
Contexts

This is a book about four eleventh-century scholars who lived a millennium ago. But it is also a book about ideas that took shape as if the world outside did not exist. The authors involved conceived their accounts of language, divinity, reason, and metaphor as universal accounts of the human condition. They did not see their Muslim, Arabic, Persian, medieval, context as a determining factor in these universal accounts, and neither should we. To claim that eleventh-century Muslim scholars, writing in Arabic, expressed a universal human spirit with just as much purchase on language, mind, and reality as we achieve today is an endorsement of the position in the history of thought made famous by Leo Strauss.¹ However, in order to make sense of eleventh-century texts we need to explore the books their authors had read, the debates in which they were taking part, and the *a priori* commitments they held: this is the methodology for the history of thought advocated by Quentin Skinner.²

THE ELEVENTH CENTURY

What can we say about the eleventh century? It was known, in its own calendar, as the fifth century of the Islamic era that started in 622 A.D. with Muḥammad's emigration from Mecca to Medina (*al-hiğrah*; hence the name of that calendar: Hiğri) and was counted in lunar years thereafter. The different calendars are, of course, a translation problem. The boundaries of the eleventh-century that I am using (1000

1. Strauss (1989).

2. Skinner (2002).

and 1100) are not just artificial; they were wholly absent from the imaginations of the scholars who lived between them, for whom those same years were numbered 390 and 493. I have chosen to provide dates in just one calendar, the Gregorian solar calendar dominant in my target language, English. This entails a slight loss of exactness: lunar-solar conversion is only accurate when one is in possession of the day and month in the source calendar, and so dates in this book should be regarded as approximate, plus or minus one year. My excuse for this loss of exactness is that the sources do not always provide the day and month for events such as births and deaths, which means that imprecision is found on both sides of the translation process (when the day and month is known in Arabic, I do of course ensure that the English date is accurate). The boundaries of the eleventh century also cut off differing amounts of the early lives of my four authors, as well as awkwardly forcing famous later scholars such as al-Ġazālī (who was born in 1058) into an imagined “eleventh-century” picture. I would therefore like to say at this early point in the book that I use the phrase “eleventh-century” simply as shorthand for the period of time in which the four scholars in whom I am interested worked. With “eleventh-century,” I am not trying to make my English translation sound awkward in order to highlight a gap in conceptual vocabulary, as is the case with “mental content.” On the contrary, I am aiming for an idiomatic English phrase that can indicate the years with which I am concerned. Another way to look at the utility of this flawed chronological label is that it enables me to avoid many other types of labels that are arguably more problematic (classical, postclassical, late Abbasid, Būyid, renaissance, medieval, Islamic, Islamicate, Arab, Persian, etc.).

What else can we say about the eleventh century? Although we do not give our years the same numerical labels, or determine them with the help of the same celestial body, we do share the chronological unit of a calendar year with Ibn Fūrak, ar-Rāġib, Ibn Sīnā, and al-Ġurġānī. Like them, we record our family histories in generations, and count time in years. This means that we can try to imagine what the weight of scholarly and linguistic precedent felt like to them. The civilization in which they wrote was an established one. Its first written text, the Quran, was understood to have been gathered by the prophet’s followers in the 640s and 650s, and the foundational grammar of Sībawayh (d. ca. 796) was written in the 790s. So for our four authors, their particular confessional community and its concern with language was over 350 years old, and some of the scholarly texts they read were over 200 years old. As for the Arabic language itself, it was well over a millennium old; the “first clear attestation of an Arabic word occurs in the Kurkh monolith inscription of the neo-Assyrian monarch Shalmaneser III (853 B.C.E.)”³ Transposing this chronology onto my own Californian situation at the beginning

3. Al-Jallad (2018, 315).

of the twenty-first century, 350 years ago European colonialists were still failing to establish a foothold on the eastern seaboard of what is now the United States, and 200 years ago those colonists (now a state) were fighting the Anglo-American War while California had become part of the First Mexican Empire. Readers of this book in the Europe where I grew up are in the same chronological relationship to Galileo, Hobbes, and Descartes as Ibn Fūrak and his contemporaries were to Sibawayh. When we users of English on either continent rewind an equivalent distance to the reign of Shalmaneser and his use of Arabic, there are no early attestations of our language (at what was the time of Tacitus we are scarcely aware of a language related to English among the Germanic peoples). One may therefore say about the Arabic eleventh century that its scholarly pursuits were as old as California and its language as ancient as Latin. When they read Greek philosophy, Aristotle (d. 322 B.C.) was as far removed from them as Muḥammad is from us.

THE FOUR SCHOLARS

In the world of Classical Arabic scholarship it is easy to forget that we know of our authors' lives only through their appearances in the biographical literature or from their own works. Although we share with them the contours of a human life and a life spent reading books, we do not have access to much information about how their lives looked or felt. Their published works usually provide little of the information that a biographer may look for today, and autobiographical writing was rare. This leaves us with the innumerable biographical dictionaries produced across all disciplines and confessional identities from the early ninth century onward, scaled up by their authors for detail or down for concision, with lax and catholic attitudes to inclusion or with rigorously policed boundaries. These collections of biographies constitute a massive self-referential and self-disciplining archive, produced contention and invention, and are now all that we have. In this archive, our four authors fared quite differently.

The archive reminds us of its own scale. To read it for the biographies of these four men is to be confronted with the depth and breadth of the intellectual conversations in which they were engaged: a great number of scholars across a large geographical space, working on a broad range of topics. Much of this information is now lost to the vicissitudes of time and the difficulties of preserving manuscripts across a millennium, but a great deal is still available in printed editions (relatively few) and unedited manuscripts (vast in number), and I have not read all of it by any means. My primary methodological response to the scale of the archive has been to privilege depth of reading over breadth. I chose to select four scholars for this book because this choice has enabled me to read sufficient amounts of their work. Extending my scope to more authors would, within the inevitable constraints, have led me to read less of each author's work, and perhaps most problematic, to read

selections and passages rather than complete books. The kind of argument that I am making, one in which I take a commonplace word that occurs almost everywhere and show how it reveals a functioning conceptual vocabulary that helps us understand theories about language, is the kind of argument that necessitates reading books from start to finish. As a result, I have read Ibn Fūrak's *Muğarrad*, al-Ġurġānī's *Asrār* and *Dalā' il*, and ar-Rāġib's *al-I' tiqādāt*, *ad-Ḍarī' ah*, *Muqaddimah fī t-Tafsīr*, *Tafsīl*, and *Rasā' il* in their entirety. I have read around widely in the same authors' other works, and in those of Ibn Sīnā, in whose case I have also relied on secondary scholarship to supplement my reading of the first seven chapters of his *Eisagoge*, the first two chapters of his *Categories*, and the first chapter of his *De Interpretatione*. (Work on Ibn Sīnā's *Sophistical Refutations* remains a desideratum.)

