

god. Other genres related to the personal god are discussed, and editions of some of these texts are given. The second part deals with prayers to other gods that are related in various ways to the *diġir-ša-dab<sub>(5)</sub>-ba* incantations. Here too, many editions are included in the discussion.

Chapter VI explores the ritual context of the *diġir-ša-dab<sub>(5)</sub>-ba* incantations. The purpose of the main ritual text, edited in full, is to reconcile the personal god with an individual. The ritual text prescribes the recitation of many of the incantations known from the Akkadian version of the group of *diġir-ša-dab<sub>(5)</sub>-ba* incantations. This chapter also deals with passages from other rituals prescribing the recitation of Akkadian incantations from the same group.

Chapter VII is a discussion of the general tradition and context of the *diġir-ša-dab<sub>(5)</sub>-ba* prayers: it explores, among other topics, the personal god in Mesopotamia. It also deals with the legacy of the religious traditions in the *diġir-ša-dab<sub>(5)</sub>-ba* prayers, which are reflected in the Jewish liturgy of the Day of Atonement (Yom Kippur) and in Greek steles from Lydia and Phrygia.

The book concludes with an edition by Daniel Schwemer of Hittite prayers aimed at appeasing an angry personal god. These prayers share affinities with the *diġir-ša-dab<sub>(5)</sub>-ba* prayers.

The book is an important contribution to the study of Mesopotamian religion, specifically the study of personal prayers. It presents a very interesting and complex case of transmission, and handles it in a clear and in-depth manner. The author is to be thanked for this important contribution.

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THE NEAR AND MIDDLE EAST

AYMAN SHIHADAH:

*Doubts on Avicenna: A Study and Edition of Sharaf al-Dīn al-Mas'ūdī's Commentary on the Ishārāt.*

(Islamic Philosophy, Theology and Science.) vi, 289 pp. Leiden: Brill, 2016. €97. ISBN 978 9 004 30252 5.

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Historians of philosophy in the Islamic world are increasingly unanimous in holding that the post-classical era holds many riches, contrary to the now discredited idea that philosophy died with Averroes after the onslaught of al-Ghazālī's *Incoherence of the Philosophers* (*Tahāfut al-Falāsifa*). Establishing this agreement among expert scholars was the (relatively) easy part. Now come the harder tasks: first, getting the message out to the non-experts and, second, doing the painstaking philological and philosophical work needed to understand post-classical philosophy. Ayman Shihadeh has for some years been at the forefront of this effort, and his new book is a major contribution to its eventual fruition. It provides an edition and analysis of a critical commentary on Avicenna's *Pointers* (*Ishārāt*) in the form of "doubts (*shukūk*)", by Sharaf al-Dīn al-Mas'ūdī (not to be confused with the renowned historian).

Shihadeh shows that this author must have died before 600 AH/1204 CE. He is cited frequently by Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, and emerges from this study as a precursor

of Fakhr al-Dīn's intricate engagement with Avicenna. Al-Mas'ūdī might be compared to Abū l-Barakāt al-Baghdādī and al-Ghazālī, both of whom influenced his own response to Avicenna. One may also think of Ibn Ghaylān al-Balkhī, another author of this period whom Shihadeh has brought to attention. But the comparisons are not exact. Al-Mas'ūdī does adopt one of Abū l-Barakāt's distinctive theses that the human subjecthood is unified, not split across several cognitive faculties (pp. 63–4). But he does not seem to be nearly so original a thinker as Abū l-Barakāt: the positive positions he defends mostly adhere to anti-Avicennan *kalām* doctrines. Yet his nuanced and philosophical approach makes him unlike the highly polemical Ibn Ghaylān, and in Shihadeh's view the *Doubts* is unlike al-Ghazālī's *Incoherence*, even if al-Mas'ūdī draws on this work (pp. 78, 83). Where al-Ghazālī was a *mutakallim* critiquing philosophy from the outside, al-Mas'ūdī is more an insider (p. 84).

It would seem in any event that the *Doubts* was the first text to make the *Ishārāt* the focus of this sort of critical project, so its appearance in Shihadeh's edition is much to be welcomed. The value of the book goes beyond historical contextualization and edition of the text, however. Shihadeh offers in-depth discussions of several issues at the heart of al-Mas'ūdī's critique, which often have to do with the eternity of the universe. Though one might wonder whether anything novel remains to be added on this much-discussed topic, both al-Mas'ūdī and Shihadeh manage it. Avicenna could agree with the *mutakallimūn* that the universe is dependent on God for its existence. The debate concerned the nature of that dependence. For Avicenna, as is well known, created essences are contingent and contingent essences require an external cause to "preponderate" them to exist. Shihadeh usefully emphasizes that this is a permanent feature of contingent existence: even after being caused to exist, any contingent thing still requires an external cause to maintain or sustain it in existence (p. 90).

