries on the Metaphysics that Avicenna, according to the first mention of metaphysics in the autobiography, read during his secondary education (§5). In the sixth section I describe the way in which Avicenna connected Alpha Elatton 1-2 and Lambda 6-10 at the time of his secondary studies. In the seventh section, finally, I try to sketch the evolution of Avicenna’s knowledge of Aristotle’s Metaphysics in the course of his education.

§1 - THE FIRST MENTION OF METAPHYSICS IN THE AUTOBIOGRAPHY

The first mention of metaphysics in Avicenna’s autobiography, the one occurring in the context of his secondary education, is very brief. It is found in between the detailed description of his first acquaintance with jurisprudence (under the guidance of Isma’il al-Zahid) and the first two theoretical disciplines (logic and mathematics, under the guidance of Abū ‘Abdallāh al-Nātīlī), on the one hand, and his subsequent study and practice of medicine and jurisprudence, on the other. The two remaining theoretical disciplines, namely natural philosophy and metaphysics, are the object of the following short remark:

Text 1: Then al-Nātīlī took leave of me, heading for Gurgān, and I occupied myself on my own with determining the validity of books (kutub), both essential parts (fuṣūṣ) and commentaries (ṣūrūḥ), on natural philosophy and metaphysics (ilāhiyyāt), and the gates of knowledge began opening for me. As the second mention of metaphysics in the autobiography will clarify, the “books” (kutub) referred to in Text 1 without any further qualification are mainly, if not exclusively, Aristotle’s books (in our case his writings on natural philosophy and the

8 The Life of Ibn Sīna, pp. 20, 4-24, 4.
9 The Life of Ibn Sīna, pp. 24, 7-26, 4.
10 The Life of Ibn Sīna, p. 24, 4-7: ʿumma fāraqanī al-Nātīlī mutawāqīghan ilā Kurkāṅa wa-ṣiṣṭālī anā bi-taḥṣīlī al-kutubi min al-fuṣūṣī wa-al-ṣūrūhī min al-ṭabiʿiyyātī wa-al-ilāhiyyātī wa-ṣāra abwābu al-ʿilmī tafāṭīhu ‘alayya. As Gutas notices (Avicenna, p. 27, n. 3), wa-al-ṣūrūḥī in the edited text is a misprint for wa-al-ṣūrūhī. The translation I propose is a modified version of Gutas’ translation (Avicenna, p. 27).
Metaphysics. In Text 1 metaphysics as a discipline is called ilāhiyyāt. This term, and its cognate ‘ilm ilāhī which occurs in the second mention of metaphysics in the autobiography, are often generic names for metaphysics and for Aristotle’s eponymous writing in both the earlier Arabic tradition and Avicenna. Sometimes, however, they designate in particular the theological part of this discipline and this work, in opposition to ‘ilm kullī as a name for the ontological part. In the light of what will emerge from section 6 below, it might not be accidental that Avicenna in Text 1 refers to metaphysics through a term that on occasion expresses its theological dimension.

The most important and controversial aspect of Text 1 is the occurrence in it of the term fuṣūṣ in connection with šurūḥ (“commentaries”). I reject the usual translation of this term, and I propose a new one.

Almost all the modern translations of the autobiography, which are based either on Gohlman’s edition or on one of its sources, have rendered fuṣūṣ as “texts”. This happens, for

11 Cf. below, section 2. We cannot a priori exclude that the Theologia Aristotelis (the Arabic paraphrase of Plotinus’ Enneads IV-VI) was one of the metaphysical books Avicenna read during his secondary education and in the subsequent stages of his philosophical training, especially in the light of the importance he attached later to this writing (cf. below, section 3). In the autobiography, however, there is no mention or allusion to the Theologia or other pseudo-Aristotelian writings dealing with metaphysics and stemming from the neoplatonic tradition.


The only exception to the rendering of fuṣūṣ as “texts” in Text 1 is represented by the French translation by M. Achena and H. Massé, based on al-Qifflī’s Ta’rīḥ al-ḥukmān: “Ensuite, Nāṭilī me quitta, s’en allant à Gorgānī. Quand à moi, je me plaçai à lire et à étudier les Focouc-al’hikam [sic] (de Fārābī) et d’autres commentaires sur la physique et la métaphysique; et de jour en jour, les portes de la science s’ouvraient devant moi”, in Avicenne, Le livre de science. I (logique, métaphysique), trans. M. Achena and H. Massé (Paris, 1955), p. 7. In this translation fuṣūṣ is not taken as a generic term, but rather as the title of a specific work, namely the Fūṣūṣ al-hikma, which, following the traditional attribution, Achena and Massé regard as a work by
example, in the German translation by P. Kraus ("Texte")\textsuperscript{16}; in the English translation by A. J. Arberry ("texts"),\textsuperscript{17} which deeply influenced all the subsequent English translations\textsuperscript{18}; and in the Spanish translation by M. Cruz Hernández ("obras originales").\textsuperscript{19} These translators seem to have treated $fuüz$ as though it were $nuüz$, which indeed means "texts". The reason for this confusion is, of course, the close similarity between these two terms, joined to the fact that the presence of the term $šurūh$ (commentaries) in Text 1 does require the existence of some texts to be commented upon. But the possibility of substituting $nuüz$ for $fuüz$ is excluded, and the supposed connection between $šurūh$ and $nuüz$ is far from being necessary.

The reading $fuüz$ in Text 1 cannot be casted into doubt. It is unanimously transmitted by all the witnesses Gohlman takes into account in his critical edition of Avicenna’s autobiography.\textsuperscript{20}


\textsuperscript{17} A. J. Arberry, Avicenna on Theology (London, 1951), p. 10 (translation based on al-Qiffl’s Ta’rīḫ al-Ωukam®’ and Ibn Abī Uṣaybi’a’s ‘Uyūn al-anbā’ fi ṭabaqāt al-āṭibbā’): “Then al-Nāṭili took leave of me, setting out for Gurganj. I now occupied myself with mastering the various texts and commentaries on natural science and metaphysics, until all the gates of knowledge were open to me”.

\textsuperscript{18} Gohlman, The Life of Ibn Sīna, p. 25: “Then al-Nāṭili left me, going on to Gurganj. I devoted myself to studying the texts – the original and commentaries – in the natural sciences and metaphysics”. Gutas, Avicenna, p. 27 (translation based on Gohlman’s edition): “Then al-Nāṭili took leave of me, heading for Gurganj, and I occupied myself on my own with Determining the Validity of books, both original texts and commentaries, on Physics and Metaphysics”.

\textsuperscript{19} M. Cruz Hernández, La vida de Avicena como introducción a su pensamiento (Salamanca, 1997), p. 25 (translation based on Gohlman’s edition): “Más tarde, el-Natali me dejó, marchando a Gurgan, dedicándome a comprobar por mí mismo la validez de los libros de Física y Metafísica, tanto las obras originales como los commentarios”.

\textsuperscript{20} The autobiography/biography complex exists in at least two recensions (cf. Gutas, “Avicenna. Biography”, p. 67). One is preserved in Ibn al-Qiffl’s (d. 1248) Ta’rīḫ al-Ωukam®’ (= Q in Gohlman’s edition) and in Ibn Abī Uṣaybi’a’s (d. 1270) ‘Uyūn al-anbā’ fi ṭabaqāt al-āṭibbā’ (= IAU). The other is transmitted by several
It is also attested in some retellings of al-Ḡūzānī’s edition of the autobiography/biography.\textsuperscript{21} The lectio facilior nuṣūṣ ("texts") appears only in some derivatives of these retellings.\textsuperscript{22}

It is also doubtful that Avicenna would have employed the term nuṣūṣ to signify the texts to be commented upon. In the autobiography, in fact, there is another passage in which Avicenna speaks of texts and commentaries, but in this passage the term nuṣūṣ does not appear at all. The passage in question is the description of Avicenna’s study of logic and mathematics during his secondary education. It comes, as I have said, immediately before our Text 1. Avicenna states there that he read, as far as logic is concerned, the “book (kitāb) of the Isagoge”\textsuperscript{23} (namely Porphyry’s introduction to Aristotle’s Categories) and the “books (kutub)” without further qualification (that is Aristotle’s Organon)\textsuperscript{24}; as to mathematics, he read “Euclid’s book (kitāb)”\textsuperscript{25} – i.e. the Elements – and Ptolemy’s Almagest.\textsuperscript{26}
The case of Aristotle’s *Organon* is particularly significant, since in this case Avicenna says that he read not only the “books” but also the “commentaries” (ṣūrūḥ).27 The works of logic and mathematics mentioned in this passage are clearly the *texts* that Avicenna consulted. But they are called *kutub*, not *nuṣūṣ*. The former denomination is preserved even when the texts are read in conjunction with commentaries, as in the case of the Aristotelian logical writings.

In other words, had Avicenna in Text 1 simply intended to refer to the texts of natural philosophy and metaphysics and to the commentaries upon them, he would have had no need of mentioning the *nuṣūṣ* beside the *kutub*. The latter term, in fact, would have alone sufficed to convey the meaning of “texts”, as it does in the passage of the autobiography dealing with Aristotle’s *Organon*. The mention of the commentaries in Text 1, hence, is not a sufficient ground for changing the transmitted *fuṣūṣ* into an unnecessary *nuṣūṣ*.