In this book, major eleventh-century authors other than the four selected appear occasionally. They include al-Qāḍī 'Abd al-Ġabbār al-Asadābādī (d. 1025; see J. R. T. M. Peters on his theories about language)⁴ and the equally well-known theologian and legal theorist Abū Bakr al-Bāqillānī (d. 1013, the subject of a recent dissertation by Rachel Friedman).⁵ Others do not appear at all, for example the important Andalusian literary theorist Ibn Rašīq (d. ca. 1064). A great theologian and legal scholar, Ibn Ḥazm (d. 1064), appears only in the biographical review of Ibn Fūrak. The absence of these latter two men could possibly be excused by their geographical distance from the conversations that are the subject matter of this book. But spending as much time in the archive as I have over the last eight years has led to the emergence of personal predilections and judgments, and this has particularly been the case in my preference for Ibn Fūrak over al-Bāqillānī. I judge the former to have published more intellectually cohesive works than the latter, to little fanfare in Anglophone and European-language scholarship. That scholarship has, however, made great strides in recent decades when it comes to language theory, and this is particularly true in an area that I only touch on in passing in this book: legal theory. (See inter alia my review of a recent important work on legal theory and literalism by Robert Gleave.)⁶

Ar-Rāġib

Ar-Rāġib is the first of our four men. They are all men; the eleventh century was patriarchal, and while women wrote poetry, took part in Hadith transmission, and created identity (on which see Nadia El Cheikh),⁷ they were excluded from the production of the extant theory, whether lexicographical, theological, logical, or

4. Peters (1976).

5. Friedman (2015).

6. Key (2015). Cf. Ali (2000), Gleave (2012), Lowry (2004), Vishanoff (2011), Zysow (2013).

7. El-Cheikh (2002), (2005), (2015).

literary-critical. Abū al-Qāsim al-Ḥusayn b. Muḥammad b. al-Mufaḍḍal ar-Rāḡib al-Iṣfahānī was the author of a hugely influential glossary of Quranic and scholarly vocabulary, a thinker whose approach to problems of theology, ethics, politics, and poetry was invariably linguistic. He never met an academic problem that he could not reduce to a matter of signification and therefore to the lexicography he had mastered. Ar-Rāḡib was the subject of my doctoral dissertation, and consequently the first eleventh-century scholar in whom I noticed the attitudes to language that are the subject matter of this book. I do not intend to repeat here the detailed intellectual biography of ar-Rāḡib that I have provided elsewhere; instead I will provide a brief survey that touches on his sectarian affiliation and the confusion over his death date. Both questions are, appropriately enough, problems of translation: ar-Rāḡib did not himself have any confusion about the dates of his own lifetime, nor did he exhibit any uncertainty as to his own sectarian positions and beliefs. These questions have arisen only in the biographical archive over the millennium that separates him from us.

As we will shortly see with Ibn Fūrak, the biographical archive produced lists and compendia of scholarly biographies according to theological and legal schools of thought, as well as of scholars according to birthplace and date. Ar-Rāḡib appears in no such collections until a century after his death (al-Bayhaqī),⁸ and even thereafter the notices are short on biographical detail or concerned with confusion about his theological affiliations (as-Suyūṭī).⁹ From the twelfth to the twentieth century, notices in both Arabic and European languages have provided a variety of incorrect death dates (aḍ-Ḍahabī, al-Ḥwānsārī, Brockelmann, etc.),¹⁰ and it is only through recent research (including my own) that we have been able to ascertain from the oldest manuscript witness to his Quranic glossary that ar-Rāḡib was alive in or before 1018.¹¹ It is quite possible that ar-Rāḡib's internally consistent but confessionally diverse set of doctrinal positions kept him out of biographical dictionaries that were in the process of delineating rival orthodoxies. The madrasa taxonomical process had little motivation to engage with the biography of a scholar who had combined ideas from schools of thought and creedal identities that were, in hindsight, in conflict with each other. And yet we just don't know enough about Iran in the eleventh century to be confident ascribing an iconoclastic or even catholic selection of doctrinal solutions to ar-Rāḡib. In his community, he may well have been representative and uncontroversial. He

8. Al-Bayhaqī (1946, 112); Key (2011), (2012, 40–41); Meyerhof (1948, ##131, 132).

9. Key (2012, 83), as-Suyūṭī (1979, 2:297).

10. Brockelmann (1996a, 1:289), (1996b, 1:505), aḍ-Ḍahabī (1985, 18:120–21), al-Ḥwānsārī (1991, 216), Key (2012, 39).

11. Al-Ġawharġī (1986), Key (2012, 32f), ar-Rāḡib (409/1018).

could not have known that in the future it would be the Aš‘arī creedal synthesis of Ibn Fūrak, rather than his own, that would contribute to what would be known as Sunni Islam. It is unlikely that he combined figurative interpretation of the Quran (a technique associated with the Mu‘tazilī School of theology) with a refusal to deviate in any way from divine precedent in the description of God (a position associated with the rival Ḥanbalī School) because of a wish to be uninfluential or idiosyncratic.¹²

The best way to bring some concrete philological fact to ar-Rāḡib’s biography is to examine his published work. This will also help orient us in the scholarly world of the eleventh century. Ar-Rāḡib was an exegete as well as a man of letters and an aesthete. Apart from the glossary of the Quran mentioned above, his most popular work was a literary anthology of prose and poetry, and beyond that he wrote both ethics in a Neoplatonic and post-Aristotelian vein, and poetics that foreshadowed al-Ġurġānī’s advances in understanding eloquence (albeit his authorship of the poetics work has not been established beyond all doubt).¹³ Ar-Rāḡib’s literary anthology, Quranic glossary, and ethical treatises proved most popular in the madrasa marketplace, as can be seen from the distribution and transmission of their manuscript copies around the world. His creedal work was only just preserved, and the same is true of his poetics; it seems that the creedal work was too idiosyncratic and the poetics quickly overshadowed by al-Ġurġānī. Today, almost every Arabic library in the world has a copy of ar-Rāḡib’s glossary of the Quran, and the text is virtually unchanged from its earliest manuscript witness. His literary anthology remains a popular source of scatological data about sexuality for researchers, and his ethicopolitical works are the subject of twenty-first-century commentary in North Africa.¹⁴ One reason for the popularity of his ethics is the influence he had on the much more famous al-Ġazālī, an influence that took the form of al-Ġazālī’s large-scale and unattributed copying, as demonstrated by Wilferd Madelung.¹⁵

The catholic synthesis that characterizes ar-Rāḡib’s positions places him, despite *ex post facto* uncertainty about his sectarian affiliations, at what may be called the center ground of Islamic theology and politics. This is certainly true when we compare him to Ibn Fūrak and Ibn Sīnā. As we will see below, the former was a proud theologian whose careful parsing of words and reality would leave

12. Key (2011), (2012, 80–85).

13. Key (2012, 53, 259), ar-Rāḡib (ca. 14th century). Cf. al-Andalusī (1987). My thanks to ‘Umar as-Sanawī al-Ḥālīdī for his identification of ar-Rāḡib’s ms. with the *Mi‘yār*; further work will be forthcoming from us both.

