Foreword: The PhilAnd Project

“The origin and early development of philosophy in tenth-century al-Andalus: the impact of ill-defined materials and channels of transmission” (hereafter, PhilAnd) is an Advanced Grant ERC project funded by the European Research Council and currently being conducted at UCLouvain and the Warburg Institute (University of London).¹ PhilAnd aims to provide new insights into an important chapter in the history of Islamic speculative thinking. It is concerned with the time and the form under which philosophy – in the sense of a rational, scientific and comprehensive system to approach the reality of the world around us – appeared for the first time in al-Andalus, and with the role played by this formative stage in the history of philosophy as later developed in the Iberian Peninsula among the three monotheistic communities.

PhilAnd pursues three main objectives, namely:

- (1) to determine whether the emergence of philosophy in al-Andalus did not significantly predate the time ordinarily acknowledged in modern scholarship;
- (2) to establish whether the impact of this early phase on later developments of rational thinking in al-Andalus was not considerably greater than has usually been assumed thus far;
- (3) to provide evidence in order to assess, on a scientific basis, the originality of the first Andalusī philosophers with respect to their predecessors in the Orient.

The project stands at the crossroads of several major lines of enquiry in modern scholarship: the overall history of Arabic sciences in al-Andalus, the libraries and cultural centres of al-Andalus, the interaction of politics, religion and science in the Peninsula, the common threads of Islamic and Jewish philosophy and mysticism in and outside the Peninsula, Greek-Arabic philosophy across the Mediterranean or more specifically in the context of Shi‘ism and Ismā‘ilism, Arabic into Latin and the legacy of Arabic sciences in medieval Europe, the reception of Jewish literature in the Latin Middle Ages. Although it has been designed to develop and stimulate a network of collaborations with

1 ERC Grant Agreement number 740618 (under the European Union’s H2020 ERC MGA Programme). The project started in October 2017 and will extend to September 2023: <https://sites.uclouvain.be/erc-philand/>.

most of these lines of enquiry, PhilAnd is different from any of them all and is fundamentally original in two crucial respects.

First, it puts a major emphasis on the 4th/10th century. This is a period that has often been disregarded by historians of Arab-Islamic philosophy concerned with al-Andalus on the assumption that philosophy in al-Andalus only emerged with the Jew Salomon Ibn Gabirol/Avicbron (d. 450/1058) in the 5th/11th century or, even later on, with the Muslims Ibn al-Sīd al-Baṭalyawsī (d. 521/1127) and Ibn Bāḡḡa/Avempace (d. 533/1139) in the 6th/12th century. To a very large extent, the disregard of modern scholarship for the philosophical achievements of 4th/10th-century al-Andalus is the result of a series of confusions, misconceptions and erroneous dating touching three authors (or possibly group of authors, in one case) whose role in the transfer of philosophy between the Eastern and the Western parts of the *dār al-islām* was in all likelihood decisive, and who for this reason are at the core of the present exploration, namely: 1) the Iḥwān al-Ṣafā'; 2) Ibn Masarra (d. 319/931); 3) Maslama b. Qāsim al-Qurṭubī (d. 353/964).

Secondly, the project is resolutely focused on a major reevaluation of 'ill-defined' material and channels of transmission. This also requires some justification. It has long been stressed that, among the sources which have been used by the author of the famous *Ġāyat al-ḥakīm/Picatrix*, the three most important are: 1) the above-mentioned encyclopaedical corpus by the Iḥwān al-Ṣafā'; 2) the corpus of works traditionally ascribed to the alchemist Ḡābir b. Ḥayyān (supposed to have lived in the 2nd/8th century) and therefore usually referred to as 'Corpus Ḡābirianum,' and 3) the 'Nabatean Agriculture' (*al-Filāḥa l-nabatiyya*) or, more exactly, the corpus of 'Nabatean' writings ascribed to Ibn Waḥšiyya (written in 318/930-931), which is thus commonly referred to as the 'Nabatean Corpus.' These three *corpora* show a number of remarkable similarities, which incite study of them from a common perspective – something which has never been done so far. All three were produced in Orient. All three show a marked proclivity for disciplines such as astrology, magic and alchemy, which were regarded in the Middle Ages as part and parcel of the bulk of 'rational/philosophical sciences.' All three appear to have been significantly influenced by Ismā'ilism, although the relation with Ismā'ilism, and more generally with Shī'ism, remains to be clarified in each case. All three present themselves as compilations whose elaboration may have extended over several generations, posing to scholarship major problems of dating and authorship. All three are extremely syncretic compositions having in common a Neoplatonic background to which a huge quantity of material of various provenance – in particular Hermeticism, Ṣābianism and mysticism – has been superimposed. As a result of their Ismā'īlī bias, all three works show a common,