For these reasons, I keep the term *fuṣūṣ* in Text 1, and translate it not as “texts”, but as “essential parts”. I can invoke three main reasons in support of this reading. First, the Arabic lexicographical tradition recommends such a meaning, and the rest of Text 1, especially the mention of the “commentaries” (ṣūrūḥ), seems to corroborate it. Second, a reading of the “essential parts” of Aristotle’s *Metaphysics* during Avicenna’s secondary education is implied by the second mention of metaphysics in the autobiography. Third, this same term *fuṣūṣ*, in the sense of “essential parts”, occurs in another writing by Avicenna. In the present section I will focus on the meaning of *fuṣūṣ* as it can be reconstructed from Arabic dictionaries and from Text 1 itself. The other two reasons for translating it as “essential parts” will be discussed in sections 2 and 3 below.

According to the Arabic lexicographical tradition, among the literal meanings of *faṣṣ*, the singular of *fuṣūṣ*, the main one is the “stone or gem or what is set in a ring or a signet”.28 Al-Zamaḥšari (d. 538/1144) in the *Asās al-balāğa*29 and al-Zabīdī (d. 1205/1791) in the *Tāḡ al-ʿarūs*30 record, in the context of the

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metaphorical meanings of this term, the sentence qara‘tu fī faṣṣ al-kitāb kadā, which E. W. Lane translates as “I read, in the most essential part of the book or writing, such a thing”. Some of the Arab lexicographers, thus, recognized the term fuṣūṣ as designating the essential parts of a writing.

As far as I can see, the term fuṣūṣ in Text 1 bears just this metaphorical meaning of “essential parts” with respect to Aristotle’s books of natural philosophy and metaphysics. The evidence provided by the Arabic lexicographical tradition, in fact, fits very well with the actual content of Text 1. In it, the mention of the term fuṣūṣ is immediately followed by that of the term šurūḥ. The term šurūḥ, meaning “commentaries”, indeed presupposes the existence of some writings commented upon. It is natural to look for these writings in the fuṣūṣ themselves. But it is not necessary for the objects of the commentaries to be “texts”, in the sense of integral texts. They can equally well be “essential parts”, in the sense of partial texts. The scope of the commentaries themselves, in this case, has to be narrower as well. The commentaries Avicenna consulted during his secondary education, as I will show in section 5, had exactly this character.

If, therefore, we translate fuṣūṣ in Text 1 as “essential parts”, without altering the edited text, we both give this term one of its attested meanings and we also provide a plausible object for the šurūḥ, namely the essential parts of Aristotle’s books on natural philosophy and metaphysics.

§2 - THE SECOND MENTION OF METAPHYSICS IN THE AUTOBIOGRAPHY

The description of Avicenna’s undergraduate studies in the autobiography consists of two parts. The first describes in general his commitment to reading again “logic and all the parts of philosophy” (al-manṭiq wa-ḡamī‘ aḡzā‘ al-falsafa), until he
mastered “all the philosophical sciences” (ḡamī‘ al-ʿulūm). The second part is a sort of *excursus* dealing in particular with the theoretical problems Avicenna initially met when, after progressing in logic, physics and mathematics, he reached metaphysics, and the solution he found to these problems. This second part contains the second mention of metaphysics in Avicenna’s autobiography.

If my hypothesis about the *fuṣūṣ* in Text 1 is correct, Avicenna’s approach to logic and mathematics, on the one hand, and natural philosophy and metaphysics, on the other, at the time of his secondary education, was not the same. In the one case, he read the texts (*kutub*) and, for Aristotle’s *Organon*, the commentaries as well. In the other case, he read only the essential parts (*fuṣūṣ*) and the commentaries on these parts. This original diversity in approach is confirmed by the subsequent study of these two groups of disciplines in Avicenna’s undergraduate education. According to the autobiography they had a very different fate.

Thus, as far as logic and mathematics are concerned, Avicenna does not mention any special difficulty he had to face in the context of his undergraduate education. Logic in particular, far from being a source of problems, constituted, on the contrary, the methodological corner-stone of Avicenna’s undergraduate education. This mainly consisted in applying the syllogistic method to the other philosophical disciplines.

The situation is, instead, totally different with metaphysics. According to the autobiography, Avicenna not only met serious difficulties, but also deemed these difficulties so deep and radical that he concluded that metaphysics as a discipline was useless. There are signs that these overwhelming problems about metaphysics arose at the time of Avicenna’s undergraduate education just because he had not read Aristotle’s *Metaphysics* in its entirety before, namely during his secondary education.

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33 Also in Avicenna’s philosophical production, physics and metaphysics, on the one hand, and logic, on the other, have a different degree of closeness to Aristotle’s writings on these subjects. In Avicenna’s works, the sections on physics and metaphysics are free reworkings of the corresponding Aristotelian treatises, whereas the treatment of logic is more congruent with Aristotle’s *Organon*. This is expressly noticed by Avicenna himself in his prologue to the *Kitāb al-Ṣifā* and by al-Ḡūzānī in his introduction to this same work (cf. Gutas, *Avicenna*, pp. 106-12).
The second mention of metaphysics in the autobiography deserves to be quoted in full:

Text 2: Having mastered logic, natural philosophy and mathematics, I had now reached metaphysics (al-‘ilm al-ilāhi). I read the Metaphysics (Kitāb Mā ba’d al-ţabī‘a) but did not understand what it contained and was confused about the author’s purpose to the point that I reread it forty times and consequently memorized it. In spite of this I still did not understand it or what was intended by it, and I said, despairing of myself: “There is no way to understand this book (kitāb)!”. One afternoon I was at the booksellers’ quarter when a crier came up holding a volume which he was hawking for sale. He offered it to me but I refused in vexation, believing that there was no use in this particular science. But he said to me: “Buy it; its owner needs the money and it’s cheap; I’ll sell it to you for three dirhams”. So I bought it and it turned out to be Abū Naṣr al-Fārābī’s book On the Purposes of Metaphysics (Fi Ağrāḏ Kitāb Mā ba’d al-ţabī‘a). I returned home and hastened to read it, and at once the purposes of that book (kitāb) were disclosed to me because I had learned it by heart. I rejoiced at this and the next day I gave much in alms to the poor in gratitude to God Exalted.35

The book of al-Fārābī mentioned in Text 2 is his famous Fi Ağrāḏ al-Ḥakīm fi kull maqāla min al-kitāb al-mawsūm bi-al-ḥurūf (On the purposes of the Sage in each treatise of the book named by means of letters), first edited and translated by F. Dieterici in the last decade of the nineteenth century, and recently translated and analyzed by both Th.-A. Druart and D. Gutas.36 In the title of this work, the “Sage” is Aristotle, and the “book named by means of letters” the Metaphysics.

Text 2 is reported or quoted very often in works dealing with Avicenna’s life and thought. Having become a sort of topos, it has been the object of superficial, if not distorting, readings. The scholarly misconceptions regarding this text, and its reliability

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35 The Life of Ibn Sina, pp. 30, 7-34, 4. The translation I propose is a modified version of Gutas’s translation (Avicenna, p. 28).

as historical evidence both of Avicenna’s degree of comprehension of Aristotle’s *Metaphysics*, and of the influence that al-Fārābī’s treatise exerted on him, have been underscored by D. Gutas.37

I want to emphasize three aspects of this text, which shed light on Text 1 and allow to draw some conclusions about it. First, Text 2 shows that, since he could not understand Aristotle’s *Metaphysics*, Avicenna believed that there “there was no use in this particular science” (lā fā‘ida fī hādā al-‘ilm), namely in metaphysics as a discipline. This definitively clarifies a point made above, namely that Aristotle’s *Metaphysics* was for Avicenna, if not the only, at least the main text dealing with metaphysics, and, therefore, that the *fuṣūṣ* and the *ṣūrūh* mentioned in Text 1 are, as far as metaphysics is concerned, *fuṣūṣ* and *ṣūrūh* of Aristotle’s *Metaphysics*.

Second, there is no doubt that Text 2 describes Avicenna’s reading of Aristotle’s *Metaphysics* in its entirety. This is proved by the mention of the title of Aristotle’s work (*Kitāb Mā ba‘d al-ṭabī‘a*), the two additional references to it by means of the term *kitāb* (the same term employed to designate the texts of logic and mathematics in the description of Avicenna’s secondary education), and the allusions to Avicenna’s reading, re-reading and memorizing of it. The Arabic translation of Aristotle’s *Metaphysics* which Avicenna read at this stage is probably that by Ústāṭ (9th century) or, alternatively, that by Ishāq b. Ḥunayn (d. 910-911).38 Thus, the main point of Text 2 is that, when reading Aristotle’s work in its entirety, Avicenna encountered some serious problems. But this is better explained in the hypothesis that Avicenna was reading for the first time Aristotle’s *Metaphysics* in its entirety. The emergence of these problems at this stage cannot be reasonably accounted for, unless we suppose that Avicenna was having his first acquaintance with the full text of Aristotle’s work. This implies that Avicenna did not read Aristotle’s *Metaphysics* in its entirety before this stage, namely during his secondary education.

Third, as Gutas has convincingly demonstrated, the problems Avicenna encountered in reading Aristotle’s *Metaphysics*


according to Text 2 did not concern the discrete contents of this work, but its overall purpose, in other words its arrangement and structure. This implies that the sources of Avicenna’s previous knowledge of Aristotle’s *Metaphysics* – i.e. the *fuṣūṣ* and *šurūḥ* of Text 1 – did not sufficiently elucidate the general framework of Aristotle’s *Metaphysics*. This can easily be understood if these sources did not encompass all the *Metaphysics*, but only some parts of it. In other words, Text 2 would exclude not only Avicenna’s acquaintance with the integral text of Aristotle’s *Metaphysics* during his secondary education, but also his use of something like a summary of it. The most reasonable possibility is that, during his secondary instruction, Avicenna read only some parts of the *Metaphysics*.

