Al-Mas'ūdī's Life and Career, in Context

1.1 The Context: Eastern Avicennism in the Twelfth Century

The principal context within which al-Mas'ūdī's career and philosophical output must be situated is the mid-twelfth-century Avicennan milieu in the East, particularly in Khurasan and Transoxania. I discuss this in more detail elsewhere, so the following is a brief overview.¹ During the first half of the twelfth century, Khurasan flourished as the main centre of philosophical activity east of Baghdad, due largely to the patronage provided to a wide range of scholarship, including philosophy, by Sanjar ibn Malik Shāh, the Saljuq governor (*malik*) of Khurasan between 490/1097–511/1118 and then sultan of the Great Saljuqs until his death in 552/1157.² Alongside Nishapur, the city of Marw, which Sanjar declared as his capital when he became sultan in 511/1097, attracted some of the most accomplished philosophers and scholars, some of whom had direct links to the sultan. This vibrant intellectual culture, however, came to an abrupt end in the year 548/1153, when Sanjar was vanquished by the Oghuz Turks, who invaded Marw massacring its inhabitants, including numerous scholars.³ After this date, the two cities go into decline, and scholars, including Khurasanians, turn to neighbouring regions in search of patronage, either northwards to the Khwārazm-shāhs in Khwārazm or the Qarākhānids in Transoxania, or eastwards to the Ghaznavids.

As I showed in a previous study, two intellectual trends attested in this milieu are especially pertinent to al-Mas'ūdī.⁴ The first is mainstream traditional Avicennism, which operated very much within the framework of Avicennan philosophy, developing, refining and defending the system, generally without critiquing it in fundamental ways.⁵ This school of thought is repre-

1 I do this in a forthcoming publication provisionally titled, 'The Avicennan Milieu and the Rise of Neo-Ash'arism'.

2 On him, see 'Sandjar b. Malik Shāh', *El2*.

3 Ibn al-Athīr, *Kāmil*, 11, 116–121. On the Oghuz sacking and pillage of Nishapur, see Bulliet, *Patricians of Nishapur*, 76 ff.

4 Shihadeh, 'From al-Ghazālī to al-Rāzī'; also, 'Post-Ghazālīan Critic'.

5 This current declines in the second half of the century, as it is superseded by the school of Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī. However, traces of traditional Avicennism persist into the late twelfth and early thirteenth century, a case in point being the anonymous work titled *al-Nukat*

sented in the first half of the twelfth century by four key figures, all of whom based in Khurasan. The first is al-Lawkarī (d. ca. 517/1123), who studied with Avicenna's most prominent student Bahmanyār ibn al-Marzubān (d. 458/1066) and wrote the extant philosophical compendium titled *Bayān al-ḥaqq*, which is based closely on the works of Avicenna and Bahmanyār. Based in Marw, he is credited with the spread of Avicennan philosophy in Khurasan.⁶ The second is 'Umar al-Khayyām (d. 517/1126), who was based mainly in Nishapur, and for a period in Marw. The third is the philosopher and physician Sharaf al-Zamān al-Īlāqī, reportedly a student of al-Lawkarī and al-Khayyām, who died in 536/1141 when he was in the company of Sanjar in the battle of Qatwān, near Samarqand, which the latter lost to the Qarā Khitai.⁷ The fourth is 'Umar ibn Sahlān al-Sāwī (d. mid 6th/12th c.), who studied with al-Īlāqī, probably in Nishapur, and dedicated one of his works to Sanjar, titled *al-Risāla al-Sanjariyya*.⁸

Alongside traditional Avicennism, a different group of scholars engaged with Avicenna critically, and they can be treated as a distinct current. As I showed elsewhere, this current was initiated by both al-Ghazālī's critique of philosophy in his well-known *Tahāfut al-falāsifa* and Abū l-Barakāt al-Baghdādī's work the *Mu'tabar*, which offered a philosophical critique of various aspects of Avicennan philosophy. There is evidence that Abū l-Barakāt's philosophy was spreading eastwards from as early as the beginning of the twelfth century. For instance, the Kākūyid ruler of Yazd, 'Alā' al-Dawla Farāmarz ibn 'Alī ibn Farāmarz (fl. 516/1121–1122), was reportedly a philosopher who wrote a book titled *Muḥjat al-tawḥīd* championing Abū l-Barakāt's teachings.⁹ Another philosopher, Maḥmūd al-Khwārazmī, studied with Abū l-Barakāt and later, in 519/1124–1125, was met in Marw by Ṣāḥib al-Dīn al-Bayhaqī.¹⁰ The counter-Avicennan current is represented, in the middle of the century, most notably by our Mas'ūdī and Ibn Ghaylān al-Balkhī, both of whom drew inspiration from al-Ghazālī and Abū l-Barakāt. Another figure associated with this current is the well-known theologian al-Shahrastānī (d. 548/1153), who criticised Avicennan philosophy

wa-l-fawā'id (MS Istanbul, Feyzullah Efendi 1217; on which, see Michot, 'Al-Nukat wa-l-fawā'id').

- 6 Al-Bayhaqī, *Tatimma*, 126; on al-Lawkarī's biography, see Marcotte, 'Preliminary Notes'; Griffel, 'Between al-Ghazālī and Abū l-Barakāt', 50–55; on his main philosophical work *Bayān al-ḥaqq*, see Janssens, 'Al-Lawkarī's Reception'.
- 7 Al-Bayhaqī, *Tatimma*, 131. On this battle, see Biran, *Empire of the Qara Khitai*, 41–47.
- 8 For the publication details, see the Bibliography.
- 9 Al-Bayhaqī, *Tatimma*, 117–118.
- 10 Al-Bayhaqī, *Tatimma*, 161.

in his *Muṣāra'at al-falāsifa, Nihāyat al-aqdām* and some brief objections that he wrote on certain views in Avicenna's *Najāt* and sent to Ibn Sahlān al-Sāwī.¹¹

Let us linger a little on al-Ghazālī's criticism of philosophy. His greatest innovation on this front was not simply to offer a dedicated criticism of a range of specific philosophical theories, but rather to transform *kalām* at a very fundamental structural level; it was this shift away from the earlier Ash'arī conception of *kalām* that gave us the *Tahāfut*.¹² Classical Ash'arism, epitomised by al-Ghazālī's own teacher al-Juwaynī (d. 478/1085), had already developed a highly systematic theology largely in response to the Baṣran Mu'tazila, but nonetheless one that drew extensively on Mu'tazilī theories and method. So it was in conversation with Mu'tazilism that Ash'arism formulated its classical theological system, with its established doctrines and theories, arguments and structures. By the late eleventh century, however, the Mu'tazila had ceased to be a real threat: their political backing and influence had effectively come to an end, primarily as a consequence of pro-Sunni Saljuq policies, and the school was no longer producing representatives of note within Sunnism, at least from al-Ghazālī's point of view. The Ash'arī-Mu'tazilī battle effectively over, Ash'arī orthodoxy had to face off new threats, particularly Avicennan philosophy and Ismā'ilism. Al-Ghazālī was aware both of the urgency to address these two schools of thought, and of the fact that the system he inherited from his Ash'arī predecessors was, to a great extent, outdated and burdened by the theories and extensive argumentative structures developed in its prior dialectic with Mu'tazilism. He overcomes this challenge by reorienting *kalām*, shifting its primary focus from system-building to the dialectical defence of the core doctrines of orthodoxy against the teachings of opposing belief systems.¹³ These core doctrines stem from the teachings of revelation, and they alone, to the exclusion of the theoretical underpinnings developed by earlier Ash'arīs (most obviously, their atomist physics), deserve to be defended. To al-Ghazālī, the *kalām* genre *par excellence* hence becomes the dedicated refutation (*radd*), represented by his best *kalām* work *Tahāfut al-falāsifa* (completed in 488/1095)¹⁴ and his anti-Ismā'ilī works, rather than the genre of the systematic manual or summa,

11 Al-Shahrestānī's objections and al-Sāwī's responses are transmitted in MS Istanbul, Revan Köşkü 2042, ff. 177^a–189^a.

12 This shift is discussed in more detail in Shihadeh, 'From al-Ghazālī to al-Rāzī', 142 ff.; and 'Al-Ghazālī and *Kalām*'.

13 Al-Ghazālī's demotion of *kalām* from a science to a dialectical art might be influenced by earlier philosophical views of the discipline. On Avicenna's position, see Gutas, 'Logic of Theology'.

14 See the editor's introduction to the *Tahāfut*, ix.

represented by his *Iqtiṣād*, a work in which he reluctantly makes frequent compromises, as he himself admits, to the convention of earlier *kalām* (*al-rasm*, or *al-kalām al-rasmī*, as he calls it).¹⁵

Al-Ghazālī's new style of critical, dialectical theology was continued by Ibn Ghaylān al-Balkhī, who came to be a career critic of Avicenna, as I showed elsewhere.¹⁶ Avicennan philosophy continued to proliferate in the early twelfth century, including—worryingly for some—outside the elite circles of specialist philosophers, among religious scholars who had no prior philosophical learning.¹⁷ Rising to the challenge, Ibn Ghaylān argues, under al-Ghazālī's influence, that traditional systematic *kalām* had become out of date and that the discipline must urgently revive itself by shifting its focus to the defence of the orthodox creed through the refuting of the greatest and most immediate threat it is facing at the time, namely, Avicennan philosophy. 'For nowadays', he writes, 'we have no opponents other than the philosophers, who have been a source of corruption in the world'.¹⁸ This stance is typified by Ibn Ghaylān's most substantial extant work, *Hudūth al-'ālam*, which defends the doctrine of the creation of the world in time against Avicenna's arguments and refutes his doctrine of the pre-eternity of the world.¹⁹

Traditional Avicennists in turn responded to the counter-Avicennan current, especially to the criticisms of Abū l-Barakāt. I am unaware of any responses in twelfth-century eastern Avicennism to al-Ghazālī, which probably indicates that the *Tahāfut* was brushed aside as a work of *kalām*, and as such deserving of little attention. The most concrete example of the traditional Avicennist rejoinder is Ibn Sahlān al-Sāwī's extant work titled *Nahj al-taqdīs*, which responds to Abū l-Barakāt's critique of Avicenna's views on the problem of God's knowledge of particulars.²⁰ A further example is a dedicated response to Abū l-Barakāt's *Mu'tabar* penned by the author of *Tatimmat Ṣiwān al-ḥikma*, Ṣahīr al-Dīn al-Bayhaqī (d. 565/1170), and titled *al-Mushtahar fī naqḍ al-Mu'tabar*.²¹ And in a short epistle, the 12th-century mathematician Ḥusām al-Dīn al-Sālār lambastes

15 See Shihadeh, 'Al-Ghazālī and *Kalām*'.

16 Shihadeh, 'Post-Ghazālīan Critic', 139–147.

17 Michot, 'Pandémie avicennienne'; Shihadeh, 'From al-Ghazālī to al-Rāzī', 148 ff. Also relevant is Gutas, 'Philosophy in the Twelfth Century', for the situation in Baghdad.

18 Ibn Ghaylān, *Hudūth al-'ālam*, 16; cf. Shihadeh, 'Post-Ghazālīan Critic', 143–145.

19 See also the curious criticism he wrote on the book of simple drugs in Avicenna's *Canon*, published and examined in my article, 'Post-Ghazālīan Critic'.

20 Al-Sāwī, *Nahj al-taqdīs*. On al-Sāwī's criticism of Abū l-Barakāt, see Shihadeh, 'Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī's Response', 7.

21 Yāqūt al-Ḥamawī, *Mu'jam al-udabā'*, 4, 1763.

Abū l-Barakāt for his criticism of an Avicennan proof, which happens to be the subject of Section 2 of al-Mas'ūdī's *Shukūk*.²² Towards the end of the century, the anonymous author of *al-Nukat wa-l-fawā'id*, a staunch Avicennist, attacks Abū l-Barakāt, Ibn Ghaylān al-Balkhī as well as the new critical reader of Avicenna, Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī.²³

One incident related by al-Bayhaqī in his biography of the aforementioned Kākūyid, 'Alā' al-Dawla Farāmarz ibn 'Alī, reveals the attitudes underlying the rivalry between traditional Avicennists and the counter-Avicennan current.²⁴ 'Alā' al-Dawla reportedly once asked 'Umar al-Khayyām for his opinion on the objections (*i'tirāḍāt*) raised by Abū l-Barakāt on Avicennan doctrines, and received the following answer: 'Abū l-Barakāt failed to understand the views of Abū 'Alī [Avicenna], and is not qualified even to comprehend his views. So what makes him qualified to object to him, and to raise problems (*shukūk*) concerning his views!' For this personal attack, al-Khayyām receives a stern reprimand from 'Alā' al-Dawla, who advises him to behave as a philosopher by confuting the views of a person using demonstrations, as opposed to resorting to abuse, as a 'foolish dialectician' would be inclined to do.

It is against this dialectical backdrop that al-Mas'ūdī reads, and engages with, Avicenna. As noted, he belongs to the counter-Avicennan current, but all the same he differs greatly from Ibn Ghaylān in both his objectives and approach. One major question that motivates our present study is where exactly al-Mas'ūdī's *Shukūk* ought to be situated in this milieu, and the extent to which it is inspired by each of al-Ghazālī's 'critical theology' and Abū l-Barakāt's 'critical philosophy'.

