

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

AMOS BERTOLACCI

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 Abū 'Ubayd 'Abd al-Wāḥid al-Ġūzġānī, 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 Ġurġān, where he met al-Ġūzġānī. Al-Ġūzġānī 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

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¹ *The Life of Ibn Sina. A Critical Edition and Annotated Translation* by W. E. Gohlman (Albany, New York, 1974). Cf. the critical review by M. Ullman in *Der Islam*, 52 (1975): 148-51, and the observations by D. Gutas, *Avicenna and the Aristotelian Tradition. Introduction to Reading Avicenna's Philosophical Works* (Leiden-New York-København-Köln, 1988), p. 22, n. a.

² Gutas, *Avicenna*, pp. 22-30, 149-98.

³ Gutas, *Avicenna*, p. 22.

⁴ Gutas, *Avicenna*, p. 145, pp. 194-8. M. E. Marmura, in his critical review of Gutas' monograph ("Plotting the course of Avicenna's thought", *Journal of the American*

(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".⁵

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.⁶ 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 ilāhī* or *ilāhiyyāt*) 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* (*Kitāb Mā ba'd al-ṭabī'a*) and his fortuitous – almost providential – encounter with a treatise by al-Fārābī 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.

⁵ D. Gutas, "Avicenna. Biography", in E. Yarshater (ed.), *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, vol. III (New York, 1987), pp. 67a-70b.

⁶ Gutas, *Avicenna*, pp. 152-4.

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*).⁷ Historically, it portrays Avicenna's passage from al-Kindī'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-Fārābī'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

⁷ On this topic in Aristotle, see A. Mansion, "Philosophie première, philosophie seconde et métaphysique chez Aristote", *Revue Philosophique de Louvain*, 56 (1958): 165-221; G. Patzig, "Theologie und Ontologie in der 'Metaphysik' des Aristoteles", *Kant-Studien*, 52 (1960-61): 185-205 (Engl. transl. "Theology and ontology in Aristotle's *Metaphysics*", in J. Barnes, M. Schofield and R. Sorabji (eds.), *Articles on Aristotle*, vol. III [London, 1979], pp. 33-49); W. Leszl, *Aristotle's Conception of Ontology* (Padua, 1975); C. H. Kahn, "On the intended interpretation of Aristotle's *Metaphysics*", in J. Wiesner (ed.), *Aristoteles. Werk und Wirkung. Paul Moraux gewidmet*, vol. I: *Aristoteles und seine Schule* (Berlin-New York 1985), pp. 311-38; M. Frede, "The unity of general and special metaphysics: Aristotle's conception of metaphysics", in *Id.*, *Essays in Ancient Philosophy* (Oxford, 1987), pp. 81-95; R. Bolton, "Aristotle's conception of metaphysics as a science", in T. Scaltsas, D. Charles and M. L. Gill (eds.), *Unity, Identity and Explanation in Aristotle's Metaphysics* (Oxford, 1994), pp. 321-54. On the same topic in Avicenna, see M. Fakhry, "The subject-matter of metaphysics: Aristotle and Ibn Sina (Avicenna)", in M. E. Marmura (ed.), *Islamic Theology and Philosophy: Studies in Honor of G. F. Hourani* (Albany, N. Y., 1984), pp. 137-47; A. Hasnawi, "Aspects de la synthèse avicennienne", in M. A. Sinaceur (ed.), *Penser avec Aristote* (Toulouse, 1991), pp. 227-44.

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 Ismā'īl al-Zāhid) and the first two theoretical disciplines (logic and mathematics, under the guidance of Abū 'Abdallāh al-Nātīlī), on the one hand,⁸ and his subsequent study and practice of medicine and jurisprudence, on the other.⁹ 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 Gurgāng, and I occupied myself on my own with determining the validity of books (*kutub*), both essential parts (*fuṣūṣ*) and commentaries (*ṣurūḥ*), on natural philosophy and metaphysics (*ilāhiyyāt*), and the gates of knowledge began opening for me.¹⁰

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 Sina*, pp. 20, 4-24, 4.

⁹ *The Life of Ibn Sina*, pp. 24, 7-26, 4.

¹⁰ *The Life of Ibn Sina*, p. 24, 4-7: *ṭumma fāraqanī al-Nātīlī mutawaḡḡihan ilā Kurkānḡa wa-iṣṭaḡaltu anā bi-taḡṣīli al-kutubi min al-fuṣūṣi wa-al-ṣurūḥi min al-ṭabī'iyāti wa-al-ilāhiyyāti wa-ṣāra abwābu al-'ilmi tanfatīḡu 'alayya. As Gutas notices (*Avicenna*, p. 27, n. j), *wa-al-ṣurū'i* in the edited text is a misprint for *wa-al-ṣurūḥi*. The translation I propose is a modified version of Gutas' translation (*Avicenna*, p. 27).*

Metaphysics).¹¹ 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.¹² 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.¹³ 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”).¹⁴ 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”.¹⁵ 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.

¹² *Kitāb al-Fihrist*, ed. G. Flügel, J. Roediger, A. Mueller (Leipzig, 1871), vol. I, p. 251, 25; ed. R. Tağaddud (Tehran, 1971), p. 312, 12; Ibn Sīnā, *Al-Shifā’*. *Al-Ilāhiyyāt* (1) ed. G. C. Anawati and S. Zayed (Cairo, 1960), I, 1, p. 5, 2 (cf. p. 4, 8, p. 4, 14). In the quotations from Avicenna’s *Kitāb al-Šifā’* in the present article, the indication of the page and line of the critical edition of the Arabic text is preceded by that of the treatise and chapter in which the passage I quote appears.

¹³ *Alfārābī’s philosophische Abhandlungen*, ed. F. Dieterici (Leiden, 1890), p. 35, 16-19; D. Gutas, “Avicenna’s Eastern (“Oriental”) philosophy. Nature, contents, transmission”, *Arabic Sciences and Philosophy*, 10 (2000): 159-80, p. 167.

¹⁴ For the translation of *šarḥ* as “commentary”, cf. D. Gutas, “Aspects of literary form and genre in Arabic logical works”, in C. Burnett (ed.), *Glosses and Commentaries on Aristotelian Logical Texts. The Syriac, Arabic and Medieval Latin Traditions* (London, 1993), pp. 29-76, pp. 33-5.

¹⁵ 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-Qiftī’s *Ta’riḥ al-ḥukamā’*: “Ensuite, Nātīli me quitta, s’en allant à Gorgāndj. Quant à moi, je m’appliquai à lire et à étudier les *Focouc-al’ḥikam* [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 *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikma*, which, following the traditional attribution, Achena and Massé regard as a work by

example, in the German translation by P. Kraus (“Texte”)¹⁶; in the English translation by A. J. Arberry (“texts”),¹⁷ which deeply influenced all the subsequent English translations¹⁸; and in the Spanish translation by M. Cruz Hernández (“obras originales”).¹⁹ These translators seem to have treated *fuṣūṣ* as though it were *nuṣūṣ*, 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 *ṣurūḥ* (commentaries) in Text 1 does require the existence of some texts to be commented upon. But the possibility of substituting *nuṣūṣ* for *fuṣūṣ* is excluded, and the supposed connection between *ṣurūḥ* and *nuṣūṣ* is far from being necessary.

The reading *fuṣūṣ* 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.²⁰

al-Fārābī. This interpretation is implausible, since the term *fuṣūṣ* in Text 1 is tightly joined with the term *ṣurūḥ*, which obviously is not a title. Achena and Massé’s translation, albeit incorrect, points, however, in the right direction. For a survey of the editions, translations and studies of Avicenna’s autobiography, cf. J. L. Janssens, *An Annotated Bibliography on Ibn Sīnā (1970-1989)* (Leuven, 1991), pp. 41-3; *Id.*, *An Annotated Bibliography on Ibn Sīnā: First Supplement (1990-1994)* (Louvain-la-Neuve, 1999), pp. 22-3; H. Daiber, *Bibliography of Islamic Philosophy* (Leiden-Boston-Köln, 1999), vol. II, pp. 269-70.