All this corroborates the translation of *fuṣūṣ* in Text 1 as “essential parts”.

§3 - *FUṢŪṢ IN AVICENNA’S LETTER TO KIYĀ*

Apart from Text 1, the term *faṣṣ, fuṣūṣ* occurs rarely in Avicenna’s writings.39 If we agree with S. Pines that the *Risālat al-Fuṣūṣ fī al-ḥikma*, despite its traditional attribution to al-Fārābī,40 is in reality a work by Avicenna,41 the title of this work would constitute one of the few occurrences of the term *fuṣūṣ* in Avicenna’s œuvre. *Fuṣūṣ* in the title of the *Risāla* is usually translated in its literal sense as “seals” (*Petschafte*)42 or “stones of rings” (*Ringsteine*).43

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40 This text has been edited twice under al-Fārābī’s name: Alfarābī’s *philosophische Abhandlungen*, pp. 66-83; M. Horten, *Buch der Ringsteine Alfarābīs, neu bearbeitet und mit Auszügen aus dem Kommentar des Emir Ismaīl el Fārānī erläutert* (Münster i. W., 1904).


43 M. Horten, *Buch der Ringsteine Farabis 950†, mit dem Kommentare des Emir Isma’il el-Ḥoseini el Farani (um 1485) übersetzt und erläutert* (Münster i. W., 1906).
It might, however, equally well signify “essential parts”, as in the works cited by al-Zabīdī. This would fit the actual content of the work, which is an outline of the main points of metaphysics and psychology.

A more interesting – and surely Avicennian – locus where the term fuṣūš occurs is the Letter to Kiyā, a late writing by Avicenna, dealing with questions about philosophical method. The Letter was discovered by P. Kraus about sixty years ago\(^4\) and edited by A. Badawi\(^5\) shortly later; its importance has been emphasized more recently by S. Pines and D. Gutas\(^6\). The mention of the fuṣūš in the Letter is particularly relevant for our purposes, since in it, as in Text 1, this term seems to have the meaning of “essential parts” of books. Also in this case the books in question are the Aristotelian (and Ps.-Aristotelian) writings.

Text 3: You asked to find out how I proceed in such matters.\(^4\) I will tell you: I had composed a book which I called Fair Judgment (Kitāb al-Inṣāf). [...] I commented clearly (awḍaḥtu sharḥ) on the difficult passages (mawāḍi‘ muškila) in the essential parts (fuṣūš) [of Aristotle’s books] up to the end of the Theologia (Uṭūlūqiyyā), despite the fact that the Theologia is somewhat suspect, and I talked about the oversights of the commentators (mufassirīn). [...] Then it was lost in the course of some rout, since there was only the first draft.\(^4\)

The Uṭūlūqiyyā Avicenna mentions in Text 3 is the Theologia Aristotelis, the famous Arabic abstract of Plotinus’ Enneads IV-VI, falsely attributed to Aristotle.\(^4\)

\(^5\) A. Badawi, Arisṭū ‘ind al-‘Arab (Cairo 1947), pp. 120, 9-122, 8.
\(^4\) Namely in the problems of psychology and cosmology mentioned in the previous part of the letter.
From Text 3 we get an interesting clue about the method of the *Kitāb al-Inšāf*. All the information at our disposal concerning this work (statements by Avicenna himself and others) concur in depicting it as a voluminous commentary on the Aristotelian *corpus*.\(^{50}\) This does not mean, however, that the work was an exhaustive and running commentary. Text 3 indicates, on the contrary, as far as I can see, that the *Kitāb al-Inšāf* was a selective exegesis, both in the sense that it did not range across the books commented upon in their entirety, but only on their essential parts (*fuṣūṣ*), and in the sense that it focused on the difficult passages (*mawādi‘ muškila*) within these essential parts.\(^{51}\)

This interpretation of Text 3 finds support in the inspection of the actual contents of the *Kitāb al-Inšāf*. Unfortunately, this originally massive writing is extant only partially and indirectly, in the form of disciples’ *reportationes*, in the MS Ḥīkma 6M of the *Dār al-Kutub* Library in Cairo and in other manuscripts transcribed from, or depending on, this.\(^{52}\) The parts of the *Kitāb al-Inšāf* that have been preserved in the Cairo manuscript are a commentary (*ṣarḥ*) on book *Lambda* of Aristotle’s *Metaphysics*,\(^{53}\) and two different recensions of the explanation contributo all’analisi delle fonti di *Teologia di Aristotele*, Mimar II”, in G. Piaia (ed.), *Concordia discors. Studi su Niccolò Cusano e l’umanesimo europeo offerti a G. Santinello* (Padova, 1993), pp. 3-22; *Ead.*, “Porphyry, Universal soul and the Arabic Plotinus”, *Arabic Sciences and Philosophy*, 9 (1999): 47-88; *Ead.*, “Pseudo-Theology of Aristotle, Chapter 1: Structure and composition”, forthcoming; *Ead.*, “‘Gumlatu falsafatinā, l’ensemble de notre philosophie’. L’héritage de l’Antiquité tardive et son interprétation dans le Prôme de la *Théologie d’Aristote*”, forthcoming in *Sciences et philosophie arabes: méthodes, problèmes et cas*, Actes du colloque de la SIHSPAI, Carthage, 28 Nov.-2 Dec. 2000.


\(^{51}\) Pines (“La ‘Philosophie orientale’ d’Aviceenne”, p. 9) translates the term *fuṣūṣ* in Text 3 as “texts” (textes), Gutas (*Avicenna*, p. 63) as “original texts”. In the summary of Text 3 by Kraus (“Plotin chez les Arabes”, p. 272, n. 3), *fuṣūṣ* has no exact French equivalent.


of the *Theologia Aristotelis*,<sup>54</sup> called respectively “commentary” (ṣarḥ) and “interpretation” (tafsīr).<sup>55</sup>

The commentary on *Metaphysics Lambda* consists of the exegesis of chapters 6-10 of the book. The text as we now have it is a copy of an extract made by a disciple. This latter has introduced stylistic changes (the text is reported in the third person), but has apparently preserved the original extent of the commentary. The preference accorded to chapters 6-10 within *Lambda*, if by Avicenna, would be significant, since it would indicate that these chapters were for him the essential parts of the book commented upon.

Also Avicenna’s ṣarḥ and tafsīr of the *Theologia Aristotelis*, as we have them, are disciples’ copies, ultimately deriving from the text itself of Avicenna.<sup>56</sup> It is not completely clear which portion of the *Theologia* Avicenna explained in the ṣarḥ. Only a part of the latter has been published by ‘A. Badawi. Badawi associates this part with the fifth mīmar (chapter) of the *Theologia* according to the version edited by F. Dieterici in 1882.<sup>57</sup> The French translator is probably right in describing Avicenna’s ṣarḥ as a “commentary on chosen passages” of the

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<sup>57</sup> Badawi, *Arisṭū*, p. 59, 12 and n. 8.
The exact identity of these “chosen passages” has still, however, to be ascertained. The taṣīr, on the other hand, can be more easily reconnected with the text commented upon. Its editor and its French translator agree in considering it a discontinuous exegesis of five of the ten mīmar of the Theologia, namely the first, second, fourth, seventh and eighth mīmar. Also in the case of Avicenna’s explanation of the Theologia Aristotelis, therefore, some sections of the text commented upon have played the role of essential parts.

It is difficult to establish whether the selectiveness of the surviving parts of the Kitāb al-Inšāf mirrors the character of Avicenna’s original, or rather is something introduced later by the disciples who copied it. The fact that Avicenna in Text 3 states that he commented on the Theologia Aristotelis “up to the end”, whereas the second, most extensive, recension of his explanation does not contain any commentary on the last two mīmar of the pseudo-Aristotelian work, might suggest the second alternative. But, even though the version of the Theologia upon which Avicenna commented has been identified (it is the so-called “short” or “shorter version”, available in Dieterici’s edition), it is not easy to ascertain in which form Avicenna knew this version – whether he had access to the same text as that of our modern edition or to a text qualitatively and quantitatively different.

Despite this uncertainty, which only future research may clarify, the fact remains that Avicenna’s commentaries on Metaphysics Lambda and the Theologia Aristotelis, as they have been preserved, are not integral commentaries, but selective explanations of some parts of these two works. If we take these two cases as an example of the method Avicenna followed in the rest of the Kitāb al-Inšāf as well, then it follows that in this work he did not comment on the Aristotelian (and pseudo-Aristotelian) books in their entirety, but only on their essential parts or fuṣūṣ, as Text 3, according to the interpretation proposed, seems to suggest.

The extant portions of the Kitāb al-Inšāf attest also – this time clearly – to the second aspect of Avicenna’s method as

58 Vajda, “Les notes d’Avicenne”, p. 383, n. 1: “[...] ces pages représentent en somme une rédaction du commentaire sur des passages choisis de la ThA (i.e. Theologia Aristotelis)”.
stated in Text 3, namely the special attention he paid to the “difficult passages” (mawāḍi‘ muškila) within the fuşūṣ. In the commentary on *Metaphysics Lambda* 6-10 as it appears in the Cairo manuscript, not all the text of these chapters is explained. The doxographic sections in chapter 6 (1071 b 31-1072 a 9) and chapter 10 (1075 a 28-1076 a 4), for example, are not commented upon. The explanations of the *Theologia Aristotelis* – especially the tafsīr – have this same character, and are consequently described by G. Vajda as selective exegesis.⁶⁰

From my analysis of Text 3 and of Avicenna’s work referred to in it, two main conclusions can be drawn. First, the term fuşūṣ means, in Text 3 as in Text 1, the essential parts of some Aristotelian writings. These writings are the works on natural philosophy and the *Metaphysics* in Text 1, all the Aristotelian corpus plus the *Theologia Aristotelis* in Text 3. Second, the essential part of book *Lambda* of Aristotle’s *Metaphysics* is represented, for Avicenna, by chapters 6-10.