14. Key (2011), (2012).

15. Madelung (1974).

him open to the criticism of later taxonomizers such as Šams ad-Dīn aḏ-Ḍahabī (d. 1348), and the latter was a proud Aristotelian who would be thus excoriated by al-Ġazālī. Ar-Rāġib, on the other hand, espoused at different times all three of the major trends in Arabic intellectual thought through the eleventh century and beyond. At times he hewed close to the first school of Islamic theology, the Mu‘tazilah; at others, he was sympathetic to their opponents and the school of Ibn Fūrak, the Aš‘arīyah, and yet he often claimed to be part of the stream that cried a pious plague on both their houses and rejected the process of theology itself. His was a synthesis of Islamic intellectual history, for as Sabine Schmidtke writes: “Within the Sunni realm at least, Ash‘arism proved more successful and enjoyed a longer life than Mu‘tazilism, yet, like Mu‘tazilism, Ash‘arism was constantly challenged by traditionalist opponents rejecting any kind of rationalism.”¹⁶ Ar-Rāġib played all three roles and espoused Shia ideas and slogans, to the chagrin of each school and sect’s madrasa taxonomizers. The name he gave to his own preferred affiliation, “traditionists, senior sufis, and wise philosophers,”¹⁷ does not to the best of my knowledge appear anywhere else. And yet it combined three major streams of theological and ethical thought and practice: traditionist piety and rejection of complex dialectical theology, the mystical approach to epistemology that has been called “Sufism,” and the Aristotelian and Neoplatonic ethical heritage that proved so attractive to later synthesizers such as al-Ġazālī.¹⁸ Ar-Rāġib then allowed this combination to seep, however subtly, into his glossary of the Quran, a work that would become an irreproachably orthodox and popular reference work across the coming millennium. This centrality allows me, in chapter four, to use ar-Rāġib to establish eleventh-century assumptions about language and the lexicon.

Ibn Fūrak

Abū Bakr Muḥammad b. al-Ḥasan b. Fūrak enjoyed a decorated career teaching and debating theology across what is now Iraq, Iran, and Afghanistan until his death by poisoning in 1015, when he was around seventy-five years old. His biography therefore sounds very different from that of ar-Rāġib. Rather than dealing with a catholic synthesis of contested mainstreams, we meet the school synthesizer himself. As we will see, Ibn Fūrak was so fundamental in constructing the doctrine of the Aš‘arī School of theology that he appears today in the footnotes of Arabic and European-language scholarship as the citation that establishes an Aš‘arī position. His controversial death provides an incontrovertible *terminus post quem* for his eleventh-century life. His biography will also read differently from that of

16. Schmidtke (2008, 19).

17. Ar-Rāġib (1988a, 252.16). *مذهب أهل الأثر ومحض الصوفية والحكماء*.

18. Key (2012, 73–97).

ar-Rāġib because there is a great deal more material available to us. Conversely, while ar-Rāġib's biography can easily be found elsewhere,¹⁹ a detailed synthesis of the biographical material on Ibn Fūrak is less immediately available. I will attempt to provide a synthesis here. It is a short review of Ibn Fūrak's biography, and it will tip the reader headlong into a maelstrom of creedal positioning, archival parsing, and theological controversy. The topics and allusions may seem abstruse, but careers and even lives were at stake.

In the extant bibliographical tradition, Ibn Fūrak first appeared in the work of his pupil, the well-known Sufi exegete Abū al-Qāsim al-Quṣayrī (d. 1072). In his influential monograph *ar-Risālah* (*The Epistle*), al-Quṣayrī mentioned Ibn Fūrak with veneration on multiple occasions. It is clear that Ibn Fūrak was a source of historical knowledge, spiritual guidance, and creedal principle; an authority whose presence in the text would make al-Quṣayrī's case for his beliefs more persuasive.²⁰ Ibn Fūrak was also an acknowledged source of wisdom, so when al-Quṣayrī wrote about the need for devotees to be patient with the blandishments of fellow mystics more advanced on the Sufi path, he called on an anecdote from his teacher: "I heard Ibn Fūrak saying, 'There is a proverb: if you cannot bear the blacksmith's hammer then why be his anvil?'"²¹ Ibn Fūrak was also a moral and scholarly paradigm, so in the creedal apologetic for his Aš'arī School of theology written by the Damascene historian Ibn 'Asākir (d. 1176), we learn of Ibn Fūrak's charitable work for the sick, tireless rate of publication, and service in the structures of his Sufi order. Ibn 'Asākir also reports (on the authority of al-Quṣayrī) that Ibn Fūrak told a story of having been taken in chains to Shiraz after an accusation of creedal error only to catch sight at daybreak on arrival of a mosque inscription "God takes care of his servants," (Quran 39:36, az-Zumar) and to know in his heart he would soon be released.

According to Ibn 'Asākir, Ibn Fūrak taught first in Iraq, then moved to Rayy, where he was involved in theological disputes. He next received a commission to Nishapur, where the authorities built him both a madrasa and an infirmary, and then when his published works in theology and law had reached almost one hundred, he was summoned to Ghazna. In Ghazna, which lies in what is now eastern Afghanistan, Maḥmūd b. Sebūktigin (r. 998–1030) was leading an empire he had created that stretched from Iran to India. Maḥmūd was engaged in a political process of policing theological disputes in the emerging consensus that would in later centuries become Sunni Islam. According to Ibn 'Asākir, Ibn Fūrak engaged

19. Key (2011), (2012).

20. Al-Quṣayrī (1966, 1:22). Translation: al-Quṣayrī (2007).

21. Al-Quṣayrī (1966, 2:749; cf. 2:536f).

in intense dispute with the followers of a rival school of theology (al-Karrāmīyah), and on his return journey to Nishapur “was poisoned” and died.²²

The biographical tradition we have access to today does not produce just cross-references that enable us to fill in the gaps. It also reports from sources that are lost. Ibn ‘Asākir’s work on Ibn Fūrak used a biographical dictionary that Ibn Fūrak himself had written, which is now lost: *Ṭabaqāt al-Mutakallimīn*.²³ In his dictionary of adherents to the Šāfi‘ī legal school, the Hadith scholar Ibn aṣ-Šalāḥ (d. 1245) reported a biography of Ibn Fūrak that he attributed to the now-lost history of al-Ḥākim an-Nīsāpūrī (d. 1014). This biography confirms the information in Ibn ‘Asākir and may well have been its source. To add extra color, al-Ḥākim via Ibn aṣ-Šalāḥ also reported that Ibn Fūrak attributed his study of theology to the moment when a legal scholar whom he was frequenting was stumped by one of Ibn Fūrak’s hermeneutical questions. The scholar covered up his ignorance with bluster and was corrected by another authority, and that second authority was subsequently recommended to Ibn Fūrak. Ibn Fūrak decided he had to study this discipline for himself.²⁴