¹⁶ P. Kraus, “Eine arabische Biographie Avicennas”, *Klinische Wochenschrift*, 11 (1932): 1880a-1884b, p. 1881b (translation based on Ibn Abī Uṣaybi’a’s *‘Uyūn al-anbā’ fi ṭabaqāt al-aṭibbā’*): “Danach verließ mich Nātīlī und ging nach Kurkānağ. Ich aber beschäftigte mich damit, mit die Bücher über Physik und Metaphysik in Texten und Kommentaren anzueignen. Dabei öffneten sich mir die Tore der Wissenschaft”.

¹⁷ A. J. Arberry, *Avicenna on Theology* (London, 1951), p. 10 (translation based on al-Qiftī’s *Ta’rīḥ al-ḥukamā’* and Ibn Abī Uṣaybi’a’s *‘Uyūn al-anbā’ fi ṭabaqāt al-aṭibbā’*): “Then al-Nātīlī 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”.

¹⁸ Gohlman, *The Life of Ibn Sina*, p. 25: “Then al-Nātīlī left me, going on to Gurgānj. 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-Nātīlī took leave of me, heading for Gurgānj, and I occupied myself on my own with Determining the Validity of books, both original texts and commentaries, on Physics and Metaphysics”.

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-Nātālī me dejó, marchando a Gorgānj, dedicándome a comprobar por mí mismo la validez de los libros de *Física y Metafísica*, tanto las obras originales como los comentarios”.

²⁰ The autobiography/biography complex exists in at least two recensions (cf. Gutas, “Avicenna. Biography”, p. 67). One is preserved in Ibn al-Qiftī’s (d. 1248) *Ta’rīḥ al-ḥukamā’* (= Q in Gohlman’s edition) and in Ibn Abī Uṣaybi’a’s (d. 1270) *‘Uyūn al-anbā’ fi ṭabaqāt al-aṭibbā’* (= IAU). The other is transmitted by several

It is also attested in some retellings of al-Ġūzġānī's edition of the autobiography/biography.²¹ The *lectio facilior nuṣūṣ* ("texts") appears only in some derivatives of these retellings.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*"²³ (namely Porphyry's introduction to Aristotle's *Categories*) and the "books (*kutub*)" without further qualification (that is Aristotle's *Organon*)²⁴; as to mathematics, he read "Euclid's book (*kitāb*)"²⁵ – i.e. the *Elements* – and Ptolemy's *Almagest*.²⁶

manuscripts, among which Gohlman selects: Istanbul, Aya Sofya 4852 (= A), Istanbul, Üniversite 4755 (= B), Istanbul, Ahmet III 3447 (= J), and the version of the autobiography/biography written by Yahyā ibn Aḥmad al-Kāšī (d. after 754/1353) in the margin of a manuscript of Šahrazūrī's (13th c.) *Nuzhat al-arwāḥ* (= N). For Text 1 in Q, IAU, B and N, cf., respectively, the editions by J. Lippert (Leipzig, 1903), p. 414, 16-18, A. Müller (Königsberg-Cairo, 1882-1884; repr. Frankfurt am Main, 1995), vol. II, p. 3, 11-12, S. Nafisī, *Sar-gudašt-i Ibn-i Sīnā* (Tehran, 1331/1952), p. 2, 15-17, and A. F. al-Ahwānī, "Aperçu sur la biographie d'Avicenne", in *Memorial Avicenne* (Cairo, 1952), vol. III, p. 12, 1-3. As far as Text 1 is concerned, the only difference between the two recensions is given by the singular masculine *min al-ṭabī'yyi wa-al-ilāhiyyi* in Q and IAU, instead of the plural feminine *min al-ṭabī'yyāti wa-al-ilāhiyyāti* (accepted by Gohlman) in A, B, J and N.

²¹ Cf. Zāhīr al-Dīn Abū al-Ḥasan al-Bayhaqī (d. 565/1169-1170), *Tatimma* [sic] *Šiwān al-ḥikma*, ed. M. Šafī' (Lahore, 1935; 2nd ed. Tehran, 1939), p. 40, 7-11. In the less reliable edition of this same work, under a different title, by M. Kurd 'Alī (*Ta'riḥ ḥukamā' al-islām* [Damascus, 1946]), the reading *nuṣūṣ* is accepted without indication of any variant. Also in the Persian translation of Bayhaqī's *Tatimma*, edited by Šafī' together with the Arabic original, *fuṣūṣ* is found (*Tatimma*, 2nd ed., p. 30, 13; I owe this information to D. C. Reisman).

²² Šams al-Dīn Muḥammad b. Muḥammad al-Šahrazūrī (13th c.), *Nuzhat al-arwāḥ*, ed. M. 'A. Abū Rayyān (Alexandria, 1993), p. 589, 5-7. In the introduction to his edition of Avicenna's *Pointers and Reminders* (*al-Īṣārāt wa-al-Tanbihāt li-Abī 'Alī b. Sīnā ma'a šarḥ Naṣīr al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī* [Cairo, 1960], p. 127), S. Dunya corrects *fuṣūṣ* in Text 1 (which he reads in IAU) in *nuṣūṣ* (I owe this information to one of the two anonymous ASP reviewers). The possibility of regarding *fuṣūṣ* as a corruption of *nuṣūṣ* appears, however, unlikely, since both the primary and the secondary witnesses of the autobiography agree on it.

²³ *The Life of Ibn Sina*, p. 20, 7.

²⁴ *The Life of Ibn Sina*, p. 22, 6; cf. Gutas, *Avicenna*, p. 26.

²⁵ *The Life of Ibn Sina*, p. 22, 7.

²⁶ *The Life of Ibn Sina*, p. 24, 1.

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" (*šurūḥ*).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" (*šurūḥ*), 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-Zamaḥṣarī (d. 538/1144) in the *Asās al-balāġa*²⁹ and al-Zabīdī (d. 1205/1791) in the *Tāġ al-'arūs*³⁰ record, in the context of the

²⁷ *The Life of Ibn Sina*, p. 22, 6.

²⁸ E. W. Lane, *An Arabic-English Lexicon* (London, 1863-1893), vol. I, 6, p. 2403 a-b.

²⁹ Abū al-Qāsim Maḥmūd b. 'Umar al-Zamaḥṣarī, *Asās al-balāġa* (Beirut, 1998), p. 619b.

³⁰ Abū al-Fayḍ Muḥammad Murtaḍā al-Zabīdī, *Tāġ al-'arūs min jawāhir al-qāmūs*, vol. 18 (Kuwait, 1979), p. 73a.

metaphorical meanings of this term, the sentence *qara'tu fī faṣṣ al-kitāb kaḏā*, which E. W. Lane translates as “I read, in the most essential part of the book or writing, such a thing”.³¹ 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 *ṣurūḥ*. The term *ṣurūḥ*, 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 *ṣurūḥ*, 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-mantiq wa-ḡamī’ aḡzā’ al-falsafa*), until he

³¹ Al-Zamaḡṣarī, in connection with this sentence, reports an expression in which *fuṣūṣ* occurs, namely *fuṣūṣ al-aḡbār* (“The most essential parts or particulars of narrations”, according to Lane). Al-Zabīdī, on the other hand, mentions two writings, whose title is or contains the term *fuṣūṣ*, taken in its metaphorical meaning: the *Fuṣūṣ fī al-ādāb wa-al-aṣ’ār wa-al-aḡbār* of Abū al-‘Alā’ Ṣā’id al-Baḡdādī (ca. 339/950-417/1026) and the *Fuṣūṣ al-ḡikam* (of Ibn al-‘Arabi [560/1165-638/1240]?), which he ascribes to al-Suhrawardī (539/1145-632/1234).

mastered “all the philosophical sciences” (*ğamī‘ al-‘ulūm*).³² 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.³³

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.³⁴

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.

³² *The Life of Ibn Sina*, pp. 26, 5-30, 6.