In the following two sections (§§4-5) I will show that chapters 6-10 are for Avicenna the essential parts not only of book *Lambda*, but also, together with chapters 1-2 of book *Alpha Elatton*, of all the *Metaphysics*. First, Avicenna seems actually to have regarded these two loci of the *Metaphysics* as fundamental and more relevant than the others (§4). Second, the only identifiable commentary among the šurūḥ of Aristotle’s *Metaphysics* mentioned in Text 1 is Themistius’ paraphrase of *Lambda*. Now, Avicenna was particularly interested in the part of Themistius’ paraphrase dealing with chapters 6-10 (§5).

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issue with exclusive regard to Aristotle’s *Metaphysics*. A similar investigation concerning Aristotelian natural philosophy lies outside the boundaries of the present contribution.\(^61\)

As far as the *Metaphysics* is concerned, what Avicenna in Text 1 calls its “essential parts” seem to have included chapters 1-2 of book *Alpha Elatton* – the first treatise of the *Metaphysics* in the Arab tradition – and chapters 6-10 of book *Lambda* – the theological treatise of Aristotle’s work. Only future research will determine whether these were the only essential parts of the *Metaphysics* according to Avicenna, or rather two elements of a larger complex. My assumption about the presence of *Alpha Elatton* 1-2 and *Lambda* 6-10 among the *fuṣūṣ* of the *Metaphysics* is supported by three main pieces of evidence which bear witness to the privileged attention Avicenna always devoted to these two *loeci*.

First, *Alpha Elatton* 1-2 and *Lambda* 6-10 are the only parts of the *Metaphysics* that, as far as we know, were part of Avicenna’s library. This is attested by the already mentioned MS Ḥikma 6M of the *Dār al-Kutub* Library in Cairo. As D. Gutas has shown, this manuscript was copied by ‘Abd al-Razzāq al-Ṣignāḥī, a third generation student of Avicenna, from texts originally belonging to the master’s library.\(^62\) Now, this manuscript contains not only several Avicennian works, but also some translations of Greek texts, which “would seem to have been transcribed […] from volumes owned by Avicenna”.\(^63\) The *Metaphysics* is the only work by Aristotle which appears in this manuscript. Not all the treatises of the *Metaphysics*, however, are preserved, but only those to which Avicenna evidently attached a particular importance.

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\(^{62}\) Gutas, “Notes and texts”, p. 9a-b. ‘Abd al-Razzāq’s master, Abū al-‘Abbās al-Lawkārī, was a student of Bahmanyār, one of the prominent disciples of Avicenna.

\(^{63}\) Gutas, “Notes and texts”, p. 9b.
Significantly for our purposes, the Cairo manuscript contains an abridged version of the Arabic translation of book *Alpha Elatton*, chapters 1-2 (993a30-994b31) attributed to Isḥaq b. Ḥunayn⁶⁴ – and a slightly paraphrastic version of book *Lambda*, chapters 6-10 (1071b3-1076a4).⁶⁵ The fact that in Avicenna’s library the *Metaphysics* was represented only by *Alpha Elatton* 1-2 and *Lambda* 6-10 implies that Avicenna considered these two loci as the essential parts of Aristotle’s work. The two aforementioned versions might have been the actual texts of *Alpha Elatton* and *Lambda* that Avicenna read during his secondary education.

The second piece of evidence is provided by the quotations of Aristotle’s *Metaphysics* in Avicenna’s own metaphysical writings. These writings are free reworkings of the *Metaphysics*, from which they draw their doctrinal inspiration. Aristotle’s very text is in some cases implicitly reproduced and, on a few special occasions, also explicitly quoted. The most important of such writings is the *Ilāhiyyāt* (Divine science) of the *Kitāb al-Šifāʾ* (Book of the Cure),⁶⁶ a work whose comprehensiveness is

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⁶⁴ Cf. Gutas, “Notes and texts”, p. 13b-14a. As Gutas notices, in the Cairo manuscript this abridged version and the translation of Themistius’ paraphrase of *Lambda* 6-10 which follows it (cf. below, section 5) might also be regarded as parts of the work immediately preceding, namely Ibn Zayla’s *Gumlat al-maġmū’ fi al-ilāhiyyāt* (Compilation on *Metaphysics*). If true, this would imply that Ibn-Zayla also considered *Alpha Elatton* 1-2 and *Lambda* 6-10 as the essential parts of the *Metaphysics*, without excluding the likelihood that these two translations belonged to Avicenna’s library. The abridged version of *Alpha Elatton* 1-2 contained in the Cairo manuscript remains unpublished. The translation of *Alpha Elatton* attributed to Isḥaq b. Ḥunayn, of which it is a partial abridgement, is available in Averroes’ *tafsīr* of Aristotle’s *Metaphysics*; cf. Averroes, *Tafsīr ma ba’da at-Tabī’at*, ed. M. Bouyges, vol. I (Beirut, 1938), pp. 3-54 (the attribution to Isḥaq is found in two marginal annotations of the manuscript of this work, p. 3, 6; p. 50, 5-10). In the margins of the manuscript of Averroes’ *Tafsīr*, another translation of *Alpha Elatton*, attributed to Usṭāt, is transcribed.


stressed by Avicenna himself when he says in its prologue: “There is nothing of account to be found in the book of the ancients which we did not include in this book of ours.”67 In the Ilāhiyyāt of the Kitāb al-Šifā’ (henceforth: Ilāhiyyāt) all the explicit quotations of Aristotle are taken from Alpha Elatton 268 and Lambda 7-8.69 In these quotations Aristotle is named al-mu’allim al-awwal (“The First teacher”).70 If we take the explicit quotation as a sign of distinctive importance, then Alpha Elatton 2 and Lambda 7-8 have to be considered the most important parts of Aristotle’s Metaphysics in Avicenna’s Ilāhiyyāt. The importance of Alpha Elatton 2 in this work is further confirmed by the fact that the explicit quotations from it occur in a chapter of the Ilāhiyyāt whose only purpose is to safeguard the Aristotelian doctrine of Alpha Elatton 2 from a wide array of criticisms. Such a defensive attitude is exceptional within the Ilāhiyyāt.


69 Ilāhiyyāt, IX, 2, p. 392, 4 (cf. Lambda 7, 1073 a 7-8, 1072 b 3); IX, 2, p. 392, 9 (cf. Lambda 8, 1073 a 14-b 1); IX, 2, p. 392, 15-16 (cf. Lambda 8, 1073 b 1-1074 a 18); IX, 3, p. 401, 16 (cf. Lambda 8, 1073 b 38-1074 a 17). In one of the earliest metaphysical works by Avicenna, al-Mabda’ wa-al-ma’ād (The Provenance and Destination), which was later copied in the Ilāhiyyāt, we find these same four references to Metaphysics Lambda, plus other four. Cf. Al-Mabda’ wa-al-Ma’ād (The Beginning and The End) By Ibn i Sīnā, ed. A. Nūrānī (Tehran, 1984), p. 61, 10 (= Ilāhiyyāt, p. 392, 4); p. 61, 18 (= Ilāhiyyāt, p. 392, 9); p. 62, 3 (= Ilāhiyyāt, p. 392, 15-16); p. 65, 7 (= Ilāhiyyāt, p. 401, 16); p. 34, 3; p. 68, 14; p. 68, 21; p. 85, 8). In Al-Mabda’ wa-al-ma’ād Aristotle is named “philosopher” (faylasūf) and the Metaphysics Kitāb mā ba’d al-ṭabi‘a (p. 36, 5).

Third, Alpha Elatton in its entirety and chapters 6-10 of Lambda seem to have had an unparalleled relevance not only in Avicenna’s own reworkings of Aristotle’s Metaphysics, but also in his commentaries on this work. The most important of these commentaries are those that were parts, respectively, of al-Ḥāsil wa-al-maḥṣūl (The Available and the Valid) and of the already mentioned Kitāb al-Insāf. Since the first work is completely lost, the testimony of Avicenna’s disciples about it is one of our main sources of information. The author of the letter translated by D. Gutas as “Memoirs of a disciple from Rayy” mentions a commentary by Avicenna on Aristotle’s Metaphysics, which probably was that belonging to al-Ḥāsil wa-al-maḥṣūl. It is noteworthy that, in his description, the disciple focuses in particular on the part of Avicenna’s commentary dealing with Alpha Elatton, saying that it was as comprehensive as the overall commentary of Abū al-Farāǧ ibn al-Ṭayyib (d. 435/1043) on the Metaphysics.71 As to Avicenna’s commentary on the Metaphysics in the Kitāb al-Insāf, as we have seen, the exegesis of Lambda 6-10 is extant thanks to the special interest of Avicenna’s disciples (in the specific case, the author of the extract of the commentary on Lambda 6-10, and ‘Abd al-Razzāq al-Ṣīğnāḥi, who copied this extract in the aforementioned MS Ḥikma 6M). In both cases, the particular importance the disciples attached to the commentary on Alpha Elatton and Lambda 6-10 probably reflects the special role that Avicenna himself assigned to these two loci within the Metaphysics.