Thus far, we have dealt with hagiography. Ibn Fūrak has appeared as an admired and influential figure whose achievements and movements are reported in multiple sources. But he did not die peacefully in his bed, and the theological controversy that (may have) killed him reverberated across the Islamic world. It reverberates in the biographical tradition. Writing in the thirteenth century, Ibn aṣ-Šalāḥ alerts us to a near-contemporary of Ibn Fūrak, albeit from thousands of miles to the west. The famous Andalusian legal scholar Ibn Ḥazm celebrated what he claimed was the execution of Ibn Fūrak by Maḥmūd of Ghazna as punishment for an alleged speech crime: Ibn Fūrak had maintained that the prophet Muḥammad was a “messenger” during his lifetime and then just a “prophet” thereafter (the title, “messenger” was usually reserved for prophets who brought divine scripture, making “prophet” a broader and less prestigious category). Ibn Ḥazm held that Ibn Fūrak had contradicted the plain statements in the Quran and elsewhere that “Muḥammad is the messenger of God,” statements that occur without explicit temporal restrictions on their reference.²⁵ The legal school that Ibn Ḥazm played a large part in creating (*aṣ-Zāhirīyah*) was, after all, founded on exactly this sort of methodology, antithetical to the careful ontological parsing

22. Ibn ‘Asākir (1928, 232–33). Cf. Allard (1965, 321–29). Allard’s study predates the availability of most of the sources I have used.

23. Ibn ‘Asākir (1928, 125.1). Thanks to Rodrigo Adem, who is working on a study and translation of Ibn Fūrak, for this reference.

24. Ibn aṣ-Šalāḥ (1992, 1:136–38).

25. Ibn Ḥazm (1899–1903, 4:215). Cf. Massignon (1982, 3:199).

of Ibn Fūrak. For Ibn Ḥazm, if the Quran said Muḥammad “is” the messenger of God, then Ibn Fūrak was not allowed to restrict that “is” by saying Muḥammad was first a messenger and then a prophet. To give a brief preview of my arguments in chapter 5, Ibn Ḥazm and Ibn Fūrak shared a belief that names and naming mattered, and that what one called God had a direct connection to one’s salvation. But they disagreed about how accuracy was determined. For Ibn Ḥazm, *ḥaḳīqah* was literal word use in divine revelation, a precedent that had to be followed. For Ibn Fūrak, *ḥaḳīqah* was cognitive accuracy: the ability of human language to get at the truth about God.

Ibn aṣ-Ṣalāḥ was, like al-Quṣayrī, Ibn ‘Asākir, and al-Ḥākim, sympathetic to Ibn Fūrak. He denied that Ibn Fūrak had ever actually taken such a position about the use of the term “messenger.” Ibn aṣ-Ṣalāḥ attributed Ibn Ḥazm’s accusation to a slander against Ibn Fūrak’s Aṣ‘arī theological school by their rivals in Ghazna, the Karrāmīyah. Ibn Fūrak’s own work appears to bear out this defense; he wrote that God can, if he wants, make a single messenger serve for every nation on earth (thus implying that the category is not necessarily bound by time and place),²⁶ and in this discussion of controversies concerning the category of “messenger,” he was silent on the question of whether “once a messenger always a messenger” was true for Muḥammad.²⁷

Ibn aṣ-Ṣalāḥ was actively engaged in policing the boundaries of creedal positioning, which required clear determinations of which scholars fall where in the biographical taxonomies. He was keen to give his readers in the madrasa an explanation for Ibn Ḥazm’s attack. He explained that the Karrāmīyah slander reported by Ibn Ḥazm in fact stemmed from their misreading of a different theological controversy, that of whether a saint knew he was a saint. Ibn aṣ-Ṣalāḥ directed his readers to al-Quṣayrī, who had indeed reported that Ibn Fūrak maintained in the face of opposition (including al-Quṣayrī himself) that the saint was unaware of his sainthood, because were he to be confident in it, he would no longer fear God. Ibn aṣ-Ṣalāḥ also wrote that al-Quṣayrī explained Ibn Fūrak’s position further (I have not been able to find the text in al-Quṣayrī’s published works) as referring to the feeling of being a saint, not the statement of whether or not one is a saint.²⁸ This extra statement functions, in this biographical entry, as a gloss on Ibn Fūrak’s position, allowing the reader to understand that the saint may well not feel like a saint (and thereby still be afraid of God) but would still be able to say he was a saint (and thereby perform as a Sufi in the order). The move is typical of the archive; its goal is the stability and integrity of the archive itself.

26. Ibn Fūrak (1987, 175.16).

27. Ibn Fūrak (1987, 174–76), (1999, 128–29).

28. Ibn aṣ-Ṣalāḥ (1992, 1:138), al-Quṣayrī (1966, 2:662).

As the centuries passed, the bibliographers of the madrasa continued to place Ibn Fūrak in the mainstream, either by repeating and synthesizing the early accounts discussed above, as Ibn Ḥallikān (d. 1282) did,²⁹ or by including extra detail that would be significant to their readership, as did Taqī ad-Dīn aṣ-Ṣarīfīnī (d. 1244) and aḏ-Ḍahabī. Aṣ-Ṣarīfīnī, for whom Ibn Fūrak was the first entry in his biographical dictionary of Hadith transmitters who worked in the city of Nishapur, wrote that Ibn Fūrak was a transmitter of the Hadith collection of the ninth-century Abū Dāwūd, which in aṣ-Ṣarīfīnī's thirteenth century was becoming one of the six canonical Sunni collections.³⁰ Aḏ-Ḍahabī repeats that information in his biographical dictionary,³¹ and in his even more voluminous history he also takes the time to enumerate the controversy with Ibn Ḥazm discussed above. There, aḏ-Ḍahabī criticizes Ibn Fūrak, nevertheless prefers Ibn Fūrak to Ibn Ḥazm, and overall sides with Maḥmūd of Ghazna, whose empire must have looked in hindsight like a great moment for Sunni Islam.³² Then, in the entry on Maḥmūd himself, aḏ-Ḍahabī relates a suggestive anecdote in which Ibn Fūrak appears to represent theology's potential to lead people astray. Ibn Fūrak was telling the ruler that God should not be described as being high, because that would open the door to God being described as low, when Maḥmūd exclaimed: "I wasn't going to describe him at all until you started pressuring me!" Ibn Fūrak is rendered speechless and dies shortly thereafter, galled [literally! "They say his gall bladder split."³³] The implication in the anecdote is that the two events are connected, and that Maḥmūd is right to distrust the complicated theories of the scholars. This is the traditionist attitude to theology that we encountered with ar-Rāḡib, who wrote: "The discussions about whether God wills for himself, or whether he wills with an eternal will, or with a created will, and if with a created will is the will in a specific place or not in a specific place—God has protected us from needing to deal with these matters!"³⁴