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-Šifā‘* and by al-Ġūzġānī in his introduction to this same work (cf. Gutas, *Avicenna*, pp. 106-12).

³⁴ Gutas, *Avicenna*, pp. 177-81.

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-ilāhī*). I read the *Metaphysics* (*Kitāb Mā ba‘d al-ṭabī‘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* (*Fī Aḡrāḍ Kitāb Mā ba‘d al-ṭabī‘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 *Fī Aḡrāḍ al-Ḥakīm fī kull maqāla min al-kitāb al-mawsūm bi-al-hurūf* (*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

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).

³⁶ *Alfārābī’s philosophische Abhandlungen*, pp. 34-8. An anonymous edition of this same work (*Maqāla fī aḡrāḍ mā ba‘d al-ṭabī‘āt*) appeared in Hyderabad in 1930. The German translation by Dieterici (“Die Abhandlung von den Tendenzen der Aristotelische Metaphysik von dem Zweiten Meister”) is available in *Alfārābī’s philosophische Abhandlungen*, trans. F. Dieterici (Leiden, 1892), pp. 54-60, 213-14, repr. in *Publications of the Institute for the History of Arabic-Islamic Science*, ed. by F. Sezgin, vol. XIII (Frankfurt am Main, 1999). Th.-A. Druart, “Le traité d’al-Fārābī sur les buts de la *Métaphysique* d’Aristote”, *Bulletin de Philosophie Médiévale*, 24 (1982): 38-43, provides a French translation of al-Fārābī’s essay. An English translation of the first half, with comprehensive study, is available in Gutas, *Avicenna*, pp. 237-42. For a philosophical profile of al-Fārābī, see the collective entry on this author in E. Yarshater (ed.), *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, vol. IX (New York, 1999), pp. 208b-229b.

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 *ṣurūḥ* mentioned in Text 1 are, as far as metaphysics is concerned, *fuṣūṣ* and *ṣurūḥ* 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 Uṣṭāt (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*

³⁷ Gutas, *Avicenna*, pp. 237-42.

³⁸ In the *Fihrist*, Uṣṭāt's version appears as an integral translation (*Kitāb al-Fihrist*, ed. Flügel, vol. I, p. 251, 27-28; ed. Tağaddud, p. 312, 14), whereas Ishāq's version is described as extensive, albeit incomplete (ed. Flügel, vol. I, p. 251, 30; ed. Tağaddud, p. 312, 16).

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 *ṣurūḥ* 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 oeuvre. *Fuṣūṣ* in the title of the *Risāla* is usually translated in its literal sense as “seals” (*Petschafte*)⁴² or “stones of rings” (*Ringsteine*).⁴³

³⁹ This term is not recorded in A.-M. Goichon, *Lexique de la langue philosophique d'Ibn Sīnā* (Paris, 1938), nor does it appear in the Arabic-Latin lexica of the *Avicenna Latinus* series.

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

⁴¹ S. Pines, “Ibn Sina et l'auteur de la Risalat al-fusus fi'l-hikma: Quelques données du problème”, *Revue des Études Islamiques*, 19 (1951): 121-4. Th.-A. Druart, “Al-Fārābī. Emanation and metaphysics”, in P. Morewedge (ed.), *Neoplatonism and Islamic Thought* (Albany, N. Y., 1992), pp. 127-48, p. 127, follows Pines' opinion in discarding al-Fārābī's authorship. Janssens in *An Annotated Bibliography on Ibn Sīnā (1970-1989)*, p. 70, regards the attribution to Avicenna as an “important, but very delicate topic”.

⁴² *Die Petschafte der Weisheitslehre*, in *Alfārābī's philosophische Abhandlungen*, trans. Dieterici, pp. 108-38. Cf. the rendering of *fuṣūṣ* as “seals” in Druart, “Al-Fārābī. Emanation and metaphysics”, p. 127.

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-Zabidī. 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 *fuṣūṣ* 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 ago⁴⁴ and edited by A. Badawi⁴⁵ shortly later; its importance has been emphasized more recently by S. Pines and D. Gutas.⁴⁶ The mention of the *fuṣūṣ* 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.⁴⁷ I will tell you: I had composed a book which I called *Fair Judgment (Kitāb al-Inṣāf)*. [...] I commented clearly (*awḍaḥtu šarḥ*) on the difficult passages (*mawāḍi‘ muškila*) in the essential parts (*fuṣūṣ*) [of Aristotle’s books] up to the end of the *Theologia (Uṭūlūḡiyā)*, despite the fact that the *Theologia* is somewhat suspect, and I talked about the oversights of the commentators (*mufassirin*). [...] Then it was lost in the course of some rout, since there was only the first draft.⁴⁸

The *Uṭūlūḡiyā* Avicenna mentions in Text 3 is the *Theologia Aristotelis*, the famous Arabic abstract of Plotinus’ *Enneads* IV-VI, falsely attributed to Aristotle.⁴⁹

⁴⁴ P. Kraus, “Plotin chez les Arabes: Remarques sur un nouveau fragment de la paraphrase arabe des *Ennéades*”, *Bulletin de l’Institut d’Égypte*, 23 (1940-1941): 263-95.

⁴⁵ ‘A. Badawi, *Aristū ‘ind al-‘Arab* (Cairo 1947), pp. 120, 9-122, 8.

⁴⁶ S. Pines, “La ‘Philosophie orientale’ d’Avicenne et sa polémique contre les Bagdadiens”, *Archives d’Histoire Doctrinale et Littéraire du Moyen Age*, 27 (1952): 5-37. Gutas, *Avicenna*, pp. 60-4.

⁴⁷ Namely in the problems of psychology and cosmology mentioned in the previous part of the letter.

⁴⁸ Badawi, *Aristū*, p. 121, 16-22; Ibn Sīnā, *Mubāḥaṭāt*, ed. Bīdār Far (Qom, 1414 H.), p. 375, 2-9. The translation I propose is a modified version of Gutas’ translation (*Avicenna*, pp. 63-4).

⁴⁹ See on this work F. W. Zimmermann, “The origins of the so-called *Theology of Aristotle*”, in J. Kraye, W. F. Ryan and C. B. Schmitt (eds.), *Pseudo-Aristotle in the Middle Ages. The Theology and other Texts* (London, 1986), pp. 110-240; M. Aouad, “La Théologie d’Aristote et autres textes du *Plotinus Arabus*”, in R. Goulet (ed.), *Dictionnaire des Philosophes Antiques*, vol. I (Paris, 1989), pp. 541-90. C. D’Ancona, “Per un profilo filosofico dell’autore della *Teologia di Aristotele*”, *Medioevo*, 17 (1991): 83-134; *Ead.*, “Il tema della *docta ignorantia* nel neoplatonismo arabo. Un

From Text 3 we get an interesting clue about the method of the *Kitāb al-Inṣāf*. 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-Inṣāf* 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 (*mawāḍi‘ muškila*) within these essential parts.⁵¹

This interpretation of Text 3 finds support in the inspection of the actual contents of the *Kitāb al-Inṣāf*. Unfortunately, this originally massive writing is extant only partially and indirectly, in the form of disciples' *reportationes*, in the MS Ḥikma 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-Inṣāf* 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 I: Structure and composition", forthcoming; *Ead.*, "Ġumlatu falsafatinā, l'ensemble de notre philosophie". L'héritage de l'Antiquité tardive et son interprétation dans le Proème 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.

⁵⁰ For a comprehensive description of the *Kitāb al-Inṣāf*, cf. Gutas, *Avicenna*, pp. 130-40.

⁵¹ Pines ("La 'Philosophie orientale' d'Avicenne", 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.

⁵² D. Gutas, "Notes and texts from Cairo manuscripts, II: Texts from Avicenna's Library in a copy by 'Abd-ar-Razzāq aṣ-Ṣignāhī", *Manuscripts of the Middle East*, 2 (1987): 8a-17b. Cf. Gutas, *Avicenna*, pp. 136-40, and the additions to the contents of the aforementioned article in Gutas, "Avicenna's Eastern ("Oriental") Philosophy", p. 166, n. 25.