That Alpha Elatton 1-2 and Lambda 6-10 belonged to Avicenna’s library, were explicitly quoted by Avicenna in his most important metaphysical work, and were the object, in his commentaries on the Metaphysics, of a type of exegesis that impressed the disciples, indicates the centrality of these chapters in Avicenna’s understanding of Aristotle’s Metaphysics. It seems reasonable to assume, therefore, that Avicenna in Text 1 meant primarily, if not exclusively, Alpha Elatton 1-2 and Lambda 6-10 as the fuṣūṣ of Aristotle’s Metaphysics.

71 This commentary on Alpha Elation is possibly the tafsir to which Avicenna himself refers in his correspondence with al-Birūnī (cf. Gutas, Avicenna, pp. 97-98). According to his disciple Ibn Butlān, Abū al-Farāǧ ibn al-Ṭayyib devoted twenty years of his life to the composition of the commentary on the Metaphysics, until he became ill and almost died from too much study (Pines, “La ‘Philosophie orientale’ d’Avicenne”, p. 17, n. 5; cf. Gutas, Avicenna, p. 68, n. 10).
A further confirmation of this thesis about *Lambda* 6-10 as one of the *fuṣūṣ* of Aristotle’s *Metaphysics* in Text 1 can be gained from the investigation of the šurūḥ mentioned in the same text. All the Greek commentaries on the *Metaphysics* available to Avicenna in Arabic translation were, in fact, commentaries on book *Lambda*. Among them, Avicenna very likely used Themistius’ paraphrase of this book, of which he might have owned just the part dealing with chapters 6-10.

As the “books” on natural philosophy and metaphysics in Text 1 indicate the books *par excellence*, namely Aristotle’s writings on these two disciplines, so too the “commentaries”, referred to in the same text without any further qualification, designate very probably the “canonical” commentaries, namely the Greek commentaries translated into Arabic. This being the case, the range of possibilities about the identity of the commentaries on Aristotle’s *Metaphysics* that Avicenna used during his secondary education seems to be restricted to Alexander of Aphrodisias’ (2nd century) literal commentary on *Lambda*, and to Themistius’ (4th century) paraphrase of the same treatise.

A reliable witness of this situation is al-Fārābī, who, in a passage of the already mentioned *Fi ᾸAGRAD*, states that the only extant Greek commentaries on Aristotle’s *Metaphysics* are those of Alexander and Themistius.\(^{72}\) The state of affairs described by al-Fārābī is confirmed some time later by Ibn al-Nadîm in the *Fihrist* (completed in 377/988), in which Alexander of Aphrodisias’ and Themistius’ commentaries (each of them named *tafsîr*) are the sole Greek commentaries that are recorded in the entry on Aristotle’s *Metaphysics*.\(^{73}\)

As far as Alexander of Aphrodisias is concerned, it is difficult

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\(^{72}\) *Alfārābī’s Philosophische Abhandlungen*, p. 34, 14-15. English translation in Gutas, *Avicenna*, p. 240: “Furthermore, there exists no discussion by the ancients commenting in the proper manner on this book (*lā yūḫadū lī-allocatedā kalām fi šarḥ ḥādā al-kitāb ‘alā waḫīhī*) – as is the case with the other books [by Aristotle] – but at most there is the incomplete [commentary] on chapter *Lambda* by Alexander [of Aphrodisias], and the complete one by Themistius”.

\(^{73}\) A substantially analogous statement is present in Averroes’ *tafsîr* of the *Metaphysics* (Averroes, *Tafsîr*, vol. III, p. 1393, 4-7), where Alexander’s commentary is called *tafsîr*, and Themistius’ paraphrase *talḥiṣ ‘alā al-ma’nā*. 
to establish whether Avicenna had access to, or actually used, the Arabic translation of his literal commentary on *Lambda*, both at the time of his secondary education and in the subsequent stages of his life. He does not mention it, at least explicitly, in his works. Avicenna’s indebtedness to Alexander’s commentary is still to be ascertained *in toto*.

Avicenna surely knew and was deeply influenced by another writing of Alexander of Aphrodisias translated into Arabic, namely the famous *Fi Mabādi’ al-kull* (*On the Principles of the Universe*). It is unclear, however, whether Avicenna took this work to be a “commentary” (*ṣarḥ*) on *Metaphysics Lambda*, or, rather, he considered it an independent treatise. Several considerations point towards the former possibility. First, the full title of the *Fi Mabādi’ al-kull* contains an allusion to Alexander as interpreter of Aristotle’s opinion (*Treatise by Alexander of Aphrodisias on the discourse about the principles of the universe according to the opinion of Aristotle the philosopher*). Second, the *Fi Mabādi’ al-kull* is, as a matter of fact, “a discussion of

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Metaphysics Lambda, expounding the theory of the unmoved mover and the order of the universe.” Third, Avicenna quotes this work explicitly three times in the Ilāhiyyāt; all these quotations occur in connection with, and as an explanation for, doctrines taken from Metaphysics Lambda. Fourth, Avicenna sometimes applies the term šarḥ to writings that are not commentaries in the proper sense of the word. If Avicenna deemed the Fī Mabādi’ al-kull a šarḥ on Metaphysics Lambda, then this work would deservedly constitute one of the šurūḥ referred to in Text 1.

It is almost certain, on the other hand, that Avicenna meant Themistius’ paraphrase on Metaphysics Lambda as one of the commentaries he mentions in Text 1. I rely for this assumption

75 Gutas, Avicenna, p. 215.

77 In the Ilāhiyyāt (I, 3, p. 22, 13; cf. p. 25, 70), Avicenna calls šarḥ the Kitāb al-Šifā’ itself, or at least the sections of it dealing with logic and natural philosophy: wa-qad ‘urifā’ fi šarḥina li-al-manṭiqiyāyāt wa-al-ṭabi’iyyāt […]. In the Letter to Kiyāh, he qualifies the method of the sections of the Kitāb al-Šifā’ corresponding to Aristotle’s Physics and De Caelo as consisting of šarḥ (“commentary”), taṣfīl (“detailed exposition”) and tafrī ‘alā al-uṣūl (“working out of corollary principles on the basis of the fundamental principles”); Badawi, Arisṭū, p. 121, 5-16, English translation in Gutas, Avicenna, pp. 62-3). Now, as it is known, the Kitāb al-Šifā’ is not a literal commentary on the Aristotelian corpus, nor a paraphrase of it, but rather an original reworking by Avicenna of Aristotelian doctrines, meant to be read as an autonomous writing. Averroes also seems to regard the part of Avicenna’s Kitāb al-Šifā’ corresponding to Aristotle’s Sophisticī Ėlenchī as a šarḥ (cf. Gutas, “Aspects of literary form”, p. 33 and n. 21).

on the evidence provided by Abū Sahl al-Masīḥī, a contemporary and companion of Avicenna, in his Kitāb fī Aṣnāf al-ʿulūm al-
ḥikmiyya (The Categories of the Philosophical Sciences),79 and on
the constant attention Avicenna paid to Themistius’ paraphrase
throughout his philosophical career.

Al-Masīḥī in his work records Themistius’ paraphrase of Lambda as the only Greek commentary on Aristotle’s Meta-
physics.80 He does not mention Alexander of Aphrodisias’ literal commentary on Lambda. Because of the chronological, geo-
graphical and personal connection between him and Avicenna,
the presence of Themistius’ paraphrase in al-Masīḥī’s inventory
can be taken as an indication of the availability of this para-
phrase to Avicenna as well.

As to Avicenna himself, two main signs of the importance he
accorded to Themistius’ paraphrase are remarkable. First, the
Cairo manuscript Ḥikma 6M, already mentioned as a witness
of the Kitāb al-Īnṣāf and of Avicenna’s library, contains, in an
abbreviated form, the Arabic translation of the part of
Themistius’ work dealing with chapters 6-10 of Lambda.81
Significantly, Themistius’ paraphrase is called šarḥ in this man-
uscript. Second, Themistius’ paraphrase is the only proper com-
mentary on Aristotle’s Metaphysics that Avicenna quotes in the
Ilāhiyyāt and in his own commentaries on this work. In the
Ilāhiyyāt, some explicit quotations from Themistius’ para-
phrase occur in the context of the explanation of controversial

79 MS Leiden Acad. 44, fols. 2v-12r; summary in Gutas, Avicenna, pp. 149-52.
80 Gutas, Avicenna, p. 152.
doctrines of Aristotle’s *Metaphysics*, together with explicit mentions of the *Metaphysics* itself.\(^{82}\) Implicit quotations can be detected elsewhere.\(^{83}\) Analogously, two explicit quotations of Themistius’ paraphrase can be found in Avicenna’s own commentary on *Lambda* 6-10 in the *Kitāb al-Insāf*.\(^{84}\) In this same work Themistius’ paraphrase is also implicitly quoted.\(^{85}\)

The presence of Arabic commentaries on the *Metaphysics* among the *ṭurūḥ* of Text 1 cannot be excluded. This issue is worth investigation, but is to a large extent a matter of speculation. The Arabic commentaries on the *Metaphysics* antedating Avicenna’s times are either lost, unpublished, or not extensively studied. Three such commentaries deserve, for different reasons, a special mention.