1.2 Al-Mas'ūdī's Biography

Little is known about al-Mas'ūdī's life. Some of the available data is unreliable or conjectural, and concrete dateable points in his life are few and far between. He receives little more than passing mentions in a handful of contemporaneous and later sources, and a very short entry in Saḍīd al-Dīn 'Awfī's *Lubāb al-albāb*, a work on the biographies of Persian poets dating to the early thirteenth century. He takes centre stage in only one extant contemporaneous source—namely, Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī's (544/1149–606/1210) autobiographical collection of the

22 Al-Sālār, *Untitled*. On the problem, see pp. 60–61.

23 Michot, '*Al-nukat wa-l-fawā'id*', *passim*.

24 Al-Bayhaqī, *Tatimma*, 117–118.

debates he engaged in during his travels in Transoxania, the *Munāẓarāt jarat fī bilād mā warā' al-nahr*, which truly brings al-Mas'ūdī to life, though in a rather unflattering light, as we shall see. Four of the sixteen debates recorded in al-Rāzī's work—debates 8, 9, 10 and 11—are with al-Mas'ūdī, and they provide valuable biographical information, particularly on his scholarly sources, interests and character (at least through al-Rāzī's eyes).

His name, to begin with, is Sharaf al-Dīn Muḥammad ibn Mas'ūd ibn Muḥammad al-Mas'ūdī al-Marwazī, and he is frequently given the title 'al-imām', or 'al-shaykh al-imām'.²⁵ The incipit of a manuscript of one of his works gives him the *nisba* al-Bukhārī, that of another gives him the *nisba* al-Samarqandī.²⁶ In one early manuscript, he is described as 'the most virtuous and perfect of the critical investigators (*muḥaqqiq*) of Transoxania and Khurasan', which probably highlights the links he had to both regions.²⁷ In my assessment, he was born in the first quarter of the twelfth century, most probably in the second decade of the century. Originating from Marw in Khurasan, Sharaf al-Dīn appears to descend from a well-established family of Shāfi'īs in the city, which claims descent from the famous companion of the Prophet, 'Abdallāh ibn Mas'ūd—hence the *nisba* al-Mas'ūdī and, as we shall see, the recurrence of the name Mas'ūd and to a lesser extent 'Abdallāh in the lineage.²⁸ 'Abd al-Karīm al-Sam'ānī (506/1113–562/1166)—himself a prominent Shāfi'ī based in Marw—provides details on four earlier family members, the earliest and most eminent being Abū 'Abdallāh Muḥammad ibn 'Abdallāh al-Mas'ūdī (d. soon after 420/1029), who was a student of the well-known Shāfi'ī Abū Bakr 'Abdallāh ibn Aḥmad al-Qaffāl (d. 417/1026) and wrote a commentary on al-Muzanī's juristic work, the *Mukhtaṣar*.²⁹ Another family member mentioned by al-Sam'ānī is likely to be the grandfather of our Sharaf al-Dīn—namely, Abū l-Faḍl Muḥammad ibn Sa'īd ibn Mas'ūd ibn 'Abdallāh ibn Mas'ūd ibn Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad ibn Mas'ūd al-Mas'ūdī (d. 528/1134), who was closely linked

25 For instance, Ibn Ghaylān, *Hudūth al-ʿālam*, 11; 111; 114; al-Rāzī, *Munāẓarāt*, 31; 32; 35; MS Istanbul, Bağdath Vehbi 834, f. 1^a (the title page of an early-7th/13th-century copy of *Sharḥ al-Khuṭba al-gharrā'*); Yāqūt al-Ḥamawī, *Muʿjam al-udabā'*, 2, 653. The *nisba* 'al-Marwazī' appears on the title page of MS Istanbul, Bağdath Vehbi 834, f. 1^a.

26 Respectively, al-Mas'ūdī, *Majma' al-aḥkām*, 29, and *Jahān-i dānish*, MS Istanbul, Beyazıt 4639, f. 1^b.

27 This appears on the title page of MS Istanbul, Ayasofya 2602 (f. 2^a), which contains a copy of al-Mas'ūdī's *Jahān-i dānish*, dated 654/1256.

28 On his Shāfi'ī affiliation, see also pp. 26–28 below.

29 Al-Sam'ānī, *Ansāb*, 11, 308. On Abū 'Abdallāh al-Mas'ūdī, see also al-Subkī, *Ṭabaqāt*, 4, 171–174. Abū Bakr 'Abdallāh ibn Aḥmad al-Qaffāl (on whom see al-Subkī, *Ṭabaqāt*, 5, 53–62) should not be confused with Abū Bakr al-Qaffāl al-Shāshī (d. 365/976), also a Marwazī.

to the Saljuq sultan Sanjar.³⁰ Abū l-Faḍl Muḥammad's son, Abū l-Faḥ Mas'ūd (483/1090–568/1173), who would be Sharaf al-Dīn's father, was a friend of al-Sam'ānī, studied jurisprudence with his father, and reportedly served for several years as the preacher at the old mosque of Marw.³¹ That Sharaf al-Dīn is likely to be the son of Abū l-Faḥ is suggested by his name, dates, Marwazī origin and, as we shall see, Shāfi'ī affiliation.

Al-Mas'ūdī in all likelihood started his studies in his native Marw, which, as noted, flourished as a major hub for philosophical, scientific and other scholarly activity in the first half of the twelfth century. His grandfather's links to Sanjar may have given the young Sharaf al-Dīn easier access to the intellectual elite of the city, most notably philosophers. We have no reliable information, however, on his teachers, or on whether he attended the Nizāmiyya college in Marw like his colleague Ibn Ghaylān al-Balkhī who enrolled at the college in 523/1129.³² In astronomy, I argue below that al-Mas'ūdī is likely to have studied with al-Qaṭṭān al-Marwazī (d. 548/1153), and that there is a slight possibility that he studied with Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad al-Kharaqī (d. 533/1138).³³ As to his philosophical study, we have only two pieces of evidence, both recorded approximately two centuries later by the biographer al-Ṣafadī (d. 764/1363).

The first is the following chain of transmission (*silsila*), which purports that al-Mas'ūdī read Avicenna's *Ishārāt* with the philosopher 'Umar al-Khayyām:

The shaykh and imām Shams al-Dīn Muḥammad ibn Ibrāhīm, known as Ibn al-Akfānī [d. 749/1348],³⁴ [...] related to me: I read the *Ishārāt* of the Master Abū 'Alī ibn Sīnā with the shaykh Shams al-Dīn al-Shirwānī al-Ṣūfī [d. 699/1300]³⁵ at the Sa'īd al-Su'adā' *khānqāh* in Cairo towards the end of the year [6]98[1299] and the beginning of [69]9[1299]. He told me: I read it, alongside its commentary, with its commentator Khwāja Naṣīr al-Dīn Muḥammad al-Ṭūsī [d. 672/1274]. He said: I read it with the imām

30 Al-Sam'ānī, *Ansāb*, 11, 308; idem., *Muntakhab*, 3, 1457–1458. Muḥammad ibn Sa'īd is the grandson of the brother of the aforementioned Abū 'Abdallāh Muḥammad ibn 'Abdallāh.

31 Al-Sam'ānī, *Ansāb*, 11, 309; *Muntakhab*, 3, 1725–1727; *Taḥbīr*, 2, 303–304. The 'old mosque' (*al-jāmi' al-aqdam*) of Marw, as al-Sam'ānī calls it, was the main mosque of the Shāfi'īs, which is confirmed by the fact that al-Sam'ānī's uncle preached there (*Taḥbīr*, 1, 403).

32 Ibn Ghaylān, *Hudūth al-'ālam*, 10. More on Ibn Ghaylān below.

33 See p. 23 below.

34 On whom, see 'Ibn al-Akfānī', *El2*. Al-Ṣafadī himself read part of the *Ishārāt* with him (*Wāfi*, 2, 25).

35 The shaykh of al-Khānqāh al-Shihābiyya in Damascus, who was versed, according to al-Ṣafadī, in astrology, philosophy and 'other rational sciences' (*Wāfi*, 2, 142).

Athīr al-Dīn al-Mufaḍḍal al-Abharī [d. 663/1264]. He said: I read it with the shaykh Quṭb al-Dīn Ibrāhīm al-Miṣrī [d. 618/1222]. He said: I read it with the great imām Fakhr al-Dīn Muḥammad al-Rāzī. He said: I read it with the shaykh Sharaf al-Dīn Muḥammad al-Mas'ūdī. He said: I read it with the shaykh Abū l-Faḥḥ 'Umar,³⁶ known as Ibn al-Khayyām. He said: I read it with Bahmanyār, the student of the Master. He said: I read it with its author, the Master Abū 'Alī ibn Sīnā [d. 428/1037].³⁷

To say that one person 'read' a text with another does not necessarily imply that the contents of the text were studied closely and extensively with the latter, even if the text is philosophical in nature. The process in fact often involves little more than the 'recipient' reading the text, and perhaps discussing a small number of points with the 'transmitter', and by virtue of this formal transmission the recipient becomes qualified himself to transmit the text in the same manner. A text as short as Avicenna's *Ishārāt* can be read and transmitted in its entirety in one day. However, even on the assumption that al-Mas'ūdī and al-Khayyām were only very briefly in contact, the plausibility of such a meeting between the two hinges on whether or not they could have overlapped both geographically and chronologically. The chances of them overlapping, in my assessment, are extremely slim. For although later in his life al-Khayyām was based in Marw, he returned at some unknown date to his native Nishapur, where he remained until his death in the year 517/1123–1124.³⁸ To allow al-Mas'ūdī to meet al-Khayyām at an age at which he would have been able to read a rather difficult philosophical text, we would have to push his date of birth back to 500/1106 at the latest. Such an early dating, however, is untenable, considering both that all dateable points in al-Mas'ūdī's life are concentrated in the second half of the twelfth century and that he does not appear to be in his eighties in al-Rāzī's portrayal of him around 582/1186.³⁹ Further doubts on the authenticity of the above chain of transmission emerge when we consider whether Athīr al-Dīn al-Abharī ever met al-Rāzī's student Quṭb al-Dīn al-Miṣrī. So, on the overall weight of evidence, it appears that al-Mas'ūdī could not have met, and studied with, al-Khayyām, and accordingly that the above chain was

36 The edition reads Muḥammad rather than 'Umar, which is likely to be a scribal or editorial error, especially that the volume was edited on the basis of a single manuscript (the editor's introduction, *alif-bā'*). The two names may be confused in some styles of handwriting, with the *mūn-hā'-mūn* resembling the shape of a 'ayn.

37 Al-Ṣafadī, *Wāfi*, 2, 142–143.

38 On al-Khayyām's death date, see Griffel, 'Weitere philosophische Autoren'.

39 Al-Rāzī, *Munāẓarāt*, Sections 8, 9, 10 and 11.

constructed later, partly on the basis of speculation on who studied the *Ishārāt* with whom.

Elsewhere, in his biographical entry on the grammarian Ibn al-Bāqillānī al-Nahwī al-Ḥillī (568/1173–637/1239), al-Ṣafadī writes that this figure 'studied philosophy with al-Mas'ūdī, the disciple (*ghulam*) of 'Umar ibn Sahlān al-Sāwī, author of the *Baṣā'ir*'.⁴⁰ However, this study reportedly took place in Baghdad, to which Ibn al-Bāqillānī moved in his childhood from his native Ḥilla. Al-Ṣafadī reports that Ibn al-Bāqillānī stayed for a while in Shushtar, in Khūzistān, to teach grammar to Abū l-Ḥasan 'Alī (d. 612/1216), the son of the Abbasid caliph al-Nāṣir li-Dīn Allāh. But there is no evidence that he travelled east of Khūzistān at any point, or that Sharaf al-Dīn al-Mas'ūdī travelled west of Khurasan, so the two are unlikely to have met. That said, it is perfectly plausible that al-Mas'ūdī did indeed study with Ibn Sahlān al-Sāwī, considering that in the second quarter of the twelfth century the two were based in Khurasan and that in one work al-Mas'ūdī uses laudatory titles in references to al-Sāwī.⁴¹ Having himself received the *Ishārāt* through the foregoing chain of transmission, al-Ṣafadī most probably had some knowledge of the identity of al-Mas'ūdī, and this may have found its way into his entry on Ibn al-Bāqillānī.

By the year 549/1155, al-Mas'ūdī was based in Transoxania, most probably in Samarqand, to the north-east of Marw. His presence there is evidenced, first of all, in his astronomical work *al-Kifāya fī 'ilm al-hay'a*, which he was in the process of writing in this year.⁴² In the discussion of the method for determining the *qibla*, he gives an illustrative example by applying the method to this city.⁴³ Further evidence situating him in Transoxania around the mid twelfth century appears in his philosophical work *Sharḥ al-Khuṭba al-gharrā'*, in the course of his discussion of the concepts 'priority' (*taqaddum*) and 'posteriority' (*ta'akhkḥur*). To illustrate how these terms can be used to refer to the relative spatial position of objects, he gives, as an example, 'the precedence of Karmīniyya to Ṭawāwīs for the traveller from Samarqand to Bukhara', or vice versa for those travelling in the opposite direction.⁴⁴ Karmīniyya and Ṭawāwīs, respectively, are a town and a village on the Samarqand-Bukhara road, the former being 18 *farsakhs* (approximately 107 km) away from Bukhara, and the latter 8 *farsakhs* (approximately 48 km) away.⁴⁵ Al-Mas'ūdī's primary target

40 Al-Ṣafadī, *Wāfi*, 12, 273. On this figure, see also Yāqūt al-Ḥamawī, *Mu'jam al-udabā'*, 3, 1027.

41 See the description of *Risālat al-Mukhtalifāt* on p. 25 below.

42 The date of the *Kifāya* is discussed on p. 22 below.

43 *Kifāya*, ff. 147^a; 147^b; cf. *Jahān-i dānish*, 147.