⁵³ Badawi, *Aristū*, pp. 22-33. French translation and commentary in M. Sebtī, *Sharḥ Kitāb ḥarf al-lām li al-shaykh al-ra'īs Ibn Sina. Traduction, annotation et présentation*. Mémoire rédigé [...] en vue de l'obtention du D.E.A., sous la direction de M. le Prof. J. Jolivet, École Pratique des Hautes Études, 1992 (I wish to thank the author for having kindly put at my disposal a copy of her work). English translation

of the *Theologia Aristotelis*,⁵⁴ called respectively “commentary” (*šarḥ*) and “interpretation” (*tafsīr*).⁵⁵

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 *šarḥ* and *tafsīr* of the *Theologia Aristotelis*, as we have them, are disciples’ copies, ultimately deriving from the text itself of Avicenna.⁵⁶ It is not completely clear which portion of the *Theologia* Avicenna explained in the *šarḥ*. 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 1882.⁵⁷ The French translator is probably right in describing Avicenna’s *šarḥ* as a “commentary on chosen passages” of the

of Badawi, *Aristū*, pp. 23, 21-24, 1 in Gutas, *Avicenna*, p. 264. A summary of Badawi, *Aristū*, pp. 23, 21-26, 22 by F. Zimmermann is available in R. Sorabji, “Infinite power impressed: the transformation of Aristotle’s physics and theology”, in R. Sorabji (ed.), *Aristotle Transformed: the Ancient Commentators and their Influence* (London, 1990), pp. 181-98, pp. 187-90.

⁵⁴ Badawi, *Aristū*, pp. 37, 1-73, 14. The two recensions are intermingled in Badawi’s edition, in which only a part of the first one has been published (pp. 59, 13-66, 4; cf. Gutas, “Notes and texts”, pp. 12b-13a). A fragment that Badawi regards as belonging to the second recension (pp. 73, 15-74, 13) has been shown by A. Hasnawi to be an independent work, probably not by Avicenna (cf. “Deux textes en arabe sur les preuves platoniciennes de l’immortalité de l’âme”, *Medioevo*, 23 (1997): 395-408). French translation and commentary of Badawi’s edition of both recensions in G. Vajda, “Les notes d’Avicenne sur la «Théologie d’Aristote»”, *Revue Thomiste*, 51 (1951): 346-406. For a comprehensive bibliographical survey of Avicenna’s exegesis of the *Theologia Aristotelis*, see Aouad, “La Théologie”, pp. 583-6; for an investigation of the version of the *Theologia* upon which Avicenna commented, and a discussion of the nature of the suspicions he mentions in Text 3, see Zimmermann, “The origins”, pp. 183-4.

⁵⁵ For the translation of *tafsīr* as “interpretation”, cf. Gutas, “Aspects of literary form”, pp. 32-3.

⁵⁶ In his Ph.D. dissertation (*The Making of the Avicennan Tradition: The Transmission, Contents, and Structure of Ibn Sīnā’s al-Mubāḥaṭāt, The Discussions*, Yale University 2001, pp. 332-5, 396-7, 403), D. C. Reisman identifies Abū Maṣṣūr b. Zayla (d. 440/1048), a first generation student of Avicenna, as the author of these two recensions.

⁵⁷ Badawi, *Aristū*, p. 59, 12 and n. 8.

Theologia.⁵⁸ The exact identity of these “chosen passages” has still, however, to be ascertained. The *tafsīr*, 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 *mīmars* 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-Inṣāf* 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 *mīmars* 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),⁵⁹ 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-Inṣāf* 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-Inṣāf* 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*)”.

⁵⁹ Zimmermann, “The origins”, p. 183, n. 287.

stated in Text 3, namely the special attention he paid to the “difficult passages” (*mawāḍi‘ muškila*) within the *fuṣūṣ*. 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 *fuṣūṣ* 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).

§4 - ALPHA ELATTON 1-2 AND LAMBDA 6-10 AMONG THE *FUṢŪṢ* OF ARISTOTLE’S *METAPHYSICS*

In the previous sections, I have argued that the term *fuṣūṣ* in Text 1 means the essential parts of Aristotle’s natural philosophy and *Metaphysics*, and that the *šurūḥ* referred to in the same text are the commentaries on these essential parts. The next task is to establish the identity of these essential parts and of the commentaries upon them. In what follows I address this

⁶⁰ Vajda, “Les notes d’Avicenne”, p. 346: “Il s’agit en fait non pas d’un commentaire suivi sur la fameuse «Théologie d’Aristote», mais de notes détachées sur des passages choisis”.

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 *loci*.

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-Ṣignāhī, 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.

⁶¹ Since the first philosophical work by Avicenna (*Maqāla fī al-naḥs 'alā sunnat al-iḥtiṣār*, Compendium on the Soul) deals with psychology (cf. Gutas, *Avicenna*, pp. 82-7), we can assume that Avicenna regarded the *De Anima* as one of the essential parts of Aristotle's natural philosophy. Another of these parts was very likely the *Physics*, of which Avicenna knew Themistius' paraphrase (cf. A. Bertolacci, "Metafisica A, 5, 986 a 22-26 nell'*Ilāhiyyāt* del *Kitāb al-Sifā'* di Ibn Sīnā", *Documenti e Studi sulla Tradizione Filosofica Medievale*, 10 [1999]: 205-31, pp. 214, 219-20). For the reception of Aristotle's *Physics* and *De Anima* in the Arab world, see P. Lettinck, *Aristotle's Physics and its Reception in the Arabic World*. With an Edition of the Unpublished Parts of Ibn Bājjā's Commentary on the *Physics* (Leiden-New York-Köln, 1994), and R. Arnzen, *Aristoteles' De anima. Eine verlorene spätantike Paraphrase in arabischer und persischer Überlieferung* (Leiden-New York-Köln, 1998).

⁶² Gutas, "Notes and texts", p. 9a-b. 'Abd al-Razzāq's master, Abū al-'Abbās al-Lawkarī, 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 Ishāq b. Hunayn⁶⁴ – 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-Shifā'* (*Book of the Cure*),⁶⁶ a work whose comprehensiveness is

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 *Ġumlat al-maġmū' fī 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 Ishāq b. Hunayn, of which it is a partial abridgement, is available in Averroes' *tafsīr* of Aristotle's *Metaphysics*; cf. Averroes, *Tafsīr ma ba'd at-Tabi'at*, ed. M. Bouyges, vol. I (Beirut, 1938), pp. 3-54 (the attribution to Ishāq 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 Uṣṭāt, is transcribed.

⁶⁵ Cf. Gutas, "Notes and texts", p. 13a. This paraphrase has been published by Abū al-'Alā 'Afifī, "Tarġama 'arabiyya qadīma li-maqālat al-Lām min Kitāb Mā ba'd al-ṭabī'a li-Aristū", *Bulletin of the Faculty of Arts of the University of Egypt*, 5 (1937): 89-138, and Badawi, *Aristū*, pp. 1-11. The relation of this paraphrase of *Lambda* 6-10 with the other literal translations of book *Lambda* remains to be investigated.

⁶⁶ Ibn Sinā, *Al-Shifā'. Al-Ilāhiyyāt (1)*; Ibn Sinā, *Al-Shifā'. Al-Ilāhiyyāt (2)*, ed. M. Y. Moussa, S. Dunya and S. Zayed (Cairo, 1960). All the following quotations from the *Ilāhiyyāt* are taken from this edition. The Latin Medieval translation of Avicenna's work has been edited: Avicenna Latinus, *Liber de Philosophia prima sive Scientia divina, I-IV*, ed. S. Van Riet (Louvain-Leiden, 1977); Avicenna Latinus, *Liber de Philosophia prima sive Scientia divina, V-X*, ed. S. Van Riet (Louvain-Leiden, 1980); Avicenna Latinus, *Liber de Philosophia prima sive Scientia divina, I-X. Lexiques*, ed. S. Van Riet (Louvain-la-Neuve-Leiden, 1983). Two integral translations

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*.

of this work into Western languages are available: *Die Metaphysik Avicennas enthaltend die Metaphysik, Theologie, Kosmologie und Ethik*, transl. M. Horten (Leipzig, 1907, repr. Frankfurt a. M., 1960); Avicenne, *La Métaphysique du Šifā'*. Livres I à V, transl G. C. Anawati (Paris, 1978); Avicenne, *La Métaphysique du Šifā'*. Livres de VI à X, transl. G. C. Anawati (Paris, 1985).