First, in both Ibn al-Nadīm’s *Fiḥrist* and in al-Masḥī’s *Kitāb fi Aṣnāf al-‘ulūm al-ḥikmiyya*, al-Kindī is credited with a work that appears to be an exegetical work of some sort on Aristotle’s *Metaphysics*.\(^{86}\) In the light of al-Kindī’s influence on the understanding of the *Metaphysics* Avicenna had during his secondary

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\(^{82}\) In *Ilāhiyyāt* IX, 2, p. 392, 9-14, Themistius and Alexander of Aphrodisias are quoted as *muhassilū ‘ulamā’ al-maṣṣā‘īn* (‘the validating Peripatetic scholars’; cf. above, n. 76); the reference is to the paraphrase of *Lambda* 8 (Badawi, *Aristū*, pp. 18, 19-19, 4, cf. Thémistius, *Paraphrase*, pp. 99-100). In IX, 2, p. 393, 2-3, he is referred to with the expression *allāḏī yaḥṣunu ‘ibāratuhu ‘an kutub al-mu‘alla‘īm al-awwal ‘alā sabīl al-talḥīs wa-in lam yakun yaqīṣu fi al-ma‘ānī* (‘He who expresses well the books of the First Teacher by way of epitome (*talḥīṣ*), although he did not delve deeply into the ideas’); the reference is again to the paraphrase of *Lambda*, 8, without, however, a precise correspondent therein. These quotations from Themistius are translated and compared with their parallel places in Avicenna’s *al-Mabda‘ wa-al-ma‘ād* by Gutas, *Avicenna*, pp. 290-1.


\(^{84}\) Badawi, *Aristū*, pp. 26, 23-27, 4 (the quotation is an overall summary of Themistius' paraphrase of *Lambda* 9); p. 31, 4-6 (the reference is to Themistius’ paraphrase of *Lambda* 9, ed. Badawi, *Aristū*, pp. 20, 21-21, 1). In both cases Themistius is referred to by means of his proper name (*Thāmisṭiyyūs*). A peculiarity of the first quotation prompts Brague to think (*Thémistius, Paraphrase* p. 115) that Avicenna actually commented on an Arabic text of Themistius’ paraphrase that was more complete than the one extant in the Cairo manuscript.


education (something I will try to show in section 7), this work could have been one of the šurūḥ of Text 1. Unfortunately, this work is not preserved in al-Kindī’s corpus. Its influence on Avicenna, therefore, in the lack of any further evidence, cannot be verified.

Second, Ṭābit b. Qurra (d. 901) wrote a “concise exposition” (talḥīṣ) on the Metaphysics dealing in particular with book Lambda. Apart from focusing on one of the fuṣūṣ of the Metaphysics, Ṭābit’s talḥīṣ has another noteworthy feature: it might have been part of Avicenna’s library, if we give credit to a note in the title-page of one of the manuscripts preserving it (Aya Sofya 4832). This note states that “this book belonged to Avicenna”. The reception of Ṭābit’s talḥīṣ in the Arab world requires an independent study.

Finally, among the Arabic commentaries on the Metaphysics that Avicenna, at the time of his secondary education, could have known and used, the commentary (tafsīr) on Alpha Elatton by Abū Zakariya’ Yaḥyā b. ‘Adī (d. 363/974) deserves special attention. This commentary is the only attested Arabic commentary that focuses on the other identifiable fāṣṣ (Alpha

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Forthcoming critical edition, translation and commentary by D. C. Reisman and A. Bertolacci. Ṭābit’s talḥīṣ, which was glossed by Ibn Taymiyya in Dar’ Ta‘arud al-taql wa-al-naql (ed. M. R. Sālim [Beirut, s. n.], vol. IX, pp. 272-321), is preserved in two manuscripts, Aya Sofya 4832, fols. 60v-62r (cf. Peters, Aristoteles Arabus, p. 50, n. 12), and Osmania University Library acq. 1408, fols. 4v-7r (cf. H. Daiber, “New manuscripts findings from Indian libraries”, Manuscripts of the Middle East, 1 [1986]: 26-48, p. 34).

It is remarkable (cf. Peters, Aristoteles Arabus, p. 52) that, according to a note of the MS Munich 108 of the Hebrew translation, Ṭābit revised the Arabic translation of Themistius’ paraphrase of Metaphysics Lambda (in this manuscript the translation of Themistius’ paraphrase is attributed to Iṣḥāq b. Ḥunayn; cf. above, n. 78). As a matter of fact, traces of the use of Themistius’ paraphrase are detectable in Ṭābit’s talḥīṣ. In other words, Ṭābit appears to have commented on Metaphysics Lambda using Themistius’ paraphrase as an interpretive tool – something Avicenna himself did.
Elatton) of the Metaphysics mentioned in Text 1. Yahya’s commentary is published, but its diffusion and impact on subsequent authors has still to be investigated.89

Only future research will clarify what kind of influence, if any, the commentaries of Kindi, Tabit b. Qurra and Yahya b. ‘Adi exerted on Avicenna, and whether there is any reason to include them among the surūḥ of Text 1. For the time being, it seems safer to assume that the term surūḥ in Text 1 refers primarily, if not exclusively, to Themistius’ paraphrase of Lambda.

To summarize: none of the Greek commentaries on the Metaphysics available in Arabic translation during Avicenna’s lifetime covered the entire work, but all dealt specifically with only one of its books (Lambda). The Arabic commentaries had a different scope, but their possible influence on Avicenna, both at the time of the events described in Text 1 and later, is still to be ascertained. Among the Greek commentaries translated into Arabic, it is very likely that Avicenna during his secondary education read Themistius’ paraphrase on Lambda, possibly only the part of it dealing with chapters 6-10. All this confirms that Lambda 6-10 was for Avicenna one of the “essential parts” of Aristotle’s work.

§6 - THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN ALPHA ELATTON 1-2 AND LAMBDA 6-10

From the inspection of Avicenna’s Ilahiyyat we learn not only the importance of Alpha Elatton 1-2 and Lambda 6-10 in Avicenna’s view of Aristotle’s Metaphysics, but also two other aspects of how he understood these two loci. First, in the Ilahiyyat the doctrines of Alpha Elatton 1-2 and Lambda 6-10 are somehow connected with each other in the same section of the book, the one dealing with natural theology. Second, the doctrine of Alpha Elatton 1-2 precedes that of Lambda 6-10, and constitutes a sort of introduction to the theological part of the

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Ilāhiyyāt. It is possible that Avicenna read *Alpha Elatton* 1-2 and *Lambda* 6-10 during his secondary education according to this same pattern.

In the *Ilāhiyyāt* a first “ontological” part, devoted to being-qua-being, its species and its properties, is followed by a second “theological” part, dealing with the first principle of being, its existence and features, the procession of the universe from it and the return of the human intellectual souls to it after death.\(^9^0\) Avicenna reworks into this context not only the doctrine of *Lambda* 6-10 – the theological core of this book and of the entire *Metaphysics* – but also that of *Alpha Elatton* 1-2.

In *Alpha Elatton* 2, Aristotle proves the finitude of the causal chains within each of the possible types of causes, and the finitude of the kinds of causes themselves. After demonstrating the existence of the Unmovable Mover in *Lambda* 6-7, in *Lambda* 7-8 he elucidates its characteristics and discusses the question of how many the unmoving movers are. Now, Avicenna combines these two Aristotelian loci, placing the former before the latter in the theological part of the *Ilāhiyyāt*: in *Ilāhiyyāt* VIII, 1-3 he uses the aetiology of *Alpha Elatton* 1-2 as the basis for the demonstration of the First Principle’s existence and the subsequent elucidation of its features (VIII, 3-IX, 1); in IX, 2-3 he twice addresses the question of the number of the movers of the heavens.\(^9^1\)

\(^9^0\) The emanative process in the theological part of the *Ilāhiyyāt* has been described by A. Hasnawi, “*Fayḍ* (épanchement, émanation)”, in A. Jacob (ed.), *Encyclopédie philosophique universelle*, vol. II (Paris, 1990), pp. 966-72, and J. Janssens, “Creation and emanation in Ibn Sinā”, *Documenti e Studi sulla Tradizione Filosofica Medievale*, 8 (1997): 455-77.

\(^9^1\) We may wonder whether *Alpha Elatton* 1-2 is introductory to *Lambda* 6-10 in the *Ilāhiyyāt* only by constituting its starting-point, or also by facilitating a fundamental change in its doctrine. At the end of *Alpha Elatton* 1 (993 b 29-30), Aristotle contends that the principles of eternal things “are not merely sometimes true, nor is there any cause of their being (τοῦ ἐἶναι), but they themselves are the cause of the being of other things”: οὐ γὰρ ποτε ἀληθεῖς, οὔδ’ ἐκεῖναις αἰτίων τί ἐστι τοῦ ἐἶναι, ἄλλ’ ἐκεῖναι τοῖς ἄλλοις; Greek text as in in *Aristotle’s Metaphysics*. A Revised Text with Introduction and Commentary, ed. W. D. Ross (Oxford, 1924) and *Aristotelis Metaphysica* ed. W. Jaeger (Oxford, 1957); English translation in *The Complete Works of Aristotle. The Revised Oxford Translation*, ed. by J. Barnes, vol. II (Princeton, 1984), p. 1570. This is one of the few passages of Aristotle’s corpus where being is said to be the object of causation, and where the causal power with respect to being is attributed to the first principles. Now, in the *Ilāhiyyāt* Avicenna transforms Aristotle’s demonstration of the Unmoved Mover’s existence in *Lambda* 6-7 from a “physical” proof – based on moving causality and leading to the first principle of the heavens’ eternal movement – to a proper “metaphysical” proof. This latter relies on
It is reasonable to suppose that the presence of the doctrine of both Alpha Elatton 1-2 and Lambda 6-10 in the theological part of the Ilahiyyat, and the precedence of the former over the latter in this context, is a remnant of Avicenna’s original way of approaching Aristotle’s Metaphysics during his secondary education.