By contrast, the *kalām* understanding of creation makes it a one-time causal act: it means making something exist *after it did not exist*. And once God has made a thing exist, it will go on existing unless it is somehow destroyed. This, Shihadeh suggests, is why the *mutakallimūn* could not accept the world's eternity. They denied that creation could be an ongoing process in which the cause sustains the existence of its effect. From this they inferred that an eternally produced universe would not be created at all. As Shihadeh points out, the Avicennan view could be falsified by giving just one example of "ontological inertia" (my phrase, not Shihadeh's), in which an effect continues without being sustained by its cause. Al-Mas'ūdī gives several such examples, for instance that hair dyed with henna will retain its colour without the constant application of further henna (p. 102).

A further aspect of the same debate concerns the relation between possibility and potentiality. In what Shihadeh sees as an original move (though I think it could be argued to be tacitly present even in Aristotle's arguments against the possibility of a first motion), Avicenna argues that possibility must be seated in a subject that has the potential to realize that possibility. Thus a created world, in the *kalām* sense of "created", would have to be preceded by matter, which would potentially be the universe that is to come (p. 113). Against this al-Mas'ūdī insists that things may simply be in themselves possible, and thus available for God to create from nothing. Al-Mas'ūdī accuses Avicenna of confusing "the absence of dispositional possibility with the negation of per se possibility" (p. 133). Shihadeh leaps to Avicenna's defence here, but I think al-Mas'ūdī may have a point. But I wonder whether Avicenna is so far from such a conflation himself. As Shihadeh notes, Avicenna remarks at one point that when there is no potentiality for a thing, that thing is "impossible in itself" (p. 116). Perhaps there is a solution here to a puzzle

about Avicenna's system: why does he say that never-instantiated, yet conceivable, things are "impossible"? Might it be because matter is simply never suitable to become these things? This would not be an impossibility due to the lack of a particular potentiality right here and now, as Shihadeh describes (pp. 116, 126) – but rather an impossibility stemming from the fact that matter *never* offers the right sort of potentiality.

Shihadeh's book combines an important historical and philological contribution with rich philosophical analysis. Even readers who think they can afford to skip knowing about the relatively obscure al-Mas'ūdī should consult it, if they have any interest in Avicenna's philosophy or its reception.

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JEAN-MICHEL MOUTON, DOMINIQUE SOURDEL, JANINE SOURDEL-THOMINE  
(avec un appendice de JEAN RICHARD):

*Gouvernance et libéralités de Saladin d'après les données inédites de six documents arabes.*

(Documents relatifs à l'histoire des Croisades.) 146 pp., 6 pl. Paris: Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres, 2015. €30. ISBN 978 2 87754 323 1.

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Since the 1960s, the editors of this small but meritorious volume have had exclusive access to arguably the most important archive of pre-Ottoman documentary sources outside of Egypt. Kept for centuries in Damascus in the Umayyad Mosque's treasure house (*Qubbat al-khazna*), they were finally made accessible to a German researcher in 1900 and removed in 1903, mostly to Istanbul where they still are today. As in previous publications, the editors erroneously cling to a story by which the existence of the stash was revealed only through a fire in 1893 (p. 9), when in fact knowledge of it even among foreigners had been growing throughout the nineteenth century.

The present volume combines the edition of six documents with a short appendix by Jean Richard on the freed slaves of Saladin. What is supposed to give this volume coherence is Saladin's politics of public generosity. Documents directly related to the reign of this famous ruler are extremely rare and the provenance from Damascus only adds to the significance since the vast majority of pre-Ottoman Arabic documents are of Egyptian origin. For these reasons, each text in this volume merits a publication in its own right. Still, as the editors chose to place them within the thematic framework of "governance and benevolence", the whole collection seems somewhat haphazard.

Document 1 is one of the most interesting Arabic letters preserved from the period. Written by a Damascene merchant in Cairo it gives an unusually spirited and often vernacular account of this man's affairs in the city but especially of the entrance of Saladin's father and a meeting the writer had with the two. For the events described the letter must have been written in 565/1170, a time when the young ruler was still vizier to the last Fatimid caliph in Egypt. The writer is able to use his personal acquaintance to acquire management of taxes on cheese. To see those back-room deals spelled out here is certainly illuminating.

Alongside smaller quibbles, I found only one major misinterpretation of the text. Line 33: اليهود وامه واخته واركات; the translation: "à Ḥalaf, à Barakāt ainsi qu'à sa