Tāḡ ad-Dīn as-Subkī (d. 1368) has perhaps the longest biographical entry on Ibn Fūrak. He includes a complete review of the sources reviewed above with his critical commentary, extra hagiographic anecdotes such as the claim that Ibn Fūrak would stay up all night reading the Quran in any house he visited if there were one available, and an explicit justification of the need to revisit the question

29. Ibn Ḥallikān (1948, 3:402).

30. Aṣ-Ṣarīfīnī (1989, 15–16).

31. Aḏ-Ḍahabī (2004, 11:109–110).

32. Aḏ-Ḍahabī (1990–2001, 28:147–49).

33. Aḏ-Ḍahabī (1990–2001, 29:73).

34. والكلامُ في أنَّ الله تعالى هو مریدٌ لنفسه أو بإرادة قديمة أو مُحدثة وأنه وإن كان مریداً بإرادة مُحدثة. Key (2012, 81), ar-Rāḡib (1988a, 270).

of his controversial death. As-Subkī does not blame Maḥmūd of Ghazna but rather calls the scene before the ruler fake news and the poisoning a response by the Karrāmīyah to their failure to convince Maḥmūd to execute Ibn Fūrak on false charges. As-Subkī sides with aḍ-Ḍahabī against Ibn Ḥazm; Ibn Fūrak, against aḍ-Ḍahabī; and al-Quṣayrī, against Ibn Fūrak. The entry is an exercise in theological defense of Ibn Fūrak, preservation of the reputations of the ruler Maḥmūd and the mystic al-Quṣayrī, and professional self-promotion vis-à-vis his slightly older contemporary aḍ-Ḍahabī.³⁵

Apart from providing a fascinating window into the biographical and taxonomical processes of Islamic scholarship, what this complicated accounting of theological controversies shows us is that Ibn Fūrak was widely read among the great scholars of his time, famous in the century of his death as far afield as Islamic Spain, and while he was controversial in terms of what he said about God, he was not tangential to the conversation. It is worth stressing again that the point of contention between Ibn Fūrak and Maḥmūd was linguistic; it was an argument about what to say, and how to talk about God. Ibn Fūrak had wanted to police Maḥmūd's speech according to the logic that he had developed, but Maḥmūd resisted. At the interface between politics and theology, everyone was focused on language.

For the purposes of this book, I have used Ibn Fūrak's survey of the creedal positions of al-Aš'arī, *Muğarrad Maqālāt al-Aš'arī* (*An Abstraction from the Statements of al-Aš'arī*), in Daniel Gimaret's exemplary edition. I will also make some use of Ibn Fūrak's legal and hermeneutical work.³⁶ The *Muğarrad* is, however, much more than a survey. Abū Ḥasan al-Aš'arī (d. 935) was the eponymous figure around whose ideas the Aš'arī School of theological doctrine was founded. It was this Aš'arī School that provided a set of dialectically established creedal positions that self-identified as universally Muslim and around which Sunni Islam would coalesce in a process of distinguishing itself from its opponents.³⁷ Ibn Fūrak studied in Baghdad at the beginning of his career with one of al-Aš'arī's students, Abū al-Ḥasan al-Bāhili, and then wrote at the beginning of the *Muğarrad* that the work was designed to meet an express need for knowledge of the principles that governed al-Aš'arī's theories and upon which al-Aš'arī's dialectical successes against his opponents had been built. It was a matter of gathering "both that for which there is textual evidence and that for which there is no textual evidence, in which latter case I have answered according to what is appropriate for al-Aš'arī's principles and rules. I will also tell you where there are internal inconsistencies in al-Aš'arī, where there are consistent doctrines, and where we have resolved

35. As-Subkī (1964–, 4:127–35).

36. Ibn Fūrak (1906), (1999), (2003).

37. For a concise review: Heinen (2011).

inconsistency by selecting what is closest to his schools of thought and most suited to his principles.”³⁸ A principle was “that upon which knowledge of other things is built.” Ibn Fūrak thought that if he laid out al-Aš‘arī’s principles, he would need to give fewer examples.³⁹ Ibn Fūrak did indeed then explicitly disagree with al-Aš‘arī’s positions. Al-Aš‘arī thought that holy men who were not prophets or messengers could be completely immune from sin, but Ibn Fūrak wrote that “nothing like that is said by us.”⁴⁰ Ibn Fūrak highlighted inconsistencies between al-Aš‘arī’s published works on, for example, the question of whether or not God’s eternality is in his self, and confidently decided that, according to “our community of skilled theologians,” it is.⁴¹ He wrote that al-Aš‘arī’s followers were largely ignorant of some of the contradictions within his oeuvre, and that this may have been due to inconsistent distribution of al-Aš‘arī’s published works.⁴²

In his book’s closing paragraph, Ibn Fūrak was confident that he had achieved the goal he set himself.⁴³ A diffuse and sometimes contradictory set of dialectical debates had become a single, internally consistent, ordered and referenced manual of creedal positioning. The logic to which it adhered was that of Ibn Fūrak, even if he couched his statements in language that attributed the theology to al-Aš‘arī. Al-Aš‘arī’s own debates, and by extension the teaching of al-Bāhili, had failed to produce an account of al-Aš‘arī’s governing principles, so Ibn Fūrak had taken on the task and then used the rules and principles identified to tidy up the doctrine. What better place could there be for us to look for the conceptual vocabulary of the eleventh century than a work self-conceived as the imposition of a consistent eleventh-century epistemology (Ibn Fūrak’s) on a diffuse tenth-century theology (al-Aš‘arī’s)?

Scholarship on Islamic theology has already made good use of Ibn Fūrak’s work as a source for al-Aš‘arī’s ideas, an approach of which he would have approved. This is a fair caricature of Ibn Fūrak in the work of A. I. Sabra, Daniel Gimaret,

وَأَنْ أَجْمَعَ لَكُمْ مِنْهَا مُتَّفَرِّقَهَا فِي كِتَابِهِ مَا يَوْجَدُ مِنْهَا مَنْصُوصاً لَهُ وَمَا لَا يَوْجَدُ مَنْصُوصاً لَهُ أَجَبْنَا فِيهِ 38. عَلَى حَسَبِ مَا يَلِيقُ بِأُصُولِهِ وَقَوَاعِدِهِ وَأَعْرَفَكُمْ مَعَ ذَلِكَ مَا اخْتَلَفَ قَوْلُهُ فِيهِ فِي كِتَابِهِ وَمَا قَطَعَ بِهِ مِنْهُمَا وَمَا لَمْ يَقْطَعْ بِأَحَدِهِمَا وَرَأَيْنَا أَنَّ أَحَدَهُمَا أَوْلَى بِمَذَاهِبِهِ وَأَلْتَبَقَ بِأُصُولِهِ فَبَيَّنَّا عَلَيْهِ. Ibn Fūrak (1987, 9.5–8).