The inclusion of Alpha Elatton within natural theology as an introduction to Lambda has some basis in the text itself of the Metaphysics. Aristotle ends, in fact, Alpha Elatton 1 with a reference to “the principles of eternal things” (τὰς τῶν ἀεί ὄντων ἀφογος), anticipating in this way the discussion of Lambda 6-7. In Lambda 7, conversely, he demonstrates the existence of the mover of the “eternal” first heaven by relying on the fact that “that which is moved and moves is intermediate” (τὸ κινούμενον καὶ κινοῦν [καὶ] μέσον), a statement reflecting the causal doctrine of Alpha Elatton 2. In the overall structure of the Arabic Metaphysics, however, Alpha Elatton is the opening book, separated from Lambda by a long series of other books dealing with ontology. The fact that Avicenna during his secondary education did not read Alpha Elatton 1-2 as an introduction to the Metaphysics in its entirety, but in all likelihood as an introduction to Lambda 6-10 in particular, suggests that, at that stage, he ignored the books of the Metaphysics (from Beta to Kappa) that lie between Alpha Elatton and Lambda.

Efficient causality, meant as cause of existence, not of movement, and leads to the first principle of the universe’s existence. The possible influence of the aforementioned passage of Alpha Elatton 1 on Avicenna’s doctrine of causality in general, and on his proof of the existence of God in particular, has to be seriously investigated.

In sum, Avicenna’s reading of Aristotle’s *Metaphysics* at the time of his secondary instruction had three main characteristics: (i) it was not an extensive reading of the work in its entirety, but only of the essential parts of it, namely – on the basis of the evidence at our disposal – *Alpha Elatton* 1-2 and *Lambda* 6-10; (ii) these two *loci* were read in connection with each other, as elements of the theological part of the *Metaphysics*, in disregard of the ontological part of it; (iii) *Alpha Elatton* was read as an introduction to *Lambda* 6-10, whereas books *Beta-Kappa* of Aristotle’s work were probably neglected.

§7 - FROM AL-KINDĪ’S TO AL-FĀRĀBĪ’S WAY OF READING ARISTOTLE’S *METAPHYSICS*

The results of the analysis of Text 1 in the previous sections have a threefold significance. First, they witness that during his secondary education Avicenna understood metaphysics and read Aristotle’s *Metaphysics* according to the pattern established by al-Kindī almost two centuries before, namely by identifying metaphysics with natural theology and privileging books *Alpha Elatton* and *Lambda* within Aristotle’s work. Second, they help to explain why Avicenna was so baffled when he read the entire text of the *Metaphysics* at the time of his undergraduate education, and realized that the main theme of Aristotle’s work was by no means natural theology, but ontology, and that within the *Metaphysics* book *Alpha Elatton* did not count as an introduction to book *Lambda*. Third, they imply that al-Fārābī’s treatise on the purposes of Aristotle’s *Metaphysics* helped Avicenna to solve both these difficulties.

As far as the doctrinal issue of the relationship between natural theology and ontology within metaphysics is concerned, the presence of the aforementioned process (“Kindian” phase, “aporetic” phase, “Farabian” phase) in the autobiography has

that book *Nu* is extant only in Greek. Peters (*Aristoteles Arabus*, p. 50) understands the *Fihrīst* as purporting that book *Nu* was part of Uṣṭā’s translation of the *Metaphysics*, but his interpretation of the expression ḥādīhi al-ḥurūf (“these letters [i.e. books]”) in l. 27 of Flügel’s edition (= ed. Tağaddud, l. 13) as including book *Nu* is questionable. Al-Fārābī, when describing the *Metaphysics* in the *Fi aqrād*, mentions one single book after book *Lambda* (Alfārābī’s *Philosophische Abhandlungen*, p. 38, 5), which Gutas identifies with book *Mu* (*Avicenna*, p. 242), whereas Druart regards it as corresponding to both books *Mu* and *Nu* (“Le traité”, p. 39).
already been described by D. Gutas. In this last section I wish to corroborate Gutas’ perspective, showing that this same evolution can be detected also in Avicenna’s way of reading Aristotle’s *Metaphysics*, from his initial focusing on books *Alpha Elatton* and *Lambda* to his later consideration of the entire *Metaphysics*, through an intermediate phase of acquaintance (and hardship) with the overall text of this work.

Among the extant writings of al-Kindī, dealing directly or indirectly with Aristotle’s *Metaphysics*, the *Kitāb fi al-Falsafa al-ūlā* (Book on First Philosophy) is surely the most significant. Aristotle’s *Metaphysics* has, as can be expected, an outstanding place among the Aristotelian sources of this work. Now, within the *Metaphysics*, *Alpha Elatton* in particular is given by al-Kindī a privileged and propedeutic function. The only explicit quotations of Aristotle in *Falsafa al-ūlā* refer, in fact, to this book. Moreover, whereas implicit or silent quotations of other books of the *Metaphysics* are occasional, those regarding *Alpha Elatton* are frequent and systematic. This happens precisely in the first chapter and half of the work, in a

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95 On the problem of the relationship between natural theology and ontology, Gutas states that “Avicenna was born and raised in the Eastern parts of the Islamic Empire where Kindī’s tradition was most flourishing” (Avicenna, p. 250), that “[t]he autodidact Avicenna could not help but approach the book with the misconceptions” proper to this tradition “and be duly perplexed” (ibid.), and that “[t]he effect of Fārābī’s essays on the philosophy of Avicenna was ... decisive” (ibid., p. 252).


97 In the first of such quotations, Aristotle is referred to with the expression “the distinguished philosophers before us who are not our co-linguists” (*Rasā’il al-Kindī*, p. 102, 5; *Œuvres philosophiques et scientifiques d’al-Kindī*, II, p. 11, 20-21; *Al-Kindī’s Metaphysics*, p. 57; the reference is to *Alpha Elatton* 1, 993 a 31-b 4). In the second, he is named “Aristotle, the most distinguished of the Greeks in philosophy” (*Rasā’il al-Kindī*, p. 103, 1-3; *Œuvres philosophiques et scientifiques d’al-Kindī*, II, p. 13, 11-14; *Al-Kindī’s Metaphysics*, p. 58; the reference is to *Alpha Elatton* 1, 993 b 15-16). These and all the following passages of al-Kindī’s *Falsafa al-ūlā* are rendered according to Ivry’s translation, unless otherwise noted.
section that has clearly the character of an introduction. In it, the main bulk of *Alpha Elatton* 1 and 3 is paraphrased, but also the doctrine of *Alpha Elatton* 2 is detectable, especially in al-Kindî’s views on the four Aristotelian causes and their finitude.

Whereas the influence of book *Alpha Elatton* is clear and circumscribed, the impact of the other books of the *Metaphysics* in *al-Falsafa al-ülâ* is difficult to evaluate. Al-Kindî’s work, as it survives in the manuscripts, appears to be the first part of a treatise that originally was more comprehensive and included a second part. Thus, even though a certain book of the *Metaphysics* is actually disregarded in the extant part of the work, it could have played a much more substantial role in the second part.

In so far as book *Lambda* in particular is concerned, three considerations are in order. First, a great deal of attention to *Lambda* as the theological book of the *Metaphysics* is implied by al-Kindî’s insistence in *al-Falsafa al-ülâ* on the identity between first philosophy and natural theology. In this work,

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98 Cf. what can be regarded as the closing sentence of this introductory section (*Rasâ’îl al-Kindî*, p. 112, 19-20; *Œuvres philosophiques et scientifiques d’al-Kindî*, II, p. 26, 7-8): “Inasmuch as these admonitions have now preceded (*fa-ištâ taqaddamat hâḏihi al-wâṣayâ*), we ought to set forth beforehand the canons the employment of which we require in this craft, and we accordingly say [...]” (*Al-Kindî’s Metaphysics*, pp. 66-7).

99 On book *Alpha Elatton* as a source of al-Kindî’s *al-Falsafa al-ülâ*, see A. Neuwirth, *Neue Materialien* (Neuwirth’s article is a critical review of Ivry’s translation).

100 I am inclined to see an influence of *Alpha Elatton* 2 behind the passages in which al-Kindî states that every cause must be one or the other of the four Aristotelian causes (*Rasâ’îl al-Kindî*, p. 101, 3-4; *Œuvres philosophiques et scientifiques d’al-Kindî*, II, p. 11, 3-4; *Al-Kindî’s Metaphysics*, p. 56). For another instance of a doctrine taken from *Alptra Elatton*, cf. *Al-Kindî’s Metaphysics*, p. 18, n. 46.


102 On the identity between first philosophy and natural theology in al-Kindî’s *al-Falsafa al-ülâ* scholars substantially agree (“By hailing knowledge of the “First Truth” and the “First Cause” as “First Philosophy”, al-Kindî [...] is within the Aristotelian θεολογική tradition”, Ivry, *Al-Kindî’s Metaphysics*, p. 17; “[...] the Kindî circle [...] made theology the ultimate object of metaphysics”, Zimmermann, “The origins”, p. 137; “The extant portion of *On First Philosophy* [...] deals with the theological part of metaphysics”, Gutas, *Avicenna*, p. 245). This identity is confirmed in another work by al-Kindî, *Fî khammiyyat kutub Aristatâlis* (On the number of
al-Kindû declares that first philosophy is “knowledge of the First True Who is the cause of every true” and “knowledge of the first Cause”. In this sense first philosophy is also called ‘ilm ilâhi (a term analogous to that designating metaphysics in Text 1, and bearing in this case the literal meaning of “divine knowledge” or “theology”) and ‘ilm mâ fawqa al-ṭabî‘iyât (literally “knowledge of what is above physical objects”). Thus, on the basis of the identity of first philosophy and natural theology maintained by al-Kindî himself, we expect Metaphysics Lambda to have had a key function in al-Falsafa al-ūlā. Second, some signs of a positive impact of Lambda, even though less strong than that of Alpha Elatton, can be seen in the extant part of al-Kindî’s work. Third, the importance of Metaphysics Lambda in al-Falsafa al-ūlā cannot be restricted to the doctrines of it that al-Kindî accepted, but has to be extended also to the many aspects of this book in which he consciously departed from, and stood in opposition to, Aristotle. This attitude, in fact, may be considered a sort of negative reception of Metaphysics Lambda.