44 Al-Mas'ūdī, *Sharḥ al-Khuṭba*, f. 18^b; cf. Avicenna, *Ilāhiyyāt*, IV.1, 163 ff.

45 For instance, al-Sam'ānī, *Ansāb*, 8, 259–260; 10, 405–408; Yāqūt al-Ḥamawī, *Mu'jam al-buldān*, 3, 555–556; 4, 368.

readership clearly has local knowledge of Transoxania, and must be located in either Samarqand or Bukhara.

The circumstances that led him to move to Transoxania are unknown. At any rate, his native Marw ceased to be a convenient place for scholars after the Oghuz invasion in the year 548/1153. Following the collapse of the Saljuqs in the city and elsewhere in Khurasan, the Qarākhānids in Transoxania offered scholars patronage and security, as already noted. In an earlier study, I showed that Ibn Ghaylān al-Balkhī—in some ways, as we shall see below, one of the most important colleagues of al-Mas‘ūdī—appears to have enjoyed the patronage of the Qarākhānids in Samarqand around the same period, and is likely to have held some sort of official position.⁴⁶ Al-Mas‘ūdī too appears to have received Qarākhānid patronage shortly after the middle of the twelfth century, as indicated by two pieces of evidence.

The first is found in al-Mas‘ūdī’s book on astrology *Majma‘ al-aḥkām*, dated 557/1162, which he dedicates to a certain ‘*sultān* Abū l-Muẓaffar Mas‘ūd ibn Qilich Qarākhān’.⁴⁷ This dedicatee is none other than Abū l-Muẓaffar Qilich Ṭamghāch Khān Mas‘ūd ibn al-Ḥasan (r. 556/1161–566/1170–1171), a Qarākhānid who ruled over Samarqand and Bukhara and used the title ‘sultan’.⁴⁸ This same figure is praised by al-Mas‘ūdī’s student of philosophy and Ḥanafī jurist, Raḍī al-Dīn al-Nisābūrī (d. 598/1201–1202).⁴⁹ It appears, therefore, that al-Mas‘ūdī made a bid for the Qarākhān’s patronage as soon as he acceded, though whether at the time the author was residing in Samarqand or Bukhara is unclear.

A second patron is mentioned in what appears to be some sort of note in a manuscript copy of his philosophical work *Sharḥ al-Khuṭba al-gharrā*, which, as we shall see, was written between 549/1154–1155 and 575/1180.⁵⁰ In a brief entry on this text, Āghā Buzurg al-Ṭīhrānī (d. 1970) correctly identifies it as a commentary on a work by Avicenna, but misidentifies the author as ‘the historian al-Mas‘ūdī, author of *Murūj al-dhahab*’, who actually died in 345/956,

46 Shihadeh, ‘Post-Ghazālian Critic’, 139–140.

47 Al-Mas‘ūdī, *Majma‘ al-aḥkām*, 101. For the date, see the description of the book on p. 24 below. In the published edition, the dedication appears as ‘*sultān* Abū l-Muẓaffar Mas‘ūd ibn Faṭḥ Qarākhān’. ‘Faṭḥ’, however, must be a misreading of ‘Qilich’.

48 His name appears in various forms in the sources. A very near match is attested in al-Ẓahīrī al-Samarqandī’s *Sindbād-nāma* (p. 8), which is dedicated to Abū l-Muẓaffar Qilich Ṭamghāch Khān ibn Qilich Qarākhān. On him, see, for instance: Ateş’s introduction to al-Ẓahīrī’s *Sindbād-nāma*, 65–70; Biran, *Empire of the Qara Khitai*, 53–54; 55; 183; Davidovich, ‘Karakhanids’, 132–133; Barthold, *Turkestan*, 336 (who refers to him, incorrectly, as Mas‘ūd ibn ‘Alī).

49 Al-Nisābūrī, *Dīwān*, 21–22; cf. Sulaymānī, *Nishāpūrī-yi dar Samarqand*, 48–49.

50 For the date of this text, see p. 21 below.

well before Avicenna.⁵¹ Stating that he came across a manuscript copy of the work, dated 707/1307–1308, at the Gharawiyya Library in Najaf, he provides a brief incipit, which matches the copies available to me. He notes that the book is dedicated to 'al-sayyid Tāj al-Dīn Maḥmūd ibn 'Abd al-Karīm', though without indicating whether this remark is based on a note in the copy itself. I have not found this detail in other manuscript copies or sources; however, given that al-Ṭīhrānī misidentifies the author, and hence does not appear familiar with the text from other sources, we can safely infer that the manuscript copy he consulted is indeed the source of this dedication. So who is this Tāj al-Dīn? One candidate is the well-known theologian Tāj al-Dīn Muḥammad (rather than Maḥmūd) ibn 'Abd al-Karīm al-Shahrastānī, who later in his life was based in Marw and closely connected to Sanjar, and accordingly may have met al-Mas'ūdī. However, he can be ruled out immediately on the grounds that al-Mas'ūdī's book, as already noted, post-dates 549/1154–1155, and *ipso facto* al-Shahrastānī's death in 548/1153, not to mention that his name is an imperfect match.⁵² The most probable candidate, rather, has to be Tāj al-Dīn Maḥmūd ibn Muḥammad ibn 'Abd al-Karīm (d. ?), a Samarqand-based vizier or official who served the Qarākhānids in the second half of the 6th/12th century. This Tāj al-Dīn is the dedicatee of the version of the Persian romance *Bakhtiyār-nāma* written by Shams al-Dīn Muḥammad Daqāyiqī, who at the time was a preacher at a mosque in Bukhara.⁵³ The same Tāj al-Dīn is also praised by Rashīd al-Dīn Waṭwāt (d. 578/1182).⁵⁴ It appears, therefore, that in the third quarter of the twelfth century, most probably soon after the middle of the century, al-Mas'ūdī approached Tāj al-Dīn in Samarqand seeking, and probably receiving, his patronage.

It is possible that al-Mas'ūdī secured patronage partly as a professional astrologer and astronomer. That he was a practicing, and not only a theoretical, astrologer is suggested by al-Rāzī's report that he once visited him and found him with a group of scholars engaged in a 'studious and painstaking discussion' of the natural disasters that were predicted to occur at the great planetary con-

51 Al-Ṭīhrānī, *Dharī'a*, 13, 223.

52 At some point before his death, al-Shahrastānī returned to his native Shahrastān, a small town in northern Khurasan.

53 The dedicatee's name even appears in the title, *Lum'at al-sirāj li-ḥaḍrat al-Tāj*. In some manuscript copies, the work is titled *Rāḥat al-arwāḥ fi surūr al-mifrāḥ*. The text confirms that Tāj al-Dīn was based in Samarqand (*Lum'at al-sirāj*, 39–40; on the text and author, see 'Daqāyeqi Marvazi' and 'Bakhtiyār-nāma', *Elr*; 'Daqāyiqī Marvazi', *El3*).

54 See Rawshan's introduction to *Bakhtiyār-nāma*, 15–16.

junction of 29 Jumādā II 582/14 September 1186.⁵⁵ Al-Mas'ūdī, on that occasion, offered a passionate defence of astrology.

When he next appears, al-Mas'ūdī is settled in Bukhara. He had certainly moved there well before 575/1180, as that year is the *terminus ante quem* for the response that al-Rāzī wrote to the *Shukūk*. Titled *Jawābāt al-masā'il al-bukhārīyya* (*Response to the [Philosophical] Problems from Bukhara*), al-Rāzī's work characterises al-Mas'ūdī's text as originating from that city.⁵⁶ Al-Rāzī tells us in his *Munāẓarāt* that the two met frequently in Bukhara, the only dated meeting taking place in 582/1186.⁵⁷

Sadīd al-Dīn 'Awfī (late twelfth–early thirteenth century), a Transoxanian contemporary of al-Mas'ūdī, describes him as one of the most prominent scholars in the city.⁵⁸ Al-Mas'ūdī is also the only contemporary figure mentioned by his Samarqand-based colleague Ibn Ghaylān al-Balkhī in his *Hudūth al-'ālam*, where he refers to him twice with the title 'the most venerable (*al-ajall*) shaykh and imām', and considers him comparable to al-Ghazālī with respect to his sharpness of mind and learning.⁵⁹ Likewise, the impression we are given in al-Rāzī's *Munāẓarāt* is that al-Mas'ūdī was the most outstanding specialist in philosophy in Bukhara, and probably in the whole of Transoxania, and was surrounded by a circle of scholars. According to al-Rāzī, al-Mas'ūdī's students of philosophy included the aforementioned well-known Ḥanafī jurist Raḍī al-Dīn al-Nisābūrī.⁶⁰

Later on in his life, al-Mas'ūdī either returns to his native Marw, then under the rule of the Khwārazm-shāhs, or at least visits the city, which is not far from Bukhara. The only piece of evidence that suggests this—and indeed the only glimpse we have into al-Mas'ūdī's life past 582/1186—is transmitted by Yāqūt al-Ḥamawī (d. 626/1229) in his entry on the genealogist 'Azīz al-Dīn Ismā'īl ibn al-Ḥusayn al-Azwarqānī al-Marwazī (572/1176–after 618/1221), whom he met in Marw in 614/1217.⁶¹ Yāqūt recorded 'Azīz al-Dīn's exact date of birth, and the names of scholars with whom the latter studied literature and jurisprudence,

55 Al-Rāzī, *Munāẓarāt*, 32–38. On this astronomical event, see Weltecke, 'Die Konjunktion der Planeten im September 1186'; de Callataÿ, 'La Grande Conjonction de 1186'.

56 On the dating of the *Jawābāt*, see Shihadeh, 'Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī's Response', 2.

57 Al-Rāzī, *Munāẓarāt*, 32.

58 'Awfī, *Lubāb al-albāb*, 363.

59 Ibn Ghaylān, *Hudūth al-'ālam*, 11; 111.

60 Al-Rāzī, *Munāẓarāt*, 34. On al-Nisābūrī, see, for instance, Ibn Khallikān, *Wafayāt al-a'yān*, 5, 345. One of al-Nisābūrī's students, Rukn al-Dīn al-Qazwīnī, was a Shāfi'ī, unlike his teacher (al-Rāzī, *Munāẓarāt*, 24).

61 Yāqūt al-Ḥamawī, *Mu'jam al-udabā'*, 2, 652–655.

and others from whom he narrated *ḥadīth*.⁶² The latter are divided in Yāqūt's account into the following groups: first a group of five, whose location is not specified, then a group of four whom 'Azīz al-Dīn met in Nishapur, then one narrator whom he met in Rayy, then two whom he met in Baghdad, 'as well as others in Shiraz, Herat, Shushtar and Yazd'. The first group includes 'al-Imām Sharaf al-Dīn Muḥammad ibn Mas'ūd al-Mas'ūdī, who must be our Mas'ūdī, given that the name and title are a perfect match. Although the location of this group is not stated, it is clear from the context that they are all based in 'Azīz al-Dīn's native Marw, where Yāqūt met him, and that this piece of information was omitted because it was so obvious. (There is, furthermore, no evidence that 'Azīz al-Dīn ventured anywhere near Bukhara.) And indeed, of the five names given, the three figures that I have been able to identify, other than al-Mas'ūdī, all resided in Marw—namely, Muḥammad ibn 'Umar al-Ṣā'ighī al-Sanjī (d. 598/1201), 'Abd al-Raḥīm ibn 'Abd al-Karīm al-Sam'ānī (d. 618/1221), the son of the aforementioned Sam'ānī, and Ismā'īl ibn Muḥammad al-Fāshānī (d. 599/1203), the preacher at the main mosque of Marw.⁶³ The remaining figure, a certain 'Abd al-Rashīd ibn Muḥammad al-Zarqī, originates from a village near Marw known as Zarq, and hence is almost certain to be another Marw-based scholar.⁶⁴ So, although it is unclear whether al-Mas'ūdī had returned permanently to Marw or was only visiting when he met 'Azīz al-Dīn, his presence there provides further confirmation of his links to the city.

Al-Mas'ūdī's death date is unknown, but must be earlier than 605/1208, the completion date of a manuscript in which his name is appended with the formulaic prayer, 'may God's mercy be upon him' (*rahmat Allāh 'alay-hi*).⁶⁵ In one place in his *Munāẓarāt*, al-Rāzī, who died in 606/1210, likewise appends al-Mas'ūdī's name with the formula, 'may God have mercy upon him' (*rahima-hu llāh*), and in another place he describes his reputation as a scholar in the past tense, both of which points confirm that he died before al-Rāzī's book was written.⁶⁶ The book is undated, but is unlikely to be one that al-Rāzī wrote at a very late stage in his life. It seems safe, therefore, to propose the year 600/1204 as the *terminus ante quem* for al-Mas'ūdī's death.