⁶⁷ Ibn Sinā, *Al-Šifā'*, *al-Mantiq. Al-Madḥal*, ed. M. el-Khodeiri, A. F. El-Ehwani, G. C. Anawati (Cairo, 1952), I, 1, pp. 9, 17-10, 1. English translation in Gutas, *Avicenna*, p. 51.

⁶⁸ *Ilāhiyyāt*, VIII, 2, p. 332, 6 (cf. *Alpha Elatton*, 2, 994 a 11-19; 994 a 19-b 6); p. 333, 7, p. 335, 3, p. 336, 17, p. 339, 3, p. 339, 15 (cf. *Alpha Elatton*, 2, 994 a 19-b 6).

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 Sinā, ed. A. Nūrāni (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. 68, 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" (*faɣlasūf*) and the *Metaphysics Kitāb mā ba'd al-ṭabi'a* (p. 36, 5).

⁷⁰ The related expression *al-ta'lim al-awwal* ("the first teaching") in *Ilāhiyyāt* VIII, 2, p. 332, 5, apparently designates Aristotle's *Metaphysics*, as in the psychological part of *al-Ḥikma al-mašriqiyya* (*Eastern Philosophy*) it means Aristotle's *De Anima* (cf. Gutas, "Avicenna's Eastern ("Oriental") Philosophy", p. 173, n. 40). In other parts of the *Kitāb al-Šifā'*, however, this same expression refers to the Aristotelian *corpus* in general, as in the reworkings of Aristotle's *Topics* and of Aristotle's *Poetics*. See Ibn Sinā, *Al-Šifā'*, *al-Mantiq, al-Gadal*, ed. A. F. El-Ehwani (Cairo, 1965), p. 38, 1, cf. Gutas, *Avicenna*, p. 287, n. 10; Ibn Sinā, *Al-Šifā'*, *al-Mantiq, al-Ši'r*, ed. 'A. Badawī (Cairo, 1966), p. 31, 8, cf. I. M. Dahiyat, *Avicenna's Commentary on the Poetics of Aristotle. A Critical Study with an Annotated Translation of the Text* (Leiden, 1974), p. 70, n. 1.

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-Ḥāṣil wa-al-mahṣūl* (*The Available and the Valid*) and of the already mentioned *Kitāb al-Inṣāf*. 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-Ḥāṣil wa-al-mahṣūl*. 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-Farāğ ibn al-Ṭayyib (d. 435/1043) on the *Metaphysics*.⁷¹ As to Avicenna's commentary on the *Metaphysics* in the *Kitāb al-Inṣāf*, 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-Ṣignāhī, 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 Elatton* is possibly the *tafsīr* to which Avicenna himself refers in his correspondence with al-Birūnī (cf. Gutas, *Avicenna*, pp. 97-98). According to his disciple Ibn Buṭlān, Abū al-Farāğ 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).

§5 - THEMISTIUS' PARAPHRASE OF BOOK *LAMBDA*
AS ONE OF THE *ŠURŪḤ*

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 *Fī Aḡrād*, 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-Nadīm in the *Fihrist* (completed in 377/988), in which Alexander of Aphrodisias' and Themistius' commentaries (each of them named *tafsīr*) 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

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 yūḡadu li-al-qudamā' kalām fī šarḥ ḥādā al-kitāb 'alā waḡhihi*) – 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' *tafsīr* of the *Metaphysics* (Averroes, *Tafsīr*, vol. III, p. 1393, 4-7), where Alexander's commentary is called *tafsīr*, and Themistius' paraphrase *talḥīṣ '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 *Fī Mabādi' al-kull* (*On the Principles of the Universe*).⁷⁴ It is unclear, however, whether Avicenna took this work to be a "commentary" (*šarḥ*) on *Metaphysics Lambda*, or, rather, he considered it an independent treatise. Several considerations point towards the former possibility. First, the full title of the *Fī 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 *Fī Mabādi' al-kull* is, as a matter of fact, "a discussion of

⁷⁴ *Maqālat al-Iskandar al-Afrūdīsī fī al-qawl fī mabādi' al-kull bi-ḥasab ra'y Aristātālis al-faylasūf*, in Badawi, *Aristū*, pp. 253-77. The Greek original of this work is not extant. The identity of the Arabic translator is uncertain. More than one recension of this work existed in Arabic. A Syriac version of this same text is attested in Sergius of Reš'ainā (cf. H. Hugonnard-Roche, "Note sur Sergius de Reš'ainā, traducteur du grec en syriaque et commentateur d'Aristote", in G. Endress and R. Kruk (eds.), *The Ancient Tradition in Christian and Islamic Hellenism. Studies on the Transmission of Greek Philosophy and Sciences dedicated to H. J. Drossaart Lulofs on his ninetieth birthday* [Leiden, 1997], pp. 121-43, p. 126). The critical edition of an epitome of Alexander's *Fī Mabādi' al-kull* has been provided by G. Endress, "Alexander Arabus on the First Cause. Aristotle's First Mover in an Arabic treatise attributed to Alexander of Aphrodisias", in C. D'Ancona, G. Serra (eds.), *La recezione araba ed ebraica della filosofia e della scienza greche* (Padova, 2001), forthcoming. An integral French translation of the published text is available in A. Badawi, *La transmission de la philosophie grecque au monde arabe* (Paris, 1968), pp. 121-39. Among the partial translations, those of F. Rosenthal, *Das Fortleben der Antike im Islam* (Zürich, 1965); Engl. tr.: *The Classical Heritage in Islam* (London-New York, 1975), pp. 146-9 (cf. Badawi, *Aristū*, pp. 266, 23-270, 13), and of D. Gutas, *Avicenna*, pp. 215-17 (cf. Badawi, *Aristū*, pp. 276, 6-277, 6) deserve to be mentioned. For the Arabic and Latin reception of this work, see respectively C. Genequand, "Vers une nouvelle édition de la *Maqāla fī Mabādi' al-kull* d'Alexandre d'Aphrodise", in A. Hasnawi, A. Elamrani-Jamal and M. Aouad (eds.), *Perspectives arabes et médiévales sur la tradition scientifique et philosophique grecque* (Paris-Leuven, 1997), pp. 271-6, and A. De Libera, "Ex uno non fit nisi unum. La lettre sur le Principe de l'univers et les condamnations parisiennes de 1277", in B. Mojsisch and O. Pluta (eds.), *Historia Philosophiae Medii Aevi* (Amsterdam-Philadelphia, 1991), vol. I, pp. 543-60. For the Arabic reception of Alexander in a broader perspective, see A. Hasnawi, "Alexandre d'Aphrodise vs Jean Philopon: Notes sur quelques traités d'Alexandre 'perdus' en grec, conservés en arabe", *Arabic Sciences and Philosophy*, 4 (1995): 53-109.

Metaphysics Lambda, expounding the theory of the unmoved mover and the order of the universe”.⁷⁵ 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*.⁷⁶ Fourth, Avicenna sometimes applies the term *ṣarḥ* to writings that are not commentaries in the proper sense of the word.⁷⁷ If Avicenna deemed the *Fī Mabādi’ al-kull* a *ṣarḥ* on *Metaphysics Lambda*, then this work would deservedly constitute one of the *ṣurūḥ* 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 1.⁷⁸ I rely for this assumption

⁷⁵ Gutas, *Avicenna*, p. 215.

