CHAPTER ONE

THE TRADITION OF ARISTOTLE'S METAPHYSICS
IN THE MUSLIM EAST

The transmission of Aristotle's *Metaphysics* is a crucial issue for the history of ancient, medieval and renaissance philosophy. A number of important studies, which have been published since the end of the nineteenth century, have inquired exhaustively into the making of the Aristotelian corpus and its organization by Andronicus of Rhodes in the first century BC. They have also investigated the Greek commentaries on Aristotle's *Metaphysics* of the Imperial ages – in particular the exegesis produced within the Neoplatonic schools – and the Greek-Latin translations.

More recent investigations which are not yet complete have been devoted to the Greek-Arabic transmission of Aristotle's *Metaphysics* in Baghdad, during the first two centuries of the ʿAbbāsid caliphate (ninth – eleventh centuries AD). They have also inquired into Avicenna's reception and Averroes' commentaries on the *Metaphysics*, and finally also the medieval Arabic-Latin translations, which were diffused into European universities from the first decades of the thirteenth century onwards.1

Another open field is the reception of Aristotle's *Metaphysics* in the Muslim East at the time of the strong reaction both in favour and against Avicenna's philosophy and the concomitant rediscovery of the science of metaphysics from the end of the twelfth century in the schools of Baghdad, Cairo, and Damascus, in a what was by then an active atmosphere which combined metaphysical and theological doctrines within falsafa; it last until the seventeenth century.2

This book is devoted to the ‘Metaphysical Science’ proposed by Muwaffaq al-Dīn Muḥammad ‘Abd al-Laṭīf ibn Yūsuf al-Baḡdādī (1162–9 November 1231), a little known author of later falsafa. His Book on the Science of Metaphysics (*Kitāb fī īlm mā baʿd al-ṭabīʿa*) proves to be a central piece, not only for obtaining a better insight into the Arabic tradition of Aristotle's *Metaphysics*, but also for acquiring a better understanding of

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1 See Booth (1983); Bertolacci (2006); the volume of *Medioevo. Rivista di storia della filosofia medievale*, 32 (2007) dedicated to Arabic-Islamic Metaphysics, which I edited; Arnzen (2010); Arnzen (2010a).

2 See Janssens (2007); Janssens (2010); Eichner (2007); Arnzen (2007); Adamson (2011).
the nature of metaphysical science in the East of the Islamic world. A reading of the *Book on the Science of Metaphysics* suggests that one should reject an idea which has gained wide currency, namely, that after Avicenna philosophy came to an end, surviving only in al-Andalus.

The metaphysical work by ʿAbd al-Laṭīf ibn Yūsuf al-Bağdādī offers an example of striking consistency with the original metaphysical project elaborated at the beginning of falsafa by al-Kindī in his *On First Philosophy* (*Fī l-Falsafa al-Ūlā*). This project was subsequently endorsed and revised by the scholars of the tenth century Aristotelian circle in Baghdad, mostly by al-Ḥarrābī. The last three *Enneads* by Plotinus – translated by Ibn Nāʿima al-Ḥimṣi and then known as the so-called *Theology* of Aristotle – and Proclus’ *Elements of Theology* were conceived of, in al-Kindī’s circle, as the natural development of *Metaphysics Lambda* in a synthesis of Aristotelianism and Neoplatonism fitting with Islamic theology and its demanding monotheism.

The *Book on the Science of Metaphysics* resembles a school textbook: in it, the *Metaphysics* is less of a text, transmitted through a chain of historical stages, and more of a discipline: this discipline is meant to find its final and definitive fully-fledged form in the synthesis of the metaphysical doctrines expounded by Aristotle, Alexander of Aphrodisias, Themistius, Plotinus, Proclus, al-Kindī and al-Ḥarrābī.

The *Book on the Science of Metaphysics* finds itself at the end of an uninterrupted process of translation, reception and transformation of Aristotle’s *Metaphysics* in the Arabic-speaking world. Conclusions on the peculiar features of this work, its degree of originality with respect to the previous tradition of Aristotelian thought, and its systematic organization of concepts, therefore depend on the careful analysis and reconstruction of this process. The “Aristotle” of ʿAbd al-Laṭīf al-Bağdādī is in fact a “virtual Aristotle”, as G. Endress accurately puts it, the Aristotle built up by falsafa in a development of no less than four centuries.

In this chapter, I will present the framework within which ʿAbd al-Laṭīf al-Bağdādī’s metaphysical work should be considered, through a survey of the translations, the commentaries and the works of the Hellenizing Arabs which formed both the direct and indirect Arabic tradition of Aristotle’s *Metaphysics*. I will first provide an overview of the Greek tradition of this Aristotelian treatise, that is, the making of the *Metaphysics* as a unitary monograph, as well as an overview of the Greek commentaries. Then I will consider the first stage of the translation and reception of the *Metaphysics* in the Arabic-speaking world, paying special attention to the translators, to al-Kindī (795–865) and his treatise *On First Philosophy* together with