62 Yāqūt al-Ḥamawī, *Mu'jam al-udabā'*, 2, 652–653.

63 On al-Sanjī, see, for instance, al-Dhahabī, *Mushtabah*, 353. On al-Fāshānī (rather than al-Qāshānī, as in the published editions of Yāqūt's *Mu'jam al-udabā'*), see al-'Asqalānī, *Tabṣīr al-muntabih*, 3, 1148. Sanj and Fāshān are two villages in the vicinity of Marw (al-Sam'ānī, *Ansāb*, 7, 165; 9, 225).

64 On the *nisba* al-Zarqī, see al-Sam'ānī, *Ansāb*, 6, 267–268.

65 See the description of MS B on p. 172 below.

66 Al-Rāzī, *Munāẓarāt*, 39; 31 ('he was a *shaykh* famous for philosophy and skilfulness').

1.3 Al-Mas'ūdī's Oeuvre

Al-Mas'ūdī's main areas of interest are philosophy, astronomy, astrology, mathematics, logic and jurisprudence, and he has several extant works covering all of these subjects. In what follows, I provide brief details on the known texts, arranged according to subject.

I General Philosophy

Al-Mas'ūdī is known to have written two general philosophical works, both in Arabic, and both extant.

1. *Al-Mabāḥith wa-l-shukūk 'alā kitāb al-Ishārāt wa-l-tanbīhāt* (*Investigations and Objections on 'The Pointers and Reminders'*), an aporetic commentary on selected passages in Avicenna's *Ishārāt*. The book is discussed in detail in the next chapter, and its extant manuscripts in Chapter 7, which introduces the critical edition. The *Shukūk* is undated, but must have been written before 575/1180, which is the *terminus ante quem* for al-Rāzī's response to this work, the *Jawābāt al-mas'āl al-bukhārīyya*.⁶⁷ And as the title of al-Rāzī's response confirms that al-Mas'ūdī wrote the *Shukūk* while in Transoxania, the text probably post-dates 549/1154–1155. In short, the *Shukūk* most likely dates to the third quarter of the 6th/12th century. The text contains a reference to Abū l-Barakāt al-Baghdādī (d. before 560/1164–1165) as 'the most excellent person of our time, whom God favoured with a superior [skill for] research and inquiry, the author of the *Mu'tabar*, may God reward his deeds and recompense him well'.⁶⁸ This may be read—considering the absence of eulogies similar to those given at the first mention of al-Ghazālī, 'may he be blissful' (*al-sa'īd*) and 'may his soul be sanctified' (*quddisa rūḥu-hu*)—as implying that the *Shukūk* was written in Abū l-Barakāt's lifetime; but this is hardly conclusive evidence.

2. *Sharḥ al-Khuṭba al-gharrā'* (*Commentary on 'The Exalted Homily'*). A medium-sized commentary on a very short text by Avicenna on philosophical theology and cosmogony.⁶⁹ Unlike the *Shukūk*, this is a full, sentence-by-sentence exegetical commentary on the main text, in which Avicenna's text

67 Shihadeh, 'Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī's Response', 2–3.

68 *Shukūk*, 215.

69 For an edition of Avicenna's *al-Khuṭba al-gharrā'*, which is also known by the titles *Khuṭbat al-tamjīd*, *al-Khuṭba al-tawḥīdiyya* and *al-Khuṭba al-ilāhiyya*, see Akhtar, 'A Tract of Avicenna'. On this text and its manuscript copies, see Gutas, *Avicenna and the Aristotelian Tradition*, 509.

is introduced by 'the Shaykh says', followed by 'interpretation' (*al-sharḥ*). Like the *Shukūk*, this composition is undated, but can be dated with confidence to the third quarter of the 6th/12th century. For in the *Sharḥ*, al-Mas'ūdī cites his astronomical work *al-Kifāya fī 'ilm al-hay'a*, which, as we shall see, he was in the process of writing in 549/1154–1155.⁷⁰ And the *Sharḥ* itself is referred to—simply as al-Mas'ūdī's 'homily' (*khuṭabu-hu*)—in al-Rāzī's *Jawābāt*, completed before 575/1180.⁷¹ There is no evidence, however, to establish the relative dating of the *Sharḥ* and the *Shukūk*. As previously mentioned, the *Sharḥ* appears to be dedicated to Tāj al-Dīn Maḥmūd ibn Muḥammad ibn 'Abd al-Karīm, a vizier or official of the Qarākhānids in Samarqand.⁷² The work is transmitted in several manuscript copies.⁷³

In the preface to the *Sharḥ*, al-Mas'ūdī writes that despite its terseness, Avicenna's *Khuṭba* is rich in philosophical profundities and hence deserves a devoted commentary.⁷⁴ Asking God to guide him to the truth, he seeks 'refuge in Him from the sway of the faculty of anger (*al-quwwa al-ghaḍabiyya*), and from appealing to prejudice and partisanship (*al-mayl wa-l-'aṣabiyya*).'⁷⁵ He adds the following curious disclaimer:

We should now proceed with our commentary on the *Khuṭba*. However, it should be known from the outset that the present commentary is written in keeping with the methods, principles, core foundations, and demonstrations of philosophy (*innamā huwa 'alā manāḥij al-ḥikma wa-qawānīni-hā wa-qawā'id madhāhibi-hā wa-barāḥīni-hā*). Yet not all that my tongue utters and that is set forth in my exposition concurs with what I believe in my heart. We seek refuge in God from harbouring any beliefs contrary to religion (*sharī'a*), and from following anything other than its straight path.⁷⁶

70 Al-Mas'ūdī, *Sharḥ al-Khuṭba*, f. 53^b.

71 Al-Rāzī, *Jawābāt*, 48; cf. Shihadeh, 'Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī's Response', 7.

72 See pp. 16–17 above.

73 I have been able to verify the following copies: MS Istanbul, Bağdatlı Vehbi 834 (the copy cited in the present study); MS Istanbul, H. Hüsnü Paşa 1243, ff. 1^a–58^a; MS Istanbul, Ayasofya 4855, ff. 211^a–289^a; MS Cairo, al-Azhar, *khuṣūṣī* 275, 'umūmī 817; MS Cairo, al-Azhar, *khuṣūṣī* 112, 'umūmī 34260 (which seems to descend from the previous copy); MS Najaf, Gharawīyya, unknown number.

74 Al-Mas'ūdī, *Sharḥ al-Khuṭba*, ff. 1^b–2^a.

75 Al-Mas'ūdī, *Sharḥ al-Khuṭba*, f. 2^a. We return to these themes in the next section.

76 Al-Mas'ūdī, *Sharḥ al-Khuṭba*, ff. 2^a–^b.

So, unlike the *Shukūk*, the commentary on the *Khuṭba* is entirely expository and never critical. We shall return to the points raised in the preface to the commentary in Section 1.4 below, where some of the text's contents are examined.

II The Sciences

Al-Mas'ūdī also wrote on the sciences, particularly astronomy, astrology, meteorology and mathematics. The mathematician Kamāl al-Dīn al-Fārisī (d. ca. 720/1320) credits 'Sharaf al-Dīn al-Mas'ūdī' with making significant advances in algebra, but he may be confusing him with the mathematician Sharaf al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī (late 11th–early 12th c.), as al-Mas'ūdī's only surviving work on the subject shows no evidence of these advances.⁷⁷

3. *Al-Kifāya fī 'ilm al-hay'a (The Compendium of Cosmography)*.⁷⁸ Written in Arabic, the *Kifāya* consists of two parts, one on astronomy, and the other on geography.⁷⁹ Al-Mas'ūdī states in the course of one astronomical discussion that he was in the process of writing the book in 549/1150, the earliest dateable point in his life.⁸⁰ It is most likely that he completed the text in the same year. Soon afterwards, he produced a Persian translation titled *Jahān-i dānish*, which is undated.⁸¹ The following is the substantive part of the author's preface to the *Kifāya*—not transmitted in *Jahān-i dānish*—where he provides information on the organisation and sources of his book. Referring to a friend of his, al-Mas'ūdī writes:

77 See p. 24 below. Al-Fārisī is quoted by Ghiyāth al-Dīn al-Kāshī (d. 833/1429) (*Miftāh al-ḥisāb*, 198–199; cf. Rashed, *Sharaf al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī*, xxxii–xxxiii [French introduction] and xxvii [Arabic introduction], where al-Fārisī's still-unpublished *Usus al-qawā'id* is cited). On al-Ṭūsī, see, for instance, the introduction of the latter source. On the confusion between him and al-Mas'ūdī, see Āl Dāwūd, '*Jahān-i dānish*'.

78 This is the title given in the preface and in *Jahān-i dānish* (p. 1). In *Sharḥ al-Khuṭba al-gharrā'* (f. 53^b), he refers to it as *al-Kifāya fī hay'at al-'ālam*.

79 I am aware of two extant copies of this book: MS Istanbul, Hafid Efendi 154, ff. 107^b–149^a, and MS Medina, 'Arif Hikmat 9 *Falak* (Kaḥḥāla, *Muntakhab*, 895).

80 Al-Mas'ūdī, *Kifāya*, f. 114^b: '... in the year in which this manual is being written, which is the year 549 of the Hijra, or 523 in the Persian calendar', i.e. in the Yazdigird era (on which, see 'Ta'rikh', EI3).

81 The date given in the *Kifāya* is simply translated in *Jahān-i dānish* (44–45). The latter is mentioned in *Anāshir wa kā'ināt al-jaww*, which was completed in 550/1155–1156. So it is possible that al-Mas'ūdī produced the Persian translation of the *Kifāya* immediately after completing the Arabic original. *Jahān-i dānish* survives in numerous manuscript copies, and clearly had much wider circulation than the Arabic original.

Since this friend's traversing the paths of investigation has led him to the study of cosmography, he sought my advice to select one of the manuals written on the subject. I suggested the book of Abū 'Alī ibn al-Haytham, and [al-Kharaqī's two books] *Muntahā al-idrāk fī taqāsīm al-aflāk* and *Kitāb al-Tabṣira*. His own view, however, was that I should compose for him, by collating the manuals just mentioned, a compendium (*mukhtaṣar*) of approximately the same length and exactly the same organisation as the *Tabṣira*. He implored me to do so, but I declined and tried to be excused [from the task], as I knew that the *Tabṣira* was unsurpassable in its excellence and perfection and that whoever desired to match it had desired an impossible thing. My friend, however, pressed on with his pleas, and urged me to agree, and I eventually had no choice but to yield to his request. So I composed the present compendium by excerpting the aforementioned books in accordance with his wish and instruction, and I added to it in some places things that I had retained in my memory from reading books on the subject other than the three mentioned, such as [al-Qaṭṭān al-Marwazī's] *Kayhān*⁸² *shinākht*, the works of Abū l-Rayḥān [al-Bīrūnī] and Kūshyār [ibn Labbān al-Jīlī], and others. I have titled it *The Compendium of Cosmography*; for it provides all that students of this subject need [to learn].⁸³

Two of the sources mentioned in this passage—namely, al-Kharaqī and al-Qaṭṭān al-Marwazī—were older Marw-based contemporaries of al-Mas'ūdī.⁸⁴ Given the reverence he holds for both astronomers, it is conceivable that he studied the subject with al-Kharaqī, and hard to imagine him missing the opportunity to study with al-Qaṭṭān. The latter was captured and killed by the Oghuz when they invaded Marw in 548/1153, just months, it seems, before al-Mas'ūdī completed the *Kifāya* in the safety of Samarqand.

4. *Risāla dar ma'rifat-i 'anāšir wa kā'ināt al-jaww* (*Epistle on Delineating the Elements and Phenomena of the Sky*). Appearing in several manuscripts under the title *Āthār-i 'ulwī* (*Meteorology*), this is a short work in Persian, dated 550/1155–1156.⁸⁵ Al-Mas'ūdī refers to his astronomical work *Jahān-i dānish*

82 Or, alternatively, *Gayhān*.

83 Al-Mas'ūdī, *Kifāya*, f. 107^b.

84 On these two figures, see 'Al-Kharaqī', *El2*; 'Qaṭṭān al-Marwazī', *The Biographical Encyclopedia of Astronomers*. Al-Qaṭṭān was a student of al-Lawkarī.