39. حُدُّ الْأَصْلُ هُوَ مَا يُبْنَى عَلَيْهِ غَيْرُهُ عَلَيْهِ. Ibn Fūrak (1999, 146).

وَالْإِبَانَةُ عَنْ كَشْفِ أُصُولِهِ فِي هَذَا الْبَابِ تُغْنِي عَنِ الْجَوَابِ فِي تَفْرِيعِ الْمَسَائِلِ الَّتِي تَتَفَرَّعُ عَنْ هَذَا الْأَصْلِ. Ibn Fūrak (1987, 134.19–20).

40. وَلَا يُقَالُ مِثْلُ ذَلِكَ عِنْدَنَا. Ibn Fūrak (1987, 126.16).

41. وَعَلَيْهِ الْحَدَّاقُ مِنْ أَصْحَابِنَا الْمُنَاطِرِينَ عَنْهُ. Ibn Fūrak (1987, 326.7–12).

42. وَهَذَا [الْخِلَافُ] غَيْرُ مَعْرُوفٍ عِنْدَ أَصْحَابِهِ لِعِزَّةِ وَجُودِ هَذَا الْكِتَابِ عِنْدَ أَكْثَرِهِمْ وَبَعْضُهُ لِقَلَّةِ عِنَايَتِهِمْ [بِتَدْبِيرِهَا] لَعَلَّ الصَّوَابَ: بِتَدْبِيرِهِ (جِيمَارِيه) Ibn Fūrak (1987, 165.11–12).

43. Ibn Fūrak (1987, 338.24–339.2).

and Louis Massignon. (Cf. Jan Thiele.)⁴⁴ Ibn Fūrak will instead appear in this book *qua* Ibn Fūrak, an experiment in reading him that permits his authorial voice to come through, both in the criticism of al-Aš‘arī detailed above and, more engagingly, in his remarks about the state of the eleventh-century field. Expressing sentiments familiar to an academic seeking to publish in any age, Ibn Fūrak wrote that a monograph on al-Aš‘arī’s doctrine already existed, that it was full of errors and mistakes, and, most damaging, that it had already “spread throughout the lands!”⁴⁵ Comfortingly, perhaps, posterity was kind to Ibn Fūrak’s work, which survives in print today while that of his rival, Muḥammad b. Muṭarrāf aḍ-Ḍabbī al-Astarābādī, is lost.⁴⁶

Ibn Sīnā

When we come to review the biography of our third scholar, Abū ‘Alī Ḥusayn Ibn Sīnā (d. 1037), the situation is completely different. Rather than trawling through the untranslated Arabic and Persian biographical and bibliographical archive, we are dealing with a philosopher whose Latinized name, Avicenna, is familiar to all students of European Scholasticism and Humanism, and whose cultural ubiquity is revealed by, *inter alia*, the appearance of his portrait in medical-facility waiting rooms across the Middle East. He was a successful politician in a turbulent period of history, a logician and philosopher whose work reshaping the Aristotelian and Neoplatonic traditions transformed the subsequent millennium of Arabic intellectual endeavor, and the doctor who took over from Galen as the standard reference in Europe until the seventeenth century. We are also in an entirely different situation when it comes to European-language scholarship. From his autobiography, and from the many accounts of his contemporaries, we know about his life and how he imagined it. In Dimitri Gutas’s *Avicenna and the Aristotelian Tradition*, we have a primer and reference to this information and, more important, an analytical map of Ibn Sīnā’s works and their engagement with the Arabic Aristotle of the eleventh century.⁴⁷ Much of Ibn Sīnā has been translated into English (long after it was translated into Latin), and monographs and collections on various aspects of his philosophy and legacy abound.⁴⁸ Less work has been done on Ibn Sīnā’s philosophy of language, and it is here that I will focus my attention. Ibn Sīnā will

44. Gimaret (1988), (1990); Massignon (1982); Sabra (2006), (2009); Thiele (2016a, 229–30).

45. أعلمُ أنه قد انتشر هذا الكتاب في البلدان. Ibn Fūrak (1987, 323.14).

46. Gimaret (1985, 198–201).

47. Gutas (1988).

48. Good starting points: Adamson (2013), McGinnis and Reisman (2004), Reisman and al-Rahim (2003).

also represent, for my purposes, the discipline of Arabic logic that was proving so attractive and productive in the eleventh century.

There is a famous and possibly apocryphal anecdote from the beginning of the thirteenth century that during a discussion of lexicography at the court of ‘Alā’ ad-Dawlah Muḥammad, the ruler and patron/employer of Ibn Sīnā (r. ca. 1007–41 in Isfahan and beyond), the prominent lexicographer Abū Maṣṣūr al-Ġabbān said to Ibn Sīnā that he did not care to compete with a logician: “We do not approve of your statements about the Arabic lexicon.” Ibn Sīnā was reportedly embarrassed, and the criticism stung him into writing a series of epistles on lexical niceties (including a lexicon or glossary, *The Language of the Arabs*).⁴⁹ Sure enough, when ‘Alā’ ad-Dawlah tested Abū Maṣṣūr on a later court occasion, Ibn Sīnā was prepared to jump in and demonstrate a command of Arabic lexical rarities and provenances that shamed his opponent and led to a prolonged apology.⁵⁰ Ibn Sīnā clearly represented the discipline of logic for his contemporaries. This anecdote shows us not only that in the Arabic eleventh century there were charged discussions about lexicography at court but also that the totemic status of the study of word meanings was such that a scholar whose power spanned academia and politics could be stung into writing a dictionary. Ibn Sīnā’s eleventh-century desire to perform literary expertise in addition to medicine and philosophy would be reflected in the archive of subsequent centuries: the twenty-page biographical entry on Ibn Sīnā in Ibn Abī Uṣaybi‘ah’s (d. 1270) history of medicine includes eight solid pages of complex poetry composed by the logician on subjects including old age, the soul, and love (“It is as if I am magnetic, and she is iron.”)⁵¹

Al-Ġurġānī

Al-Ġurġānī’s reputation as the greatest theorist of Arabic poetics is a reputation cemented in the madrasa system, largely through the efforts of the great polymath Faḥr ad-Dīn ar-Rāzī (d. 1209), who wrote a systematized madrasa-ready version of al-Ġurġānī’s theories.⁵² Abū Bakr ‘Abd al-Qāhir b. ‘Abd ar-Raḥmān al-Ġurġānī died in 1078 or 1081 after a life spent writing and teaching in his native town of Gorgan at the southeastern tip of the Caspian Sea, in what is now Iran. This is about as much as we know of his biography; in stark contrast to Ibn Sīnā and Ibn Fūrak he maintained a stellar reputation unadorned by biographical (or indeed autobiographical) information. (See Lara Harb in 2016 and, from 1944,

49. Gutas (1988, 216, 442–44).

50. أنت منطقي ما نعارضك وكلامك في لغة العرب ما نرضاه. Al-Qifī (2009, 4:176–77).