⁷⁶ In *Ilāhiyyāt*, IX, 2, p. 392, 9-14, Alexander of Aphrodisias and Themistius are quoted as *muḥaṣṣilū ‘ulamā’ al-maššā’in* (“the validating Peripatetic scholars”); in the case of Alexander, the reference is to *Fī Mabādi’ al-kull* as in Badawi *Aristū*, pp. 266, 9-268, 6; cf. Badawi, *La transmission*, pp. 130-2, Rosenthal, *The Classical Heritage*, pp. 146-9). In IX, 2, pp. 392, 17-393, 1, he is named *ba’dū man huwa asaddu qawlan min aṣḥābihi* (“one of his [i.e. Aristotle’s] followers who speaks more to the point”); cf. *Fī Mabādi’ al-kull*, as in Badawi, *Aristū*, pp. 266, 9-11; cf. Badawi, *La transmission*, pp. 130-1, Rosenthal, *The Classical Heritage*, p. 146). In IX, 3, pp. 393, 15-394, 1, finally, he is called *fāḍil al-mutaqaddimīn* (“the most excellent among the ancients”); the reference is to *Fī Mabādi’ al-kull*, as in Badawi, *Aristū*, p. 267, 13-18; cf. Badawi, *La transmission*, p. 132). In the psychological section of the *Šifā’*, Alexander is called *fāḍil qudamā’ al-mufasssīrīn* (“the most excellent among the ancient commentators”); cf. *Avicenna’s De Anima (Arabic Text), being the psychological part of the Kitāb al-Šifā’*, ed. F. Rahman (London, 1959), III, 7, p. 149, 4-5. The first two quotations from Alexander in the *Ilāhiyyāt* are translated and compared with their parallel places in Avicenna’s *al-Mabda’ wa-al-ma’ād* by Gutas (*Avicenna*, pp. 290-91).

⁷⁷ In the *Ilāhiyyāt* (I, 3, p. 22, 13; cf. p. 25, 70), Avicenna calls *ṣarḥ* the *Kitāb al-Šifā’* itself, or at least the sections of it dealing with logic and natural philosophy: *wa-qad ‘urifa fī ṣarḥinā li-al-mantiqiyyāti wa-al-ṭabi’iyyāti* [...]. In the *Letter to Kiyā*, he qualifies the method of the sections of the *Kitāb al-Šifā’* corresponding to Aristotle’s *Physics* and *De Caelo* as consisting of *ṣarḥ* (“commentary”), *tafṣīl* (“detailed exposition”) and *tafrī’ alā al-uṣūl* (“working out of corollary principles on the basis of the fundamental principles”; Badawi, *Aristū*, 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 *Sophistici Elenchi* as a *ṣarḥ* (cf. Gutas, “Aspects of literary form”, p. 33 and n. 21).

⁷⁸ Two Arabic fragments of this paraphrase have been published by ‘A. Badawi (cf. the textual remarks by R. M. Frank, “Some textual notes on the Oriental versions of Themistius’ Paraphrase of Book I [sic, pro: XII] of the *Metaphysics*”, *Cahiers de Byrsa*, 8 [1958-1959]: 215-30): an abbreviated version of the part dealing with *Lambda* 6-10 (*Aristū*, pp. 12-21, from the MS. Cairo, Dār al-Kutub, Ḥikma 6M, fols.

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

Al-Masīhī in his work records Themistius' paraphrase of *Lambda* as the only Greek commentary on Aristotle's *Metaphysics*.⁸⁰ He does not mention Alexander of Aphrodisias' literal commentary on *Lambda*. Because of the chronological, geographical and personal connection between him and Avicenna, the presence of Themistius' paraphrase in al-Masīhī's inventory can be taken as an indication of the availability of this paraphrase 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-Inṣāf* 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 *ṣarḥ* in this manuscript. Second, Themistius' paraphrase is the only proper commentary 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' paraphrase occur in the context of the explanation of controversial

206v16-210r7; cf. Gutas, "Notes and texts", p. 14a), and a full version of the part dealing with *Lambda* 1-2 (*Aristū*, pp. 329-33). The French translation of these fragments is available in Thémistius, *Paraphrase de la Métaphysique d'Aristote (livre Lambda)*, traduit de l'hébreu et de l'arabe, transl. R. Brague (Paris, 1999). In both versions (Badawi, *Aristū*, p. 12, 1; p. 329, 2), Themistius' paraphrase is called *ṣarḥ*. The expression *kalām fī ṣarḥ* is used by Fārābī to describe Themistius' paraphrase in the *Fī aḡrāḍ* (*Alfārābī's Philosophische Abhandlungen*, p. 32, 14-15). This same paraphrase is, instead, called *talḥiṣ 'alā al-ma'nā* by Averroes (Averroes, *Tafsir*, vol. III, p. 1393; cf. above, n. 73). The identity of the Arabic translator of Themistius' paraphrase of Book *Lambda* is uncertain. According to the *Fihrist* (ed. Flügel, vol. I, p. 251, 29-30; ed. Taḡaddud, p. 312, 14), it was Abū Biṣr Mattā (d. 328/940); on the other hand, according to the manuscript containing the full version of *Lambda* 1-2 (cf. Badawi, *Aristū*, p. 329, 2) and MS Munich 108 of the Hebrew translation (cf. Themistii *In Aristotelis Metaphysicorum Librum Lambda Paraphrasis*, ed. S. Landauer, CAG V 5, Berlin, 1903, p. v) it was Ishāq b. Ḥunayn (cf. Thémistius, *Paraphrase*, p. 16, n. 6; p. 17, n. 1).

⁷⁹ MS Leiden Acad. 44, fols. 2v-12r; summary in Gutas, *Avicenna*, pp. 149-52.

⁸⁰ Gutas, *Avicenna*, p. 152.

⁸¹ Gutas, "Notes and texts", p. 14a.

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-Inṣāf*.⁸⁴ In this same work Themistius' paraphrase is also implicitly quoted.⁸⁵

The presence of Arabic commentaries on the *Metaphysics* among the *ṣurūḥ* 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 *Fihrist* and in al-Masīhī's *Kitāb fī Aṣnāf al-ʿulūm 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

⁸² In *Ilāhiyyāt* IX, 2, p. 392, 9-14, Themistius and Alexander of Aphrodisias are quoted as *muḥaṣṣilū ʿulamāʾ al-maššāʾin* ("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 *allaḍi yaḥsunu ʿibāratuhu ʿan kutub al-muʿallim al-awwal ʿalā sabīl al-talḥiṣ wa-in lam yakun yaḡūṣu fī al-maʿāni* ("He who expresses well the books of the First Teacher by way of epitome (*talḥiṣ*), 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-Mabdaʾ wa-al-maʿād* by Gutas, *Avicenna*, pp. 290-1.

⁸³ Cf. S. Pines, "Some distinctive metaphysical conceptions in Themistius' Commentary on Book Lambda and their place in the history of philosophy", in J. Wiesner (ed.), *Aristoteles. Werk und Wirkung. Paul Moraux gewidmet*, vol. II: *Kommentierung, Überlieferung, Nachleben* (Berlin-New York, 1987), pp. 177-204, pp. 193-4; repr. in *The Collected Works of Shlomo Pines*, vol. III: *Studies in the History of Arabic Philosophy* (Jerusalem, 1996), pp. 267-94.

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 (*Tāmistiyyūs*). 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.

⁸⁵ Gutas, *Avicenna*, p. 315.