85 Al-Mas'ūdī, *'Anāšir wa kā'ināt al-jaww* (ed. Shafī'), 69 (which reads *khamṣa* rather than *khamṣin*, an error that also appears in other manuscript copies); (ed. Dānishpazhūh), 110.

twice.⁸⁶ The name of the patron to whom the book is dedicated is omitted in the extant manuscript copies (at least the ones used for the published editions), and replaced with 'so-and-so' (*fulān*).⁸⁷

5. *Majma' al-aḥkām* (Compendium on [Astrological] Interrogations). Dated 557/1162 and written in Persian, this book is dedicated to the *sultān* Abū l-Muẓaffar Mas'ūd ibn Qilich Qarākhān, discussed earlier.⁸⁸

6. *Maqāla fī ḥisāb al-jabr wa-l-muqābala* (Treatise on Algebra). A medium-sized manual on algebra is attributed to Sharaf al-Dīn Muḥammad ibn Mas'ūd ibn Muḥammad al-Mas'ūdī by Ṭāshköprüzāde (d. 968/1561).⁸⁹ A manuscript copy, in 75 folios, of this work appears to be located in Tashkent, but is currently inaccessible to me.⁹⁰ According to Roshdi Rashed, who had the opportunity to examine this manuscript, the book is overall an elementary algebraic work devoted mainly to second-degree equations, and contains no biographical information on its author. The incipit states that it consists of a compilation (*intikhāb*) of 'ancient and later' sources.⁹¹

7. *Manāfi' al-abdān* (The Preservation of Bodily Health). A short work, in Persian, on medicine.⁹²

III Logic

Al-Mas'ūdī is known to have written the following two logical texts, both on modally 'mixed syllogisms'. Only the first is extant. Ibn Ghaylān wrote a re-

86 Al-Mas'ūdī, *Anāṣir wa kā'ināt al-jaww* (ed. Shafī'), 40; 57; (ed. Dānīshpazhūh), 69; 92.

87 Al-Mas'ūdī, *Anāṣir wa kā'ināt al-jaww* (ed. Shafī'), 36; (ed. Dānīshpazhūh), 63.

88 Al-Mas'ūdī, *Majma' al-aḥkām*, 101. The date given is 531 in the Persian Yazdigird era.

89 Ṭāshköprüzāde, *Miftāḥ al-sa'āda*, 1, 327; and, following him, Kātib Çelebi, *Kashf al-ẓunūn*, 1, 857; and Şiddiq Ḥasan Khān, *Abjad al-'ulūm*, 2, 207.

90 MS Tashkent, Al-Biruni Institute of Oriental Studies 10364. See Farfūr and al-Ḥāfiẓ, *Al-Muntaqā min makḥṭūṭāt ma'had al-Bayrūnī*, 134 (where the title is given as *Maqāla fī l-ḥisāb wa-l-jabr wa-l-muqābala wa-l-handasa*).

91 I am very grateful to Professor Rashed for confirming the authenticity of this copy, and for generously providing me with the incipit and other helpful details. He plans to publish a note on this text. The incipit goes as follows:

هذه مقالة في حساب الجبر والمقابلة انتخبها لبعض أصدقائي من تصانيف القدماء والمتأخرين، وأوردت فيها من أصول هذه الصناعة ما يقرب إلى الأفهام دون الغوامض البعيدة عن الطبع فيما يتعلق بالمكعبات وأموال الأموال وغيرها، إذ قل ما يحتاج إليها في استخراج المسائل الفقهية والحسابية.

92 MS Istanbul, Fazıl Ahmed Paşa 1624, ff. 30^b–31^b; Şeşen, *Fihris*, 2, 383.

sponse to both texts, which survives in a unique, titleless manuscript copy dated 570/1174.⁹³ The two texts, therefore, were completed prior to this date.

8. *Risālat al-Mukhtaliṭāt (Treatise on Mixed Syllogisms)*.⁹⁴ A general manual on mixed syllogisms, complete with tables, meant to serve as an introduction to the study of philosophy.⁹⁵ In this work, al-Mas'ūdī cites the *Ishārāt* and *Shifā'* of Avicenna, the *Baṣā'ir* of Ibn Sahlān al-Sāwī, to whom he refers as a 'critical investigator' (*muḥaqqiq*) and 'al-Qāḍī al-Imām',⁹⁶ and the *Taḥṣīl* of Bahmanyār.⁹⁷

9. *Al-Ajwiba 'alā l-Tawḥī'a li-l-takḥī'a (Responses to 'The Prolegomenon to the Refutation')*. Ibn Ghaylān refers to a work—now lost—by the title *al-Ajwiba*, in which al-Mas'ūdī responds to an unidentified work by Ibn Ghaylān.⁹⁸ The latter text is simply referred to as 'my initial treatise' (*risālatī al-ūlā*), which indicates that it was the text that instigated the series of responses.⁹⁹ Judging by the discussion, Ibn Ghaylān's initial text appears to be, again, on mixed syllogisms. So I strongly suspect it is the book titled *al-Tawḥī'a li-l-takḥī'a (Prolegomenon to the Refutation)*, a counter-Avicennan book to which Ibn Ghaylān refers in two of his other works, and which he describes as being 'devoted to revealing the mixed syllogistic forms that [Avicenna] omitted to consider in logic'.¹⁰⁰ Whence the fuller title I have given here to al-Mas'ūdī's work.

93 MS Tehran, Kitābkhāna-yi Majlis-i Shūrā 599, ff. 1^a–35^b. The copy is incomplete at the beginning, but was identified by Dānishpazhūh (introduction to al-Sāwī's *Baṣā'ir*, 61–62). I am grateful to Frank Griffel for providing me with a copy of this manuscript.

94 An apparently unique copy, in approximately 19 folios, survives in a composite manuscript belonging to the personal library of Aṣghar Mahdawī (Tehran). For details of the facsimile edition, see the Bibliography. Neither the title nor the author's name are given in the manuscript, dated 596–597/1200 (the title *al-Qiyāsāt al-ḥamlīyya* is in a later hand), but the author was identified as al-Mas'ūdī by Dānishpazhūh, though he conflates him with Muḥammad ibn Mas'ūd al-Ghaznawī (introduction to al-Sāwī's *Baṣā'ir*, 61–62). The title, *Risālat al-Mukhtaliṭāt*, is given by Ibn Ghaylān (*Response*, e.g. ff. 25^a; 25^b; 26^b; 27^a; 29^a).

95 Al-Mas'ūdī, *Mukhtaliṭāt*, 308.

96 Al-Mas'ūdī, *Mukhtaliṭāt*, 312; 313; 317; 323; 330; 331.

97 Al-Mas'ūdī, *Mukhtaliṭāt*, 314.

98 Ibn Ghaylān, *Response*, ff. 9^a; 25^a; 26^a; 26^b; 27^a; 29^a.

99 Ibn Ghaylān, *Response*, ff. 15^b; 23^a. Ibn Ghaylān is likely to have identified his 'initial treatise' in the introduction to his response, which, as noted, is missing in the only known copy.

100 Ibn Ghaylān, *Tanbīh*, 160; cf. *Ḥudūth*, 11; Shihadeh, 'Post-Ghazālian Critic', 141.

Therefore, the sequence of texts is this. Ibn Ghaylān wrote the *Tawṭī'a* in response to Avicenna's views on mixed syllogisms. Al-Mas'ūdī then wrote a response, *Ajwiba*, to the *Tawṭī'a*, in which he criticised some of Ibn Ghaylān's views as unsound (*takḥī'a*).¹⁰¹ At some stage, al-Mas'ūdī also wrote an independent work on mixed syllogisms, titled *Risālat al-Mukhtaliṭāt*. Finally, Ibn Ghaylān wrote a response in which he addressed al-Mas'ūdī's views in both the *Ajwiba* and the *Mukhtaliṭāt*. That al-Mas'ūdī wrote a response to the *Tawṭī'a* should not be taken as evidence that he was defending Avicenna against Ibn Ghaylān—al-Ghazālī, after all, had already pronounced logic as a largely sound discipline, which posed no threat to the teachings of revelation, but to the contrary could be put to their service.

IV Jurisprudence

The prevalent contemporary view that al-Mas'ūdī followed the Ḥanafī school of law is based on two indicants: the first, an entry in Kātib Ḥalebī's *Kashf al-ẓunūn*, which attributes a juristic book titled *al-Hādī fi l-furū'* to a certain 'Sharaf al-Dīn al-Mas'ūdī ... al-Ḥanafī, who died in the year ...' (the two instances of the ellipsis mark appear in the Istanbul edition and seem to signify lacunae in the autograph manuscript).¹⁰² However, as I have not come across any other reference to either this book or to a 'Sharaf al-Dīn al-Mas'ūdī al-Ḥanafī', and given the absence of a fuller name and the lacunae in the manuscript copy of Kātib Ḥalebī's work, we have good reason to exercise caution.¹⁰³ The second indicant is that al-Mas'ūdī had Raḍī al-Dīn al-Nisābūrī, who happens to be a Ḥanafī, as a student. However, as I mentioned earlier, Raḍī al-Dīn only studied philosophy with him, and indeed his Ḥanafī affiliation did not pose an obstacle to him having a Shāfi'ī studying jurisprudence with him, namely Rukn al-Dīn al-Qazwīnī.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰¹ Ibn Ghaylān, *Response*, ff. 23^a; 26^a.

¹⁰² Kātib Ḥalebī, *Kashf al-ẓunūn* (Istanbul ed.), 2, 2026. Fluegel's edition (6, 470) has, 'by Sharaf al-Dīn al-Mas'ūdī al-Ḥanafī', omitting the two ellipsis marks and 'who died in the year'.

¹⁰³ For extant juristic works authored by a Muḥammad ibn Mas'ūd or a Mas'ūdī, or whose titles start with '*al-Hādī*', see *al-Fihris al-shāmil*, 12, 576; 12, 600; 11, 363–365. A work titled *al-Hādī fi l-furū'* was written by Mas'ūd ibn Muḥammad ibn Mas'ūd al-Nisābūrī (d. 578/1182–1183), who nonetheless was a Shāfi'ī (listed by Kātib Ḥalebī immediately following the entry in question; cf. al-Baghdādī, *Hadīyyat al-'arīfīn*, 2, 429; and *al-Fihris al-shāmil*, 11, 363, for extant manuscript copies).

¹⁰⁴ See n. 60 above.

As I argued earlier, Sharaf al-Dīn seems to belong to a well-established family of Shāfi'īs based in Marw,¹⁰⁵ and I have not found a single Mas'ūdī from the city, at least in the 5th/11th and 6th/12th centuries, who happens to be a Ḥanafī.¹⁰⁶ In the eleventh discussion in al-Rāzī's *Munāẓarāt*, we are told that al-Mas'ūdī held al-Ghazālī's juristic works *Shifā' al-ghalīl* and the *Mustasfā* in high esteem. Al-Rāzī, himself a Shāfi'ī, lambastes both texts on scholarly grounds.¹⁰⁷ Al-Ghazālī's former book, which treats aspects of juristic analogy, frequently criticises Abū Ḥanifa and is intended in part as a response to the views of the influential Ḥanafī Abū Zayd al-Dabūsī (d. 430/1039).¹⁰⁸ Had al-Mas'ūdī been a member of the Ḥanafī school, he would have been inclined either to attack it, or at least to refrain from praising it so passionately in front of a Shāfi'ī. Therefore, the discussion reported in the *Munāẓarāt* must be one between two Shāfi'īs.

Yet the most concrete evidence of al-Mas'ūdī's expertise in jurisprudence and Shāfi'ī affiliation is the following work, which survives in a unique manuscript copy. It, furthermore, confirms his interest in al-Ghazālī's juristic writings, already suggested in al-Rāzī's report.

10. *Al-Muntakhab al-aṣghar mina l-wasīṭ* (Abridgement of the Collected Excerpts from 'The Middle Book'). In the preface, the author explains that he had previously written a work comprising excerpts from al-Ghazālī's important book of substantive law *al-Wasīṭ fi l-madhhab*.¹⁰⁹ Titled *al-Muntakhab li-l-fatāwā 'an kitāb al-wasīṭ*, the longer work appears to be lost. This abridged, or 'shorter' (*aṣghar*), version is extant in a unique manuscript copy housed at Dār al-Kutub in Cairo, which I have been able to consult.¹¹⁰ The title page (f. 1^a)

105 See pp. 12–13 above.

106 See, for instance, the entry on the *nisba* 'al-Mas'ūdī' in al-Sam'ānī, *Ansāb*, II, 306–310.

107 Al-Rāzī, *Munāẓarāt*, 43–47.

108 Al-Ghazālī, *Shifā' al-ghalīl*, 9. On account of his aggressive criticism of Abū Ḥanifa in an earlier juristic work, the *Mankhūl*, al-Ghazālī faced fierce opposition from contemporary Ḥanafīs, some even demanding his execution (see, for instance, Griffel, *Al-Ghazālī's Philosophical Theology*, 55; 73–74). The *Shifā'* is a sequel to the *Mankhūl*.

109 He writes (f. 1^b):

فلما تيسر الفراغ بعون الله وحسن توفيقه عن تحرير المنتخب للفتاوى عن كتاب الوسيط للإمام حجة الإسلام
قدس الله روحه سألني بعض المحصلين أن أختار له من مسائله ما لا بد من معرفتها وحفظها لمن يتصدى بجواب
الفتاوى ... وجمعت هذا المختصر الموسوم بالمنتخب الأصغر حاوياً لأقل ما يحتاج إليه المفتي، واقصرت فيه على
مجرد الأحكام دون العلل والتوجيهات والفروق.

110 MS Cairo, Dār al-Kutub, *Fiqh Shāfi'ī* 251 (previously, MS Cairo, Khidīwiyya Library 1765); cf.

gives the author's name as 'al-Imām Sharaf al-Dīn Muḥammad ibn Mas'ūd ibn Muḥammad al-Mas'ūdī'.