51. فَكَأَنِّي | قَدْ صِرْتُ مَغْطِيسَ وَهِيَ حَدِيدٌ . . . Ibn Abī Uṣaybi‘ah (1884, 2:16.7). But cf. Gutas (1988, 511).

52. Ar-Rāzī (1992).

Muḥammad Ḥalafallāh's review of the scholarship in Arabic up to that point.)⁵³ We know almost as little about his life as we do about ar-Rāḡib's, the difference between the two being largely that al-Ġurġānī's name would be associated with his ideas throughout the millennium after his death, whereas ar-Rāḡib's theories were either submerged in the facticity of his lexicography or appropriated by the more famous al-Ġazālī.

Al-Ġurġānī's efforts in teaching (or the success of his pupils) meant that when the madrasa bibliographers came to review his career they had plenty of evidence of other scholars studying with him or commenting on his works.⁵⁴ But al-Ġurġānī first appears in extant surveys as a poet, in the collection of contemporaneous poetry gathered by his slightly younger contemporary and Baghdadi bureaucrat 'Alī b. Ḥasan al-Bāḥarzī (d. 1075). Al-Ġurġānī's entry is ten lines of poetry in praise of the dominant politician of the day, the founder of the madrasa Niẓām al-Mulk (on whom more below).⁵⁵ Then a century later, in his biographical dictionary of literary figures, Ibn al-Anbārī (d. 1181) tells us that al-Ġurġānī was one of the greatest grammarians of the age, and that his teacher Ibn 'Abd al-Wārīṭ was, atypically for this period, the only teacher that al-Ġurġānī ever had, because he never left Gorgan.⁵⁶ Ibn 'Abd al-Wārīṭ (d. 1030) was the maternal nephew of the great grammarian Abū 'Alī al-Fārisī (d. 987),⁵⁷ on whose studies of morphology and syntax al-Ġurġānī wrote voluminous commentaries,⁵⁸ which are extant (and have been studied by Antonella Ghersetti) along with his shorter pedagogical grammar books.⁵⁹ Even in the thirteenth century with Ibn al-Qifṭī (d. 1248 and one source of the Ibn Sīnā anecdote above), al-Ġurġānī remains largely a grammarian notable for not leaving Gorgan. Beyond grammar, al-Qifṭī mentions al-Ġurġānī's work on Quranic inimitability, which "showed his knowledge of the principles of eloquence and the path of concision,"⁶⁰ and "a number of scattered discussions that he fixed in a volume, which was like a notebook for him."⁶¹

53. Ḥalafallāh (1944, 14–23), Harb (2017). See also Harb and Key forthcoming in the *Journal of Abbasid Studies* 5(1–2), a special issue on al-Ġurġānī.

54. Ibn al-Anbārī (1970, 274), al-Qifṭī (2009, 1:222, 223, 343; 2:100, 248, 306, 355; 3:118).

55. Al-Bāḥarzī (1993, 1:499–500).

56. Ibn al-Anbārī (1970, 264–65).

57. Ibn al-Anbārī (1970, 251), al-Qifṭī (2009, 3:116–18).

58. On morphology: al-Ġurġānī (2007). On syntax: al-Ġurġānī (1982).

59. Ghersetti (2011), al-Ġurġānī (196–), (1972), (1987 (1988), (1990).

60. وله إعجازُ القرآن دَلٌّ على معرفته بأصول البلاغة ومجاز الإيجاز. This book is al-Ġurġānī's *Ar-Risālah aš-Šāfiyah fī Wuġūh al-I'ğāz*, printed in al-Ġurġānī (1992a, 573f). Also al-Ġurġānī (1959b).

61. وله مسائلٌ مَشْهُورَةٌ أثبتتها في مجلد هو كالتذكرة له. Al-Qifṭī (2009, 2:188–90).

The key moment for al-Ġurġānī's reputation came slightly later in the thirteenth century with the great polymath Faḥr ad-Dīn ar-Rāzī. His reading of al-Ġurġānī (although not unprecedented; see Noy)⁶² would dominate the madrasa and consequently dominate intellectual history. The works of al-Ġurġānī that ar-Rāzī synthesized in his concise textbook were not the works of grammar noted by the biographers. He wrote that the most important knowledge, the noblest discipline, was that of language, without which nothing else could be known. But people were confused about how language worked and about its principles until al-Ġurġānī, "the Glory of Islam," came and laid out those principles. Ar-Rāzī wrote that al-Ġurġānī "wrote two books in this field, the first of which he called *Dalā' il al-I' ḡāz* [*Indications of Quranic Inimitability*] and the second of which he called *Asrār al-Balāġah* [*Secrets of Eloquence*]."⁶³ These two books are the subject of significant English-language scholarship by Margaret Larkin and Kamal Abu Deeb,⁶⁴ and are the texts I focus on in my final chapter. They are also the subject of a forthcoming special issue of the *Journal of Abbasid Studies*, in which Avigail Noy and Matthew Keegan successfully expand the story of al-Ġurġānī's reception beyond ar-Rāzī, and Harb and I briefly review the secondary scholarship.⁶⁵ The *Asrār* and *Dalā' il* were a singular event in the history of Arabic language theory. But they required reading, and here ar-Rāzī started a trope for al-Ġurġānī's biography: that his works were disorganized: "But al-Ġurġānī, may God have mercy on him, because he was bringing out the principles and divisions of this science, its requirements and rules, neglected to take care of arrangement into sections and chapters, and was also exceedingly prolix."⁶⁶ I will discuss the accuracy of this characterization and its theoretical implications in the chapter on al-Ġurġānī. Ar-Rāzī felt that he needed to rewrite al-Ġurġānī for the madrasa, although the chronological gap between them was less than two hundred years and the language, Arabic, was the same.

THE MADRASA

Looking through the archive for the biographies of these four scholars does not just remind us how dependent we are on its taxonomies, heresiographies, biographical

62. Noy (2016, 140–44).

63. Al-Ġurġānī (1954), (1992a); ar-Rāzī (1992, 50–51).

64. Abu Deeb (1979), Larkin (1995).

65. Avigail Noy, Matthew Keegan, and Harb and Key: all forthcoming in the *Journal of Abbasid Studies* 5(1–2), a special issue on al-Ġurġānī.