and distinctly *bāṭinī*, manner to interpret the religious scriptures, and in particular the Qurʾān. Now, what is also particularly worth noting is that these three *corpora* of writings appear to have been introduced into al-Andalus about the very same period, and not at all impossibly by the same man, namely Maslama b. Qāsim al-Qurṭubī, who is today generally acknowledged as the genuine author of the *Rutbat al-ḥakīm* and the *Ġāyat al-ḥakīm*. How can we account for this fact? What prompted such a sudden interest in 4th/10th-century al-Andalus for doctrines so clearly at odds with the model imposed there by the Sunnī-Malikī traditionalists? Was there anything like an Ismāʿīlī *daʿwa* ('propaganda') in al-Andalus? Which was the role played by the regime itself in the reception of this type of knowledge? And how profoundly this introduction of heterodox material did affect the subsequent development of Neoplatonism and mysticism as cultivated in al-Andalus among the three monotheistic communities? These questions, largely remained unexplored thus far, are at the core of the present proposal.

In order to explore these issues with the best prospects of achieving groundbreaking results, eight sub-projects (SP) have been defined, which are briefly presented here. Five of these SP specifically deal with aspects of the three above-mentioned Eastern *corpora* – the 'Ġābirian' (SP1), the 'Iḥwānian' (SP2), and the 'Nabatean' (SP3) – as well as with Ibn Masarra (SP4) and Maslama b. Qāsim al-Qurṭubī (SP5). In addition to these five 'linear' SP, the project also includes three 'transversal' SP to reinforce its interdisciplinary and cross-cultural approach, and to address wider and more complex cultural issues. Although in intimate connection with the former five SP, these latter three SP are conducted in the form of cross-disciplinary and international conferences to be held in a second phase of the project, namely:

- 'Power, religion and wisdom: *bāṭinism* between orthodoxy and heterodoxy in 10th-century al-Andalus' (SP6, at the Institute for Advanced Study, Princeton);
- 'Interconnections between Jewish and Islamic rationalistic forms of thought during the 10th-century' (SP7, at UCLouvain);
- 'Science and craft: the relations between the theoretical and practical sides of esoteric disciplines in al-Andalus and their link with craft' (SP8, at the Warburg Institute, University of London).

The following five articles are intended to give an idea of the research carried out as part of this project, although it is understood that each author takes personal responsibility for what he or she writes. Two contributions focus on the writings ascribed to the Iḥwān al-Ṣafā'. In one of them, Janne Mattila revisits the vexed issue of the kinship between the corpus of the *Rasā'il Iḥwān al-Ṣafā'* with its about fifty epistles and *al-Risāla l-ġāmi'a* attributed to the same authors

and supposed to constitute a sort of synthesis of the corpus. On the basis of close examination of internal references both in the Beirut edition and in the oldest manuscripts, Mattila concludes that the theory of a common authorship is no longer tenable. In the other study, which also invites the reader to reconsider the results of past scholarship, Godefroid de Callataÿ highlights the radically different way in which the *Rasā'il Iḥwān al-Ṣafā'* are considered in the *Rutbat al-ḥakīm* and the *Ġāyat al-ḥakīm*, suggesting that Maslama b. Qāsim al-Qurṭubī had a copy of the *Rasā'il* when he wrote the second of his 'twin' treatises on the occult, but not the first. Elaine van Dalen's contribution deals with *al-Filāḥa l-nabaṭiyya*. In contrast to the long-prevailing tendency to consider this work as of a limited value for the history of late-antique and early Islamic science, she argues that it contains rationally-based epistemological categories, methods of deductive reasoning, and a sense of empiricism that is judiciously applied to the field of botany and agriculture. For their part, Marion Dapsens and Sébastien Moureau present the critical edition, together with the English translation and a commentary, of an important alchemical treatise, namely an untitled epistle attributed to the Umayyad prince Ḥālid b. Yazīd (d. ca 85/704). Additionally, they provide here for the first time the (partial) Latin version of this text, which they have recently identified. The last contribution of this dossier, by José Bellver, is focused on a codex preserved in Tunis, the only known extant manuscript presenting a complete copy of Ptolemy's *Almagest* in Ishāq/Ṭābit version. Bellver's study is substantially focused on a marginal note of this manuscript which provides new information on the history of libraries and the transfer of books in al-Andalus.

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