1.4 Theological Commitments

Before turning to al-Mas'ūdī's critique of Avicennan philosophy in the *Shukūk*, we should firstly try to gain an initial understanding of his own commitments and motives, specifically whether he engaged in philosophy as a philosopher (much like Abū l-Barakāt), or, to an extent, as a theologian (more like al-Ghazālī in the *Tahāfut*, but without the strident polemic). For sure, there is no evidence that he belonged to any of the established schools of theology, and neither of his two works on philosophy exhibits any of the usual hallmarks of *kalām*; but that would be to understand *kalām* as it is conceived and practised within classical Ash'arism. What we need to query is whether al-Mas'ūdī may have taken his impetus from *kalām* as conceived and practised by al-Ghazālī,¹¹¹ which would explain his remarkable openness towards natural philosophy and his comparatively critical stance in his treatment of philosophical metaphysics. Answering this query—at least, at this stage, by forming a hypothesis—will allow us to frame and interpret his critique of Avicennan philosophy in the *Shukūk*; and this makes it imperative that we pursue the task at hand without reference to this critique.

That al-Mas'ūdī subscribed to positions that we would describe as theological is readily evident in the manner in which he distances himself, in the preface to *Sharḥ al-Khuṭba*, from views expressed in the book that do not accord with the teachings of revelation (though he does not specify any of the contents or teachings in question).¹¹² That he had at least some involvement in *kalām* is evident in his antagonism towards the Ismā'īlīs, a prime target for al-Ghazālī's combative and tactical *kalām* project. In Section 10 of his *Munāẓarāt*, al-Rāzī reports that in one meeting al-Mas'ūdī defended a refutation (*naqd*) of the teachings of al-Ḥasan al-Ṣabbāḥ (d. 518/1124), which al-Ghazālī deploys in an unidentified work. Unimpressed with al-Ghazālī's arguments, al-Rāzī discusses one argument with his interlocutor and concludes by giving the following verdict on both al-Ghazālī and al-Mas'ūdī:

al-Mayhī and al-Biblāwī, *Fihrist*, 3, 278; and *al-Fihris al-shāmil*, 10, 424. The copy consists of 124 folios, and is undated.

111 As explained in Section 1.1 above.

112 See pp. 21–22 above.

How very strange you are! You accuse people of sympathy to the enemies of religion. However, what you do not realise is that refuting the specious views of the godless [Ismā'īlīs] (*mulḥidūn*) using wretched and unconvincing arguments only serves in fact to reinforce their views!¹¹³

So al-Mas'ūdī here is characterised as a theologian motivated by the defence of certain religious tenets and the refutation of Ismā'ilism. However, although this shows that he engages in theological activity against a particular system of belief, it does not immediately follow that he assumes the same stance towards other schools of thought. Opposition to Ismā'ilism does not imply opposition to philosophy; and in fact the characteristic Ismā'īlī principle discussed in the section is the charismatic authority of the infallible imām, which was deemed antithetical to both philosophical and theological rationalism.

I *Al-Mas'ūdī as portrayed by his contemporaries, Ibn Ghaylān and al-Rāzī*

Although al-Mas'ūdī's two known general philosophical works are extant, closer inspection of these works and of contemporaneous sources reveals that the man himself is extremely difficult to pin down. Being commentaries, both texts give away scarce and fleeting glimpses of the commentator's own independent views. We do not seem to be alone, however, in finding ourselves a little puzzled, for there is evidence that even to his contemporaries al-Mas'ūdī appeared as a somewhat ambiguous thinker.

To his colleague Ibn Ghaylān al-Balkhī, who quotes the *Shukūk* in his *Ḥudūth al-'ālam*, al-Mas'ūdī was a *kalām* theologian who, like him, was committed to refuting Avicennan philosophy.¹¹⁴ In the course of contextualising his own struggle against Avicenna's teachings, Ibn Ghaylān complains that many of his contemporaries had come under their influence and started to incorporate them into their writings.¹¹⁵ There are, however, important exceptions that buck the trend, as he goes on to explain:

Not everyone who has read the books of the philosophers, understood their discussions, and pursued¹¹⁶ their opinions should be suspected of having accepted them as true and abandoned the beliefs upon which

¹¹³ Al-Rāzī, *Munāzarāt*, 42.

¹¹⁴ Ibn Ghaylān, *Ḥudūth al-'ālam*, 111; 114.

¹¹⁵ Ibn Ghaylān, *Ḥudūth al-'ālam*, 7–14.

¹¹⁶ Reading *tafahhama* ... *wa-tatabba'a*, rather than *yafhamu* ... *wa-yattabi'u*, as in the edition.

he was raised. Such a suspicion (*ẓann*) would be a great blunder and a heinous error: it implies that [the philosophers'] views are so sound and evident that whoever comprehends them will accept them, so it effectively bolsters the philosophers and reinforces their false opinions. The truth is that one who is able to understand their discussions with ease, and studies them perceptively, who is highly talented by nature and capable of distinguishing truth from falsehood in what he reads, who is swift to pick out the errors committed and unapparent fallacies therein, and who moreover is thoroughly learned in the discipline of logic, well-grounded in the discipline of *kalām*, and predisposed to engage in rational subjects—such as the Proof of Islam Muḥammad al-Ghazālī, the venerable Shaykh and Imām Sharaf al-Dīn Muḥammad al-Mas'ūdī, and other *kalām* experts who studied logic and [philosophical] metaphysics only for the purpose just mentioned [that is, refutation]—he should not be subject to this misplaced suspicion.¹¹⁷

Two salient points can be drawn out from this passage. To begin with, it reveals that al-Mas'ūdī was 'suspected' by some of his contemporaries of being an Avicennist, that is, one of those religious scholars described by Ibn Ghaylān as having bought into Avicennan teachings in metaphysics and natural philosophy and abandoned the teachings of Sunni theology. Second, Ibn Ghaylān counters this suspicion by characterising al-Mas'ūdī as a *kalām* theologian—not any type of *kalām* theologian, but one who can aptly be classed with al-Ghazālī. According to this characterisation, al-Mas'ūdī would be a *mutakallim* of the Ghazālīan type, one who has little time for systematic theology and whose efforts are devoted to the defence of the central creeds of orthodoxy by refuting competing systems of belief, which pose a real and imminent threat in the theologian's time and place (as opposed, for instance, to obsolete heresies).

In contrast to Ibn Ghaylān, al-Rāzī characterises al-Mas'ūdī primarily as a philosopher (*faylasūf*), introducing him in the *Munāẓarāt* as 'a *shaykh* famous for philosophy and skilfulness', and telling him at one point that he is 'one of the philosophers (*ḥukamā'*)'.¹¹⁸ In the vein of this characterisation, he identifies Abū l-Barakāt's philosophical work the *Mu'tabar*, in the preface to the *Jawābāt*, as the main source of the *Shukūk*—an association which suggests that al-Mas'ūdī pursued a comparable philosophical project.¹¹⁹ In some cases, how-

117 Ibn Ghaylān, *Hudūth al-'ālam*, 11.

118 Al-Rāzī, *Munāẓarāt*, 31; 37.

119 Al-Rāzī, *Jawābāt*, 11.

ever, al-Rāzī expresses this characterisation with some irony, as he observes at several points that al-Mas'ūdī's views and arguments are more befitting of a *kalām* theologian or a literalist reader (*ẓāhirī*) of Avicenna, than of a philosopher or a critical investigator.¹²⁰ Al-Rāzī indeed seems to regard his contemporary's intellectual pedigree as somewhat ambiguous—a point highlighted most notably through the attention given in the *Munāẓarāt* to the influence that al-Ghazālī had on him. This characterisation becomes apparent when his portrayal of al-Mas'ūdī in the *Munāẓarāt*, especially in Sections 9 and 10, is studied closely.¹²¹ One salient theme that emerges in this portrayal is that al-Mas'ūdī has a highly emotional, above all irascible, character. (Whether or not this is an accurate characterisation is besides the point here.) Al-Rāzī describes his anger (*ghaḍab*), sometimes giving vivid details, no less than eight times in the book: we are told that he becomes 'extremely angry' in discussions, he loses the capacity to think clearly and to speak coherently, his colour changes, his body shakes in anger, he tends to descend to quarrel (*shaghab*) and imbecility (*safāha*), and so forth.¹²² On the other hand, in one discussion he is described as being predisposed to excitement: we are told that he became ecstatic (*fī ghāyat al-farah wa-l-surūr*) after purchasing books that he held in high regard, and then after reading a passage from a work by al-Ghazālī.¹²³ This characterisation may initially seem to be a frivolous attempt on al-Rāzī's behalf to present his interlocutor in the worst possible light, but its significance increases once we consider another salient theme in the *Munāẓarāt*. Al-Mas'ūdī himself gives us a vital clue in the preface to his commentary on the *Khuṭba*, where he links the faculty of anger (*al-quwwa al-ghaḍabiyya*) to prejudice and partisanship (*al-mayl wa-l-'aṣabiyya*).¹²⁴ A similar association is implicit in al-Rāzī's portrayal of

120 Al-Rāzī, *Munāẓarāt*, 37; *Jawābāt*, 23; 29; 46; cf. Shihadeh, 'Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī's Response', 3.

121 Section 11 too centres on al-Mas'ūdī's close following of al-Ghazālī (*Munāẓarāt*, 43–47), but addresses the latter's jurisprudential works. Moreover, al-Mas'ūdī in that section remains mostly silent, while al-Rāzī effectively delivers a lecture.

122 Al-Rāzī, *Munāẓarāt*, 31; 32 (twice, in Sections 8 and 9); 34; 35; 36; 41; 42. In a ninth place, we are told that al-Mas'ūdī 'turned red and yellow' (*Munāẓarāt*, 47), probably, in this case, out of a sense of defeat, rather than anger!

123 Al-Rāzī, *Munāẓarāt*, 39; 41.

124 See p. 21 above. Taneli Kukkonen has kindly informed me that he is preparing a study to be titled 'Al-Ghazālī on Anger and Spirit', in which he explores the link that al-Ghazālī makes, particularly in *Ihyā' ulūm al-dīn*, between partisanship and an overdeveloped spirited part of the soul. It seems that the link that al-Mas'ūdī makes between anger and partisanship is yet further evidence of the deep influence that al-Ghazālī had on him.

al-Mas'ūdī: the way he is described in the *Munāẓarāt*, he is quick to anger at his interlocutor's criticism of authority due to his entrenched emotive attachment to certain individuals, texts, doctrines and arguments. Al-Rāzī's clearest reference, in this text, to the aggressive partisan bias that can motivate theological and philosophical enquiry occurs in his assessment of the heresiographical work *al-Farq bayn al-fīraq* by the earlier Ash'arī 'Abd al-Qāhir al-Baghdādī (d. 429/1037), on whom he writes: 'This *Ustādh* was extremely biased (*shadīd al-ta'aṣṣub*) against opponents'.¹²⁵ (Al-Baghdādī is mentioned as a source for al-Shahrastānī's *al-Milal wa-l-niḥal*, which al-Mas'ūdī held in high esteem.)

So, in the course of one discussion, and reacting to al-Mas'ūdī's anger, al-Rāzī remonstrates with his interlocutor, explicitly linking dispassion to sound and critical investigation:

If this discussion is going to be conducted on the basis of quarrel and anger, then we had better end it! But if our purpose is to investigate and to reflect (*al-baḥṭh wa-l-naẓar*), then this can only be achieved through level-headedness and composure (*al-thabāt wa-l-sukūn*).¹²⁶

Al-Rāzī implies that partisan bias—a motive that, he suggests, underlies some of al-Mas'ūdī's thinking—impacts rational investigation in two major ways. The first is that it tends to affect the manner in which one reports and interprets the views of others: due to his bias, we are told, 'Abd al-Qāhir al-Baghdādī does not report the views of non-Ash'arīs accurately, al-Ghazālī misreports a certain view of al-Ḥasan al-Ṣabbāḥ, and in one discussion al-Mas'ūdī likewise reportedly misrepresents a view of al-Rāzī.¹²⁷ In the *Jawābāt* too, al-Mas'ūdī is taken to task for basing his critiques of Avicenna in the *Shukūk* on an uncharitable reading of the *Ishārāt*, one that conveniently makes the task of objecting to the target text all the easier.¹²⁸ The second impact, which often follows on from the first, is that the desire to champion certain views or sources and to refute others tends to result in uncritical, and hence frequently specious reasoning, a point that comes to the fore in al-Rāzī's complaints against two arguments of al-Ghazālī defended by al-Mas'ūdī. The arguments themselves are of little rele-

¹²⁵ Al-Rāzī, *Munāẓarāt*, 39.

¹²⁶ Al-Rāzī, *Munāẓarāt*, 35.

¹²⁷ Respectively: al-Rāzī, *Munāẓarāt*, 39; 42; 34. In the last case, al-Rāzī protests in frustration that al-Mas'ūdī fails to grasp the rational (*aqlī*) argument that his interlocutor put forth, but instead imagines (*takhayyala*) it to be a different, much weaker argument.