⁸⁶ *Kitāb al-Fihrist*, ed. Flügel, vol. I, p. 251, 28; ed. Taḡaddud, p. 312, 14 (cf. Gutas, *Avicenna*, p. 152). The *Fihrist* ascribes to al-Kindī a *ḥabar* of the *Metaphysics*; F. E. Peters, *Aristoteles Arabus* (Leiden, 1968), p. 49, translates this term as "notation", whereas B. Dodge, *The Fihrist of al-Nadīm. A Tenth-century Survey of Muslim*

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" (*talḥiṣ*) on the *Metaphysics* dealing in particular with book *Lambda*.⁸⁷ Apart from focusing on one of the *fuṣūṣ* of the *Metaphysics*,⁸⁸ Ṭābit's *talḥiṣ* 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 *talḥiṣ* 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 Zakariyā' Yaḥyā b. 'Adī (d. 363/974) deserves special attention. This commentary is the only attested Arabic commentary that focuses on the other identifiable *faṣṣ* (*Alpha*

Culture, transl. B. Dodge (New York-London, 1970), vol. II, p. 606, renders it as "information". Al-Masiḥī mentions, in connection with Aristotle's *Metaphysics* and Themistius' paraphrase of book *Lambda* (cf. above, n. 79), al-Kindī's *al-Falsafa al-dāhila* (*The Inclusive Philosophy*), which he describes – in Gutas' words – as "a short exegesis" of the *Metaphysics*. This same work appears among the philosophical books by al-Kindī in another passage of the *Fihrist* (ed. Flügel, vol. I, p. 255, 27-28; ed. Taḡaddud, pp. 315, 29-316, 1; cf. Gutas, *Avicenna*, p. 152, n. 10), where it is connected in an obscure way with the mention of "metaphysics" (*mā fawq al-ṭabī'iyāt*). In the light of al-Masiḥī's testimony, al-Kindī's *al-Falsafa al-dāhila* might represent the *ḥabar* of the *Metaphysics* mentioned by Ibn al-Nadīm; it cannot be excluded, however, that Ibn al-Nadīm refers to al-Kindī's *al-Falsafa al-ūlā* (cf. below, section 7).

⁸⁷ Forthcoming critical edition, translation and commentary by D. C. Reisman and A. Bertolacci. Ṭābit's *talḥiṣ*, which was glossed by Ibn Taymiyya in *Dar' Ta'arūḍ al-'aql 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).

⁸⁸ 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 Ishāq b. Ḥunayn; cf. above, n. 78). As a matter of fact, traces of the use of Themistius' paraphrase are detectable in Ṭābit's *talḥiṣ*. 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. Yaḥyā'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 Kindī, Ṭābit b. Qurra and Yaḥyā b. 'Adī exerted on Avicenna, and whether there is any reason to include them among the *ṣurūḥ* of Text 1. For the time being, it seems safer to assume that the term *ṣurūḥ* 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 *Ilāhiyyāt* 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 *Ilāhiyyāt* 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

⁸⁹ *Tafsīr li-al-maqāla al-ūlā min Kitāb Mā ba'd al-ṭabī'a li-Aristāṭālīs al-mawsūma bi-al-alif al-ṣuḡrā*, in *Rasā'il falsafīyya li-al-Kindī wa-al-Fārābī wa-Ibn Bāḡḡa wa-Ibn 'Adī*, ed. 'A. Badawi (Bengazi, 1973; repr. Beirut, 1980), pp. 168-203. The same commentary is available also in *Maqālāt Yaḥyā Ibn 'Adī al-falsafīyya*, ed. S. Khalifāt (Amman, 1988), pp. 220-62. Cf. C. Martini, "Yaḥyā Ibn 'Adī's commentary on the *Metaphysics*, Book α. Method and style of composition", in *Sciences et philosophie arabes: méthodes, problèmes et cas*, forthcoming.

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.⁹⁰ 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 unmovable 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.⁹¹

⁹⁰ 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.

⁹¹ 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 εἶναι), but they themselves are the cause of the being of other things”: οὐ γάρ ποτε ἀληθεῖς, οὐδ’ ἐκείνας αἰτίον τί ἐστι τοῦ εἶναι, ἀλλ’ 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 *Ilāhiyyāt*, 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 ἀεὶ ὄντων ἀρχὰς),⁹² 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),⁹³ 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*.⁹⁴

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.

⁹² 993 b 28. *The Complete Works of Aristotle*, p. 1570.

⁹³ 1072 a 24. *The Complete Works of Aristotle*, p. 1694. I seclude the second καὶ as in Ross's edition.

⁹⁴ Avicenna very likely did not know book *Alpha Meizon* (cf. A. Bertolacci, "Metafisica A, 5, 986 a 22-26", pp. 209-11), which does not appear in al-Fārābī's survey of the books of the *Metaphysics* in the *Fi agrāḍ* either. On the reception of *Alpha Meizon* in the Arab world and on its position after book *Alpha Elatton*, cf. R. Walzer, "On the Arabic versions of Books A, α and Λ of Aristotle's *Metaphysics*", in *Id.*, *Greek into Arabic: Essays on Islamic Philosophy* (Oxford, 1962), pp. 114-28; A. Neuwirth, "Neue Materialien zur arabischen Tradition der beiden ersten Metaphysik-Bücher", *Die Welt des Islam*, 18 (1977-78): 84-100; C. Martini, "La tradizione araba della Metafisica di Aristotele. Libri α e A", in *La recezione araba ed ebraica della filosofia e della scienza greche*, forthcoming; *Ead.*, "The Arabic version of the Book *Alpha Meizon* of Aristotle's *Metaphysics* and the testimony of the MS. Bibl. Apostolica Vaticana, Ott. Lat. 2048", forthcoming. As to the books of the *Metaphysics* following *Lambda*, Ibn al-Nadīm in the *Fihrist* (ed. Flügel, vol. I, p. 251, 26-27; ed. Tagaddud, p. 312, 13) appears to say that the *Metaphysics* is extant in Arabic until book *Mu*, and

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 *Fihrist* as purporting that book *Nu* was part of Uṣṭāṭ's translation of the *Metaphysics*, but his interpretation of the expression *hādihi al-ḥurūf* ("these letters [i.e. books]") in l. 27 of Flügel's edition (= ed. Taḡaddud, l. 13) as including book *Nu* is questionable. Al-Fārābī, when describing the *Metaphysics* in the *Fī aḡrād*, 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.⁹⁵ 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 fī al-Falsafa al-ūlā* (*Book on First Philosophy*) is surely the most significant.⁹⁶ 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 *al-Falsafa al-ūlā* refer, in fact, to this book.⁹⁷ 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

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).

⁹⁶ This work has been edited in *Rasā'il al-Kindī al-falsafīyya*, ed. M. 'A. Abū Rīda (Cairo, 1950), vol. I, pp. 97-162, and, more recently, in R. Rashed and J. Jolivet, *Œuvres philosophiques et scientifiques d'al-Kindī. Volume II. Métaphysique et Cosmologie* (Leiden-Boston-Köln, 1998), pp. 1-117, with facing French translation. An English translation of Abū Rīda's edition, including a comprehensive introduction and a detailed commentary, is available in A. L. Ivry, *Al-Kindī's Metaphysics* (Albany, N. Y., 1974). Among the recent studies on this work, see J. Janssens, "Al-Kindī's concept of God", *Ultimate Reality and Meaning*, 17 (1994): 4-16; C. D'Ancona, "Al-Kindī et l'auteur du Liber de causis", in *Ead.*, *Recherches sur le Liber de causis* (Paris, 1995), pp. 155-94; *Ead.*, "Al-Kindī on the Subject-matter of the First Philosophy, direct and indirect sources of *Falsafa al-ūlā* Chapter One", in J. A. Aertsen and A. Speer (eds.), *Was ist Philosophie im Mittelalter* (Berlin-New York, 1998), pp. 841-55.

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 *al-Falsafa al-ūlā* are rendered according to Ivry's translation, unless otherwise noted.

section that has clearly the character of an introduction.⁹⁸ In it, the main bulk of *Alpha Elatton* 1 and 3 is paraphrased,⁹⁹ but also the doctrine of *Alpha Elatton* 2 is detectable, especially in al-Kindī's views on the four Aristotelian causes and their finitude.¹⁰⁰

Whereas the influence of book *Alpha Elatton* is clear and circumscribed, the impact of the other books of the *Metaphysics* in *al-Falsafa al-ūlā* is difficult to evaluate. Al-Kindī'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.¹⁰¹ 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-Kindī's insistence in *al-Falsafa al-ūlā* on the identity between first philosophy and natural theology.¹⁰² In this work,

⁹⁸ Cf. what can be regarded as the closing sentence of this introductory section (*Rasā'il al-Kindī*, p. 112, 19-20; *Œuvres philosophiques et scientifiques d'al-Kindī*, II, p. 26, 7-8): "Inasmuch as these admonitions have now preceded (*fa-idā taqaddamat hādīhi al-waṣāyā*), we ought to set forth beforehand the canons the employment of which we require in this craft, and we accordingly say [...]" (*Al-Kindī's Metaphysics*, pp. 66-7).