103 Rasâ’îl al-Kindî, p. 98, 1-2; Œuvres philosophiques et scientifiques d’al-Kindî II, p. 9, 14; Al-Kindî’s Metaphysics, p. 56.
105 Rasâ’îl al-Kindî, p. 112, 15; Œuvres philosophiques et scientifiques d’al-Kindî, II, p. 27, 2; Al-Kindî’s Metaphysics, p. 66 (Ivry translates this expression as “the science of the metaphysical”).
One case of al-Kindī’s polemical attention to book *Lambda* in *al-Falsafa al-ūlā* is particularly significant, since it shows that al-Kindī regarded *Alpha Elatton* as preliminary to *Lambda* 6. As we have seen, the introduction of al-Kindī’s work, shaped according to *Alpha Elatton*, ends around the half of the second chapter. The following part of this chapter, immediately after the introduction, starts with an exposition of the “eternal” (*al-azalī*), a topic which clearly corresponds to the mention of the “eternal unmoving substance” (οὐσίαν ἀκίνητον) at the beginning of *Lambda* 6 (1071 b 4-5). This correspondence is made clear by the fact that al-Kindī, after describing the characteristics of the “eternal”, devotes the rest of chapter 2 to the demonstration that body, time and movement cannot be infinite. Now, as far as time and movement are concerned, al-Kindī’s position is the denial of the thesis that Aristotle supports in the lines of *Lambda* 6 (1071 b 6-7) immediately following the mention of the eternal unmoving substance. There Aristotle states, in fact, that movement and time are ingenerable and incorruptible, something which certifies, in his opinion, the existence of an eternal unmoving substance, namely the Unmoved Mover. In other words, the second half of *al-Falsafa al-ūlā* chapter 2 has two main characters: first, it closely follows the introduction of the work, which takes its inspiration from *Alpha Elatton*; second, it is deeply dependent on *Lambda* 6, 1071 b 3-11, being a critical discussion of it and a sort of rebuttal of Aristotle’s proof of the Unmoved Mover’s existence. Thus, in *al-Falsafa al-ūlā* 1-2 book *Alpha Elatton* of Aristotle’s *Metaphysics* appears to serve as an introduction to al-Kindī’s reworking of the doctrine of *Lambda* 6.

In sum, we find that in *al-Falsafa al-ūlā*, al-Kindī privileged the two books of Aristotle’s *Metaphysics* that Avicenna, during his secondary education, read as its “essential parts”, namely *Alpha Elatton* and *Lambda*. Moreover, in this work he connected *Alpha Elatton* and *Lambda* with each other within a theological context, in which first philosophy was described as natural theology and named “divine knowledge”. Finally, within this theological context al-Kindī assigned to *Alpha*
Elatton an introductory role with respect to the core of Lambda (the theological part of it beginning with chapter 6). This is what Avicenna himself apparently did during his secondary education. The analysis of al-Kindi’s al-Falsafa al-ülâ attests, therefore, to the likelihood that Avicenna’s reading of Aristotle’s Metaphysics during his secondary education took its inspiration from al-Kindi and the philosophical tradition stemming from his circle.110

The analysis of Text 1 that I have proposed allows a broader view of the problems Avicenna met when he read Aristotle’s Metaphysics in its entirety during his undergraduate education. If we suppose, in fact, that Avicenna, at the time of his secondary education, read basically only two books of the Metaphysics (Alpha Elatton and Lambda), in close connection with one another, within a conception of metaphysics as natural theology (‘ilm ilâhi or ilâhiyyât), we can understand better why he was so puzzled by Aristotle’s Metaphysics (Kitâb Mâ ba’d al-ṭabi’a) when he later faced this work in its entirety, as witnessed by Text 2. His difficulty was due not only to discovering that Aristotle’s Metaphysics contained more than a natural theology, but also depended, at one and the same time, on realizing that Alpha Elatton and Lambda were not the only parts of this work and were not contiguous to each other, as he was accustomed to reading them. Alpha Elatton and Lambda appeared to him as two elements of a larger complex, of which the former was the introduction and the latter the ending. Besides the doctrinal gap separating these two books from the rest of the Metaphysics (the existence of an ontological dimension of metaphysics, besides the theological one), the textual gap separating these two books from each other (the presence of many interposed books between them), also required an explanation.

Finally, the interpretation I propose of the fuşûş of the Metaphysics in Text 1 places in the right perspective al-Fârâbî’s influence on Avicenna at the time of his undergraduate education. Avicenna found in al-Fârâbî’s Fî Ağrâd the explanation of both the problems he had encountered in his integral reading

110 In the preface of the Theologia Aristotelis, a work associated in the Arabic tradition with the name of al-Kindi, the causal doctrine of Alpha Elatton introduces the subsequent treatment of natural theology. This point, first noticed by A. L. Ivry (Al-Kindi’s Metaphysics, p. 15, n. 33), has been further developed by F. W. Zimmermann, “The origins”, pp. 121-2, 137-8, and C. D’Ancona in the studies mentioned above, n. 49.
of Aristotle’s *Metaphysics*, originating from his previous partial acquaintance with this work. He learnt in al-Fārābī’s essay, first of all, that metaphysics (‘ilm mā baʿd al-ṭabiʿa)\(^{111}\) consists not only of natural theology (‘ilm ilāhī),\(^{112}\) but also of ontology (‘ilm kullī).\(^{113}\) Natural theology, according to al-Farābī, is only one constituent of the metaphysics, and therefore is not identical to it; it investigates the principle (God) of being-qua-being, whereas ontology studies the species and the properties of it. But Avicenna did not learn only this from al-Fārābī’s work. In the *Aqrād*, in fact, besides the overall aim of the *Metaphysics* in general, also the specific aim of each book of it in particular is explained. In this way, thanks to al-Fārābī’s essay, Avicenna understood how the link between *Alpha Elatton* and *Lambda* was indirect, passing through a continuous series of distinct books.

### CONCLUSION

At the end of the description of his studies in the autobiography, Avicenna states that his knowledge of the philosophical sciences remained substantially the same afterwards, “nothing new – he says – having come to me since”.\(^{114}\) Before the completion of his studies, however, Avicenna’s understanding of metaphysics among the philosophical sciences and his knowledge of Aristotle’s *Metaphysics* evolved significantly, according to the autobiography. This evolution consisted of three stages. The first one occurred in his secondary education, the other two during his undergraduate education.

Avicenna himself speaks openly of the second and third stage of this evolution within the context of his undergraduate education. He connects the second stage with his reading of the integral text of the *Metaphysics*, and links the final stage (corresponding to the discovery of the ontological dimension of the *Metaphysics*, and the inter-connection of its books) with the name of al-Fārābī. The first stage of this same evolution, on the

\[\text{\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{111}} Alfarābī’s philosophische Abhandlungen, p. 35, 21; cf. p. 34, 9-10. This point is emphasized in Gutas, Avicenna, p. 252.}}
\[\text{\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{112}} Alfarābī’s philosophische Abhandlungen, p. 35, 16.}}
\[\text{\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{113}} Alfarābī’s philosophische Abhandlungen, p. 35, 8.}}
\[\text{\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{114}} The Life of Ibn Sīna, pp. 36, 8-38, 2; Gutas, Avicenna, p. 29. Cf. also The Life of Ibn Sīna, p. 30, 5-6; Gutas, Avicenna, p. 28.}}

contrary, is less perspicuous, both because it is mentioned very briefly in the autobiography, and because the key-term (fuṣūṣ) is not immediately clear. My endeavour in this article has been mainly to demonstrate the existence and the nature of this initial stage, corresponding to Avicenna’s study of metaphysics during his secondary education, and its evolution in the subsequent two stages. During his secondary education Avicenna read only the essential parts of Aristotle’s *Metaphysics* (§§ 1-3), substantially corresponding to *Alpha Elatton* 1-2 and *Lambda* 6-10 (§§ 4-5), within a theological framework in which the former was connected with, and served as an introductory to, the latter (§ 6). In doing so, Avicenna initially adopted a partial reading of Aristotle’s *Metaphysics*, inspired by al-Kindī’s way of understanding metaphysics and approaching Aristotle’s work; then, when he read the integral text of the *Metaphysics*, he realized the inadequacy of this approach and its exegetical shortcomings; finally he passed to al-Fārābī’s mode of envisaging Aristotle’s *Metaphysics*, in which all the books of this work and both its dimensions, ontological and theological, are taken in due consideration (§ 7).

In undergoing this evolution from a Kindian phase to a Farabian phase, Avicenna, in the course of the few years of his education, followed the same path that the interpretation of Aristotle’s *Metaphysics* went through in the Arab world, from the appearance of the first translations of this work until Avicenna’s time.