¹²⁸ Shihadeh, 'Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī's Response', 5.

vance to our present purposes, but the bottom line is this. In the first argument, directed against the philosophers, al-Ghazālī refutes a certain philosophical doctrine and concludes his discussion without attempting to identify or to consider evidence that can be adduced in support of the doctrine in question. Al-Rāzī submits that once the relevant evidence is taken into account, al-Ghazālī's treatment is immediately exposed as 'frivolous' (*laysa bi-shay'*) and 'extremely weak' (*ḍa'if jiddan*).¹²⁹ In the second argument, al-Ghazālī misreports a certain position advocated by al-Ṣabbāḥ, and goes on to attack a straw man.¹³⁰

To recap, al-Rāzī describes al-Mas'ūdī as a philosopher but also ascribes to him certain traits characteristic of *kalām*, in particular partisan bias and motivation, while Ibn Ghaylān characterises him as a Ghazālī-style *mutakallim* and defends him against the accusation that he was a philosopher. To his contemporaries, therefore, al-Mas'ūdī appears to be a rather ambiguous thinker, both in terms of the objectives of his engagement in philosophy, and accordingly of which 'side' he was on. The perception that he had a foot in both camps appears to be reflected in the two earliest manuscript copies of the *Shukūk*, where al-Mas'ūdī is given the honorific title, 'the one followed by the two parties' (*muqtadā l-farīqayn*), probably a reference to (traditional Avicennan) philosophers and (counter-Avicennan) theologians.¹³¹

II *Al-Mas'ūdī through His Commentary on Avicenna's al-Khuṭba al-Gharra'*

So we must turn to al-Mas'ūdī's own philosophical works, and try to tease out hints of any commitments concerning questions that were subject to contention either between Avicennists and theologians, or among theologians. For the most part in the present section, we shall fix on a selection of discussions

129 Al-Rāzī, *Munāẓarāt*, 34–38; cf. al-Ghazālī, *Tahāfut*, 41 ff.

130 Al-Rāzī, *Munāẓarāt*, 40–42. The view that partisan bias is inconsistent with critical investigation was, of course, widespread. On the emphasis that Avicenna lays on this, see Gutas, *Avicenna and the Aristotelian Tradition*, 213–220.

131 See the description of MSS A and B on pp. 170–171 below. Traditional Avicennan philosophers and their critics are referred to as 'two parties' (*farīqayn*) by al-Rāzī (*Mabāḥith*, 1, 4; see pp. 3–4 above). I am grateful to Frank Griffel for bringing to my attention that the same title, '*quḍvat al-farīqayn*', appears to be given to al-Ghazālī in one or more manuscript copies of his *al-Maḍnūn al-ṣaghīr* (p. 89), also known as *Nafkh al-rūḥ wa-l-taswīya*. The phrase is transmitted only in early editions of the text published in Cairo. Another reading of the title in al-Mas'ūdī's case is that the 'two parties' are Shāfi'īs and Ḥanafīs; however, a reference to schools of law seems out of place in the incipit of a philosophical work.

in the commentary on Avicenna's *al-Khuṭba al-gharrā'*, and shall refer to the *Shukūk* sparingly, and only on the rare occasions where a theological point is stated explicitly.

Before we begin to interpret *Sharḥ al-Khuṭba*, we must first revisit the two provisos expressed in the preface. The first is that the commentator eschews 'prejudice and partisanship', which effectively indicates that he interprets Avicenna's text neutrally and entirely on Avicenna's terms, and thus refrains from raising objections to his views or arguments. His commentary, as he states, 'is written in keeping with the methods, principles, core foundations, and demonstrations of [Avicennan] philosophy'. The second proviso, following on from the first, is that some contents of the commentary do not correspond to the commentator's views, since his objective is only to expound Avicennan philosophy. In most cases, therefore, it is impossible, on the basis of the text alone, to identify views that al-Mas'ūdī does accept from those that he does not. We can look for clues in subtle nuances in the text. For instance, in some discussions, he reports the philosophers' views and introduces them by, 'they say' (*qālū, yaqūlūna, dhakarū*), which suggests that the commentator intends to distance himself somewhat from the views in question. And in a small number of discussions, he seems to defend certain Avicennan views as concurring with the teachings of revelation, along lines that we do not encounter in Avicennan texts, which suggests genuine eagerness to champion these views. Neither, however, is a reliable criterion for ascertaining the author's own commitments; for at least one discussion is interspersed with the expression 'they say', but all the same, concludes with the type of defence just described.

With this constraint in mind, we may now turn to our selection of discussions. The problems are predominantly of philosophical theology, and in what follows are arranged thematically.

1. God's attributes and simplicity. In the *Sharḥ*, al-Mas'ūdī expounds a thoroughly Avicennan theory of God's nature emphasising his absolute oneness and simplicity. We are told that God 'has no essence over and above His existence'; for if an entity possesses an essence, existence would be accidental to its essence and hence caused, and it is impossible for God's existence to be caused.¹³² The commentator also explains that since God is absolutely one, and thus cannot have a multiplicity of aspects (*jiha, ḥaythiyya*) to His nature, it is

132 Al-Mas'ūdī, *Sharḥ al-Khuṭba*, ff. 15^{a-b}. On Avicenna's conception of God's uniqueness and simplicity, see Adamson, 'From the Necessary Existent to God', 177 ff.

impossible for any attribute, generated or pre-eternal, to be superadded to His being and to subsist in Him.¹³³

This conception of divine simplicity underpins al-Mas'ūdī's commentary on the divine names invoked by Avicenna at the beginning of his homily. The commentator explains that a word can refer to a thing in one of six ways: either (1) the word signifies fully the essence of the thing (e.g. 'human' when said of Zayd); (2) the word signifies the essence, not wholly but in part (e.g. 'animal' when said of Zayd); (3) the word signifies, not the essence of the thing, but an accident inhering in it (e.g. 'white' when said of Zayd); (4) the word signifies an accident, which inheres in the thing, but has a connection to a different thing (e.g. 'knower' when said of Zayd, as it requires an object of knowledge); (5) the word signifies a relative attribute (*ṣifa idāfiyya*) of the thing (e.g. 'generous' when said of Zayd, on account of acts related to him); or (6) the word signifies a negation, or privation, characteristic of the thing (e.g. 'needy' when said of Zayd, on account of his lack of wealth).¹³⁴ The commentary then submits that the names of God can only be of the first, fifth or sixth types, since none of these presupposes multiplicity in His nature, whereas the second, third and fourth types do. In other words, divine names either refer to the reality of God in its fullness—that is, His necessary existence—or denote relations between God and other things, of which He is their ultimate cause, or denote negative attributes.¹³⁵ Al-Mas'ūdī writes:

In a nutshell (*'alā l-jumla*), research and investigation reveal that all of the names and attributes of God, exalted, refer either [1] to His essence¹³⁶ (*dhāt*) (such as 'God', 'Living', 'Self-subsisting' [*al-Qayyūm*], 'All-Knowing', 'All-Hearing', 'All-Seeing', and the like), though some of these are likely combined of the first and sixth types, or [2] to acts related to His essence (such as 'Producer', 'Creator', 'Sustainer', 'Merciful', 'Compassionate', and the like), or [3] to things negated with respect to His essence (such as 'One', 'Self-Sufficient', and the like).¹³⁷

133 Al-Mas'ūdī, *Sharḥ al-Khuṭba*, ff. 14^b–15^a; cf. f. 38^b.

134 Al-Mas'ūdī, *Sharḥ al-Khuṭba*, ff. 2^b–3^b; cf. Avicenna, *Mantiq*, I.I.5, 28 ff. Al-Mas'ūdī goes on to explain how four divine names mentioned at the beginning of Avicenna's text can be interpreted along these lines (ff. 3^b–5^a).

135 On Avicenna's account of 'positive' and 'negative' divine attributes, see *Ilāhiyyāt*, VIII.4–5, 343–354; cf. Adamson, 'From the Necessary Existent to God'.

136 Which, of course, is none other than His existence.

137 Al-Mas'ūdī, *Sharḥ al-Khuṭba*, ff. 4^b–5^a.

A detailed exposition (*tafṣīl*) of these names, he adds, goes beyond the book's scope and should be sought in more extensive works on 'the higher science' (*al-ʿilm al-aʿlā*), by which he means metaphysics, more specifically philosophical theology.

In the *Shukūk*, however, al-Masʿūdī appears to champion a different conception of God's nature, as he raises a doubt concerning the notion that 'the Necessary of Existence is one in all respects and contains no multiplicity whatsoever'. He contends that even though the existence of an uncaused cause, which is necessary of existence, can be established,

... what is beyond that—namely, His reality being necessary existence,¹³⁸ or His reality being necessary existence that is unconnected to an essence, or in which no attribute can possibly subsist—none of this follows from that [i.e. from proving the Necessary of Existence]. *There is in fact no evidence for this at all.* Moreover, it is not impossible that the essence (*dhāt*) of the First be necessary, and that His attributes too—including knowledge, power, will and all other [attributes] that He can possibly have—be necessary and not dependent on a cause, such that they have always been existent with the essence without being caused, just as the essence itself is uncaused. The existence of existents would accordingly proceed from Him through the pre-eternal will subsisting in the essence.¹³⁹

This is al-Masʿūdī's final word on the question of divine simplicity and attributes in the *Shukūk*, and it accords unmistakably with the Ashʿarī theory that certain attributes are distinct from, and subsist in, God's essence. Classical Ashʿarīs recognise seven such attributes—namely, life, knowledge, will, power, sight, hearing and speaking—and consider them to be pre-eternal and uncaused. They contend that though divine will is pre-eternal, it can produce things in time without itself undergoing change.¹⁴⁰ Al-Masʿūdī proposes this conception of God's attributes as one that, in his view, Avicenna fails to exclude, but he does not attempt to defend it any further. Nonetheless, it may betray an underlying commitment of his.

138 The text reads rather awkwardly here: '*kawni-hi ḥaqīqat wujūb al-wujūd*' literally means 'His being the reality of necessary existence'.

139 *Shukūk*, 275–276.

140 See, for instance, al-Ghazālī, *Iqtisād*, 102 ff.

2. Cosmogony. Commenting on Avicenna's statement, 'He acts only by way of atemporal creation (*lā yaf'alu illā ibdā'an*)', al-Mas'ūdī remarks that 'this is based on one of the principal doctrines (*aṣl kabīr*) of the philosophers'.¹⁴¹ An act (*fi'l*) is produced by its agent, he explains along Avicennan lines, either voluntarily or through a process of involuntary overflowing (*fayadān*); and the latter can be either a natural occurrence, if the agent lacks knowledge of its effect, or an act of munificence (*jūd*), if the agent knows its effect. God's acts proceed from Him by way of munificence, and not voluntarily, since voluntary action must be motivated by some need, or imperfection, which the agent seeks to fulfil, whereas God is self-sufficient and perfect. And since His action is involuntary, but proceeds from, and by virtue of, His being, it cannot have a beginning in time, as that would entail that God undergoes change, which is impossible on account of His absolute simplicity.¹⁴² Al-Mas'ūdī goes on to summarise Avicenna's refutation of the doctrine of temporal creation, introducing it as follows:

They also substantiate this view [that is, atemporal creation] in a different way, which is [this]: they lay down their doctrine that God, exalted, never produces an act out of a voluntary end, and they grant, for the sake of argument (*musāmaḥatan*), rather than as a genuine conviction, that it is possible for Him, exalted, to act by way of choice and [voluntary] intention. [From this,] however, they then argue: If we postulate that He, exalted, existed while His act (that is, the world) did not exist, it will be impossible for it to exist subsequently ...¹⁴³

He then summarises the ensuing *reductio ad absurdum*, by which Avicenna refutes the doctrines that God acts voluntarily and hence that the world came to be in time.¹⁴⁴ It is noteworthy in the passage just quoted and elsewhere in this discussion that the Avicennan views and dialectical tactics are reported second-hand, and not explicitly endorsed.

Notwithstanding, and aware of the controversy surrounding the theory of the pre-eternity of the world, al-Mas'ūdī goes on to make the following case in defence:

¹⁴¹ Al-Mas'ūdī, *Sharḥ al-Khuṭba*, f. 25^b.

¹⁴² Al-Mas'ūdī, *Sharḥ al-Khuṭba*, ff. 25^b–27^a; cf. Avicenna, *Ilāhiyyāt*, IX.1, 379–381.

¹⁴³ Al-Mas'ūdī, *Sharḥ al-Khuṭba*, f. 27^b.

¹⁴⁴ Al-Mas'ūdī, *Sharḥ al-Khuṭba*, ff. 27^b–29^a.

Let it not occur to you that this amounts to asserting that the world is pre-eternal and denying that it is generated. Not at all! For that would be contrary to religion and [true] belief—God forbid (*ḥāshā*) that philosophy come into conflict with the true [teachings of] revelation! However, the agreement (*muwāfaqa*) between revealed discourses (*al-khiṭābāt al-sharʿiyya*) and philosophical investigations can only be recognised by one who is assisted by God, exalted, and who has strived his utmost to acquire them, until he attained the optimum in both. Quite often [you find] a perfect scholar of religion, who nonetheless has no learning in philosophy, or an expert in philosophy, but whose soul nonetheless has not been elevated (*tasharrafa*) by religious learning! Neither would recognise the agreement between the two in detail (*maʿrifa juzʿiyya*), though they may recognise it in general terms.¹⁴⁵

This passage is one of the hardest to interpret in the commentary on the *Khuṭba*, as al-Masʿūdī here departs from the standard ‘script’ of offering a neutral account of Avicennan philosophy, and goes to the trouble of defending the philosopher’s doctrine of atemporal creation. However, it is impossible to tell whether this heartfelt defence attests that al-Masʿūdī genuinely champions this doctrine, or is simply an aspect of the commentator’s aim of presenting Avicennan philosophy in a positive light. As we shall see in the next chapter, the doctrine of the pre-eternity of the world is one that al-Masʿūdī appears to oppose in the *Shukūk*.