⁹⁹ On book *Alpha Elatton* as a source of al-Kindī's *al-Falsafa al-ūlā*, 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-Kindī states that every cause must be one or the other of the four Aristotelian causes (*Rasā'il al-Kindī*, p. 101, 3-4; *Œuvres philosophiques et scientifiques d'al-Kindī*, II, p. 11, 3-4; *al-Kindī's Metaphysics*, p. 56). For another instance of a doctrine taken from *Alpha Elatton*, cf. *Al-Kindī's Metaphysics*, p. 18, n. 46.

¹⁰¹ The main pieces of evidence in this respect are the colophon of the extant text, which qualifies it as "first part" of the work (cf. *Rasā'il al-Kindī*, p. 162, 17; *Œuvres philosophiques et scientifiques d'al-Kindī*, II, p. 99, 4; *Al-Kindī's Metaphysics*, p. 114), and a quotation by Ibn Ḥazm with no equivalent in the surviving part of the work (cf. *Œuvres philosophiques et scientifiques d'al-Kindī*, II, pp. 113-17; H. Daiber, "Die Kritik des Ibn Ḥazm an Kindī's Metaphysik", *Der Islam*, 63 [1986]: 284-302).

¹⁰² On the identity between first philosophy and natural theology in al-Kindī's *al-Falsafa al-ūlā* scholars substantially agree ("By hailing knowledge of the "First Truth" and the "First Cause" as "First Philosophy", al-Kindī [...] is within the Aristotelian θεολογική tradition", Ivry, *Al-Kindī's Metaphysics*, p. 17; "[...] the Kindī 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-Kindī, *Fī kammiyyat kutub Aristāṭālīs* (*On the number of*

al-Kindī declares that first philosophy is “knowledge of the First True Who is the cause of every true”¹⁰³ and “knowledge of the first Cause”.¹⁰⁴ In this sense first philosophy is also called *‘ilm ilāhī* (a term analogous to that designating metaphysics in Text 1, and bearing in this case the literal meaning of “divine knowledge” or “theology”)¹⁰⁵ and *‘ilm mā fawqa al-ṭabī‘iyyāt* (literally “knowledge of what is above physical objects”).¹⁰⁶ Thus, on the basis of the identity of first philosophy and natural theology maintained by al-Kindī 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-Kindī’s work.¹⁰⁷ Third, the importance of *Metaphysics Lambda* in *al-Falsafa al-ūlā* cannot be restricted to the doctrines of it that al-Kindī 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*.

Aristotle’s Books) – cf. M. Guidi, R. Walzer, *Studi su al-Kindī I: Uno scritto introduttivo allo studio di Aristotele*, Memorie della R. Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei, Classe di Scienze Morali, Storiche e Filosofiche, ser. VI, vol. VI, fasc. V (Roma, 1940), p. 403, 8-11; *Rasā’il al-Kindī*, p. 384, 7-10 – where Aristotle’s *Metaphysics* is described along theological lines (cf. Gutas, *Avicenna*, pp. 243-9). Al-Kindī identifies first philosophy with natural theology in order to show the congruence between Greek thought and Islamic religion; on this topic see Gutas, *Avicenna*, pp. 243-4; G. Endress, “La concordance entre Platon et Aristote. L’Aristote arabe et l’émancipation de la philosophie en Islam médiéval”, in B. Mojsisch and O. Pluta (eds.), *Historia Philosophiae Medii Aevi*. Studien zur Geschichte der Philosophie des Mittelalters (Festschrift K. Flasch), (Amsterdam-Philadelphia 1991), pp. 237-57; *Id.*, “‘Der erste Lehrer’. Der arabische Aristoteles und das Konzept der Philosophie im Islam”, in U. Tworuschka (ed.), *Gottes ist der Orient. Gottes ist der Okzident. Festschrift für Abdoldjavad Falaturi zum 65. Geburtstag* (Köln-Wien, 1991), pp. 151-81; *Id.*, “L’Aristote arabe. Réception, autorité et transformation du Premier Maître”, *Medioevo*, 23 (1997): 1-42.

¹⁰³ *Rasā’il al-Kindī*, p. 98, 1-2; *Œuvres philosophiques et scientifiques d’al-Kindī* II, p. 9, 14; *Al-Kindī’s Metaphysics*, p. 56.

¹⁰⁴ *Rasā’il al-Kindī*, p. 101, 15-17; *Œuvres philosophiques et scientifiques d’al-Kindī*, II, p. 11, 13; *Al-Kindī’s Metaphysics*, p. 56.

¹⁰⁵ *Rasā’il al-Kindī*, p. 112, 15; *Œuvres philosophiques et scientifiques d’al-Kindī*, II, p. 27, 2; *Al-Kindī’s Metaphysics*, p. 66 (Ivry translates this expression as “the science of the metaphysical”).

¹⁰⁶ *Rasā’il al-Kindī*, p. 111, 13; *Œuvres philosophiques et scientifiques d’al-Kindī*, II, p. 25, 9-10; *Al-Kindī’s Metaphysics*, p. 65.

¹⁰⁷ C. D’Ancona, “Aristotele e Plotino nella dottrina di al-Kindī sul primo principio”, *Documenti e Studi sulla tradizione filosofica medievale*, 3 (1992): 363-422, highlights the relevance of some passages of book *Lambda* in the extant part of al-Kindī’s *al-Falsafa al-ūlā*.

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*),¹⁰⁸ a topic which clearly corresponds to the mention of the "eternal unmovable substance" (ἀίδιον τινα 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.¹⁰⁹ 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 unmovable 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 unmovable 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*

¹⁰⁸ *Rasā'il al-Kindī*, pp. 113, 1-114, 9; *Œuvres philosophiques et scientifiques d'al-Kindī*, II, p. 27, 8-29, 5; *Al-Kindī's Metaphysics*, pp. 67-8.

¹⁰⁹ *Rasā'il al-Kindī*, pp. 114, 10-122, 21; *Œuvres philosophiques et scientifiques d'al-Kindī*, II, pp. 29, 6-39, 22; *Al-Kindī's Metaphysics*, pp. 68-75.

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-Kindī's *al-Falsafa al-ūlā* attests, therefore, to the likelihood that Avicenna's reading of Aristotle's *Metaphysics* during his secondary education took its inspiration from al-Kindī 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 ilāhī* or *ilāhiyyāt*), we can understand better why he was so puzzled by Aristotle's *Metaphysics* (*Kitāb Mā ba'd al-ṭabī'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 *fuṣūṣ* of the *Metaphysics* in Text 1 places in the right perspective al-Fārābī's influence on Avicenna at the time of his undergraduate education. Avicenna found in al-Fārābī's *Fī Aḡrād* 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-Kindī, the causal doctrine of *Alpha Elatton* introduces the subsequent treatment of natural theology. This point, first noticed by A. L. Ivry (*Al-Kindī'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 ba'd al-ṭabī'a*)¹¹¹ consists not only of natural theology (*'ilm ilāhī*),¹¹² but also of ontology (*'ilm kullī*).¹¹³ Natural theology, according to al-Fārābī, 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 *Aḡrād*, 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

¹¹¹ *Alfārābī's philosophische Abhandlungen*, p. 35, 21; cf. p. 34, 9-10. This point is emphasized in Gutas, *Avicenna*, p. 252.

¹¹² *Alfārābī's philosophische Abhandlungen*, p. 35, 16.

¹¹³ *Alfārābī's philosophische Abhandlungen*, p. 35, 8.

¹¹⁴ *The Life of Ibn Sina*, pp. 36, 8-38, 2; Gutas, *Avicenna*, p. 29. Cf. also *The Life of Ibn Sina*, 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.