The discussion following the passage just cited explains that Avicenna’s cosmogony should not be read as amounting to an affirmation of the pre-eternity of the world. The pair of expressions ‘*muḥdath*’ and ‘*qadīm*’, he writes, can have three senses. The first is ‘new’ and ‘old’, which are clearly irrelevant. The second is ‘temporally generated’ (*muḥdath zamānī*), i.e. a thing whose existence is preceded by time, and ‘infinite in the past’ (*qadīm zamānī*), i.e. a thing whose existence is not preceded by time. In this sense, one can state that time and certain parts of the world, in particular the celestial spheres, are pre-eternal, but not that the world as such is pre-eternal, since many parts of the world, ‘such as animals, plants, etc.’, come to be in time and are not pre-eternal. Such a view, al-Masʿūdī opines, does not contradict revelation, ‘for revelation never contradicts reality; revelation never states that black is not a colour, or that the human being is not an animal’.¹⁴⁶ Although this

145 Al-Masʿūdī, *Sharḥ al-Khuṭba*, f. 29^a.

146 Al-Masʿūdī, *Sharḥ al-Khuṭba*, f. 30^b.

assessment of revelation is meant as a defence of an Avicennan doctrine, it does not itself draw on Avicenna's theory of prophecy, according to which the theological contents of scripture contain only a modicum of truth, and consist largely of images that have little or no correspondence to reality, but serve to motivate ordinary people to abide by the Law.¹⁴⁷ Al-Mas'ūdī's assertion that 'revelation never contradicts reality' accords instead with the dominant *kalām* position on the epistemic status of scripture, according to which knowledge of reality is attained principally through reason, and if any contents of scripture appear to contradict reality the theologian must resort to figurative interpretation (*ta'wīl*) to resolve what will be deemed to be a *prima facie* contradiction. That said, we are not told exactly how Avicenna's denial of the notion that God created the world voluntarily and in time can be reconciled with revealed statements adduced to corroborate this conception of creation.

The third sense of '*muḥdath*' and '*qadīm*' is 'generated on account of its essence' (*muḥdath dhātī*, *muḥdath bi-l-dhāt*), i.e. a thing whose existence is essentially posterior to another, and 'non-generated on account of its essence' (*qadīm dhātī*, *qadīm bi-l-dhāt*), i.e. a thing whose existence is not posterior to another.¹⁴⁸ In this sense, only God is not posterior to anything (*qadīm*); and to assert that the world too is *qadīm* 'would be contrary to both revelation and reason'. Al-Mas'ūdī concludes:

You have come to know [1] the meanings of '*muḥdath*' and '*qadīm*', and [2] that what all revelations agree upon—namely, that the world is generated and not non-generated—is confirmed by philosophy, and cannot be denied by any philosopher, and [3] that temporal generation, which the mind unambiguously negates with respect to time and some parts of the world, is something that revelation does not contradict, and [4] that it is inconceivable for two sound-minded and impartial individuals to be in substantive (*ma'nawī*) disagreement over this question, though [they may have] a linguistic (*lafẓī*) [disagreement].¹⁴⁹

Revelation, accordingly, agrees with philosophy in that it teaches that the world is generated, not in the second sense of being created in time in its entirety,

147 Avicenna, *Ilāhiyyāt*, X.2. 441–443; cf. Michot, *La destinée de l'homme*, 30 ff.

148 Al-Mas'ūdī, *Sharḥ al-Khuṭba*, ff. 29^a–31^a. Essential priority and posteriority are introduced earlier in the work (ff. 18^a–19^b); cf. Avicenna, *Ilāhiyyāt*, IV.1, 163 ff.

149 Al-Mas'ūdī, *Sharḥ al-Khuṭba*, f. 31^a.

but in the third sense. The text, however, does not elaborate on this reading of scriptural cosmogony.¹⁵⁰

A little later in his commentary, al-Mas'ūdī turns to another 'one of the principal doctrines of the philosophers', this time the Avicennan principle that from a cause that is absolutely one, only one effect can derive (*al-shay' al-wāḥid lā yaṣḍuru 'an-hu illā shay' wāḥid*).¹⁵¹ This principle has various applications in Avicenna's philosophy, chief among which being his version of the Neoplatonic account of the procession of multiple existents from the One.¹⁵² Avicenna argues that being an absolutely simple efficient cause, the First Cause only produces a single effect, namely the First Intellect, whose coming-to-be ushers the first instance of multiplicity. Al-Mas'ūdī reports in second-hand fashion how Avicenna's premise is substantiated. The principle, we are told, is evident and in need of no proof; however, a reminder (*tanbīh*) is offered for the benefit of those who do not readily assent to it.¹⁵³ This is followed by an account of Avicenna's broader theory of emanation, which explains the coming-to-be of multiplicity out of an absolutely simple Cause.¹⁵⁴ No reference is made, however, to the theological complaints raised against this conception of God's activity; what is more, at the end of the discussion this conception is said to be confirmed by the Prophetic tradition, 'The first thing that God created was the intellect'.¹⁵⁵ In the *Shukūk*, by contrast, the doctrine that from one only one effect proceeds is criticised in a dedicated discussion (Section 11).¹⁵⁶

3. God can be seen. Commenting on Avicenna's statement, 'Vision cannot perceive Him', al-Mas'ūdī goes on to examine the nature of sense perception and the workings of the internal and external senses, concluding that none of these senses has the ability to perceive God.¹⁵⁷ The discussion, nonetheless, is

150 Of course, as several medieval commentators pointed out, the Qur'ān nowhere states that the world is created *ex nihilo*. Yet one always expects a reading such as the one advanced in the *Sharḥ* to be supported with evidence, given its radical departure from the standard theological position.

151 Al-Mas'ūdī, *Sharḥ al-Khuṭba*, ff. 41^a–^b.

152 On this principle, see pp. 74–75 below.

153 Al-Mas'ūdī, *Sharḥ al-Khuṭba*, ff. 41^b–42^b.

154 Al-Mas'ūdī, *Sharḥ al-Khuṭba*, ff. 41^a–50^b.

155 Al-Mas'ūdī, *Sharḥ al-Khuṭba*, f. 50^b. The *ḥadīth* is widely regarded as unsound among traditionists (for an extended discussion, see al-Zabīdī, *Ithāf*, 1, 453–455).

156 *Shukūk*, 275–278.

157 Al-Mas'ūdī, *Sharḥ al-Khuṭba*, ff. 5^a–10^a. Avicenna here paraphrases Q. 6.103.

appended with the following remark, the only reference made in the book to either al-Ghazālī or a theological source:

Do not think, however, that this negates that God, exalted, can be seen. The correct doctrine (*al-madhhab al-ḥaqq*) is that God, exalted, may be seen, but cannot be perceived through vision. The reality of 'seeing' (*ru'ya*) is different from the reality of 'perception through vision'. As to what that reality is, and how it can be affirmed while negating perception through vision, this is not the right place to explain it. Whoever desires to know this should seek it in *al-Iqtisād fī l-i'tiqād* by al-Imām al-Ghazālī, the Proof of Islam, may his noble soul be sanctified.¹⁵⁸

The position that al-Ghazālī defends in the *Iqtisād*, mainly against the Mu'tazila and secondarily against the anthropomorphists, is the standard Ash'arī doctrine that God can be seen without Him being in any way corporeal.¹⁵⁹ In the course of his discussion, he briefly explains his conception of seeing God in the Sufi-inspired terms of witnessing (*mushāhada*) and unveiling (*kashf*).¹⁶⁰ What transpires from the above passage—specifically, the reference to the *Iqtisād* and the characterisation of the Ash'arī doctrine as '*al-madhhab al-ḥaqq*'—is that al-Mas'ūdī genuinely subscribes to this doctrine. It seems that he permits himself here to slot in his passing endorsement of this non-Avicennan theological doctrine because it does not clash, at least in any direct and obvious way, with Avicennan doctrines.

4. Atomism. As expected, al-Mas'ūdī's commentary on the *Khuṭba* offers a perfectly Avicennan brand of hylomorphism. For instance, we are told that body consists of the combination of two things: matter, which is pure potentiality, and corporeal form (*ṣūra jismīyya*), which provides matter with actuality and three-dimensional continuity.¹⁶¹ A species form is produced by the Active Intellect as soon as a material substrate acquires the preparedness (*isti'dād*) to receive it.¹⁶² And so forth. In the *Shukūk*, by contrast, the theory of corporeal form is criticised, as we shall see in Chapter 6.

¹⁵⁸ Al-Mas'ūdī, *Sharḥ al-Khuṭba*, ff. 10^{a-b}.

¹⁵⁹ Al-Ghazālī, *Iqtisād*, 60–73.

¹⁶⁰ Al-Ghazālī, *Iqtisād*, 67–69. For a discussion of al-Ghazālī's position, see Treiger, *Inspired Knowledge*, 48 ff.

¹⁶¹ Al-Mas'ūdī, *Sharḥ al-Khuṭba*, ff. 12^b–13^b.

¹⁶² Al-Mas'ūdī, *Sharḥ al-Khuṭba*, ff. 4^b; 54^b–55^a.

In one discussion in the commentary on the *Khuṭba*, al-Mas'ūdī appears to reveal a genuine commitment to hylomorphism. He writes that 'some people'—by whom he clearly intends the theologians—reject the view that body is infinitely divisible in favour of the theory of the indivisible part, and he adds that there are 'numerous proofs' to affirm the former view and to refute the latter. Summarising one such proof, which he borrows from Avicenna,¹⁶³ he remarks:

What the rejectors [of the theory that matter is infinitely divisible] adduce are weak and flimsy statements that boil down to mere condemnations [of ideas] as doubtful or [intellectually] offensive, none of which [condemnations] reach the level of persuasiveness, not to mention demonstrativeness. A friend once asked me in the past to work out something that could be relied upon in defending their doctrine, [i.e. atomism], so I did that and developed [a proof] starting from true geometrical premises.¹⁶⁴

The argument devised by al-Mas'ūdī, which is of little relevance to our present purposes, is a version, articulated in geometrical terms, of the earlier *kalām* argument that when a sphere is in contact with a flat surface, the point of contact between the two must be indivisible, from which it may be inferred that the point of contact is an indivisible atom.¹⁶⁵ Al-Mas'ūdī, however, immediately goes on to confute the proof, arguing that even though the point of contact is indivisible, it cannot consist of an indivisible particle.¹⁶⁶ The autobiographical element in the passage unambiguously attests al-Mas'ūdī's opposition to atomism and commitment to hylomorphism.

5. Eschatology. The concluding discussion in *Sharḥ al-Khuṭba*, on 'the conditions of the soul after death', explains Avicenna's position on the happiness or suffering that human souls experience after the death of the body according to their degree of perfection or imperfection. One rank of human souls includes those that had already become intellectually perfected, but are immersed in

163 Al-Mas'ūdī, *Sharḥ al-Khuṭba*, ff. 59^b–60^a; cf. Avicenna, *Ṭabī'yyāt*, I.III.4, 282–284; cf. McGinnis, *Avicenna*, 75–76.

164 Al-Mas'ūdī, *Sharḥ al-Khuṭba*, f. 60^a.

165 Al-Mas'ūdī, *Sharḥ al-Khuṭba*, ff. 60^a–61^a; cf. al-Shahrastānī, *Nihāyat al-aqdām*, 507 (where a simpler version of the argument is attributed to al-Juwaynī).

166 Al-Mas'ūdī, *Sharḥ al-Khuṭba*, ff. 61^a–^b.

bodily pleasures; these souls will suffer greatly after they become separated from their bodies. However, because a soul's attraction to the body is an accidental disposition, its suffering will after a while come to an end, and it will then become happy by virtue of the perfection it had achieved. 'For this reason', al-Mas'ūdī remarks, 'Sunnīs do not hold that believers who commit major sins will spend an eternity (*khulūd*) in hell.'¹⁶⁷ Of course, this Sunnī doctrine—the antithesis of Khārījī and Mu'tazilī doctrines that condemn the committer of a major sin to everlasting punishment in hell—was based, not on rational grounds, as suggested here, but on scriptural evidence (e.g. Q. 4.48).¹⁶⁸ Al-Mas'ūdī's observation seems to be a further small attempt to reconcile an Avicennan theory with Sunnī theology.

In conclusion, despite the clues as to the commentator's commitments and motives, which the commentary on the *Khuṭba* provides us, all in all the picture it paints is, once again, inconclusive. It is impossible to tell on the basis of the text alone which Avicennan views hold good for the commentator. What is clear, however, is that theology was at the back of al-Mas'ūdī's mind: he is aware of the points of conflict between philosophers and theologians, and he occasionally attempts to allude to, or to incorporate, theological doctrines. On the balance of the evidence, it appears that these doctrines are overall associated with Ash'arism. Al-Mas'ūdī, of course, was a Shāfi'ī and heavily influenced by al-Ghazālī; so it is unsurprising that his philosophical works should exhibit the influence of Ash'arī teachings.

¹⁶⁷ Al-Mas'ūdī, *Sharḥ al-Khuṭba*, ff. 69^{a-b}.

¹⁶⁸ For instance, al-Juwaynī, *Irshād*, 385–389.