66. ولكنّه رحمه الله لكونه مستخرجاً لأصول هذا العلم وأقسامه وشرائطه وأحكامه أهمل رعاية ترتيب الفصول والأبواب وأطنب في الكلام كل الإطناب. ar-Rāzī (1992, 51).

dictionaries, and syntheses. The archive also reminds us that the story of their works was written in institutional settings they could not have foreseen. It cannot have been apparent to al-Ġurġānī, writing his long iterative notebooks of theory, that there would be a pressing institutional need for his ideas to be turned into textbooks less than two hundred years after his death. The creation of that need is the story of an educational institution: the madrasa. It can only now be written with hindsight by historians for whom the eleventh century appears as a turning point for intellectual history. The madrasa was the Islamic educational structure that came out of the mosque, turned into something like a university, and would go on to dominate the next millennium.

With several centuries of intellectual production across a range of confessional, professional, and aesthetic disciplines behind them, tenth- and eleventh-century Arabic-language scholars were engaged in complex theoretical debates. The debates associated with language were the most advanced, not least because they had started first. For example, the glossary of the Quran written by ar-Rāġib at the start of the 1000s came more than two hundred years after the first extant dictionary had been written by al-Ĥalīl b. Aḥmad (d. ca. 786), the teacher of Sibawayh.⁶⁷ But while these disciplines have been shown to be mature by the tenth and eleventh centuries,⁶⁸ they had not yet been significantly impacted by institutional structures. Scholarship had been taking place in homes, courts, mosques, and in a wide variety of structures with variant relationships to the state (a state that tended, as a gross generalization, to restrict itself to the military and fiscal aspects of politics, leaving sociocultural hegemony to be negotiated by the scholars). While the madrasa that made its appearance in the eleventh century did not necessarily change the balance of power between society and state in the way its founders may have intended, it did change the venue of scholarship. Nor did the madrasa necessarily change the content of scholarship. But what it did do was slowly change the form, giving impetus to existing trends toward the solidification of genre and disciplinary boundaries, and increasing the degree of specialization and professionalization among scholars, whether they were professional bureaucrats (*kuttāb*, on whom in this period see Andrew Peacock),⁶⁹ teachers, authors, or any combinations thereof.

With hindsight, scholarship does look different in the centuries following the famous eleventh-century madrasas founded across what is now Iraq, Iran, Afghanistan, and Turkmenistan (in Baghdad, Balkh, Nishapur, Herat, Isfahan, Basra, Merv, Amol, and Mosul) by the Persian vizier of the Turkish Seljuk dynasty,

67. Al-Ĥalīl b. Aḥmad (1980), ar-Rāġib (1992).

68. Heinrichs (1995).

69. Peacock (2015, 189–215, esp. 208f).

Nizām al-Mulk (d. 1092).⁷⁰ If we look only at theories of language, many of the new ideas that I deal with in this book as cross-genre conversations become in the twelfth, thirteenth, and fourteenth centuries disciplines of their own, with textbooks, manuals, and disciplinary identities to be taxonomized. The structured education that took place in madrasas needed curricula, and the formal consequences were inevitable. This does not in any way imply that there was change in the degree of innovation, creativity, or theoretical complexity across Arabic scholarship. (Some final rebuttals of that old trope have been provided by Robert Wisnovsky and Khaled El-Rouayheb.)⁷¹ What it does mean is that while in the eleventh century we have to skip across genres and disciplines to establish the usage of *ma' nā*, in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries we can look at two disciplines with their own textbooks and rules ('*ilm al-ma' ānī*, "the science of *ma' ānī* [the plural of *ma' nā*]" and '*ilm al-waḍ'*, "the science of word coinage"). But these new disciplines cannot be understood without their eleventh-century heritage, and the clarity they provide is illusory. There is little to be gained from our reading a textbook in either field without an understanding of the conceptual vocabulary that informed it; it would be like trying to comprehend the theory of relativity without knowing what Einstein and his contemporaries meant when they used the word "gravity."⁷² Furthermore, these two disciplines do not by any means represent the full breadth of usage of *ma' nā* after the eleventh century. '*Ilm al-ma' ānī* was the label for a subsection of the new "Science of Eloquence," one of the branches of formal literary study developed from al-Ġurġānī's work. But at the same time, the word *ma' nā* was being used to write and develop theories in all the other literary subsections, as well as outside the study of poetry and poetics altogether. And just as in the eleventh century, this apparent terminological confusion does not appear to have been a problem for the scholars actually doing the work. It becomes a problem only when we come to translation. I think that we have to look at the eleventh century in order to understand how *ma' nā* worked in the madrasa centuries. The purpose of this book is to engage with the interacting genres that preceded the influential madrasa textbooks and their associated disciplinary identities.

It is my hope that this book on the eleventh century will help scholars of Arabic poetics, logic, and intellectual history more broadly deal with occurrences of *ma' nā* and *ḥaqīqah* in the thirteenth through the nineteenth centuries. My reading of *ḥaqīqah* as a label for accurate processes from the early periods onward could productively connect with Khaled El-Rouayheb's analyses of fifteenth- and sixteenth-century scholarship as "suffused with the rhetoric of *taḥqīq*, that is, of the need to

70. Melchert (2011).

71. El-Rouayheb (2006), (2015); Wisnovsky (2004a).

72. Cf. Kuhn (2000, 231).

critically assess received scholarly propositions.”⁷³ My experiment of reading *ma‘nā* as “mental content” could help scholars of the later ‘*ilm al-ma‘ānī*’ understand how *ma‘nā* was both the label for a formal subsection of a discipline and also used across that whole discipline and beyond without contradiction. My experiment could also help scholars of ‘*ilm al-waḍ‘*’ understand exactly what the object of the process of word coinage was and where that object was located. For the object of concern in ‘Aḍud ad-Dīn al-Īǧī’s (d. 1355) *Risālat al-Waḍ‘*’ was *ma‘nā*, and the separate linguistic discipline created by al-Īǧī and his commentators on this foundational two-page treatise was concerned with mapping the ways that vocal forms (*alfāz*) indicated mental contents. It did so through a taxonomy that combined grammatical parts of speech (such as noun, verb, and proper noun) with the logical categories of universal and particular to create a complete linguistic map of word coinage. Al-Īǧī used *ma‘nā* both to talk about the mental content of other scholars (“the *ma‘nā* of the statement of the grammarians that . . .”) and to construct his own theories about the functioning of prepositions and relative particles.⁷⁴

The ‘*ilm al-ma‘ānī*’ created by as-Sakkākī (d. 1229) and al-Ḥaṭīb al-Qazwīnī (d. 1338) in *Miftāḥ al-‘Ulūm* (*The Key to the Sciences*) and *Talḥiṣ al-Miftāḥ* (*Condensed Version of the Key*) was the study of syntax, inspired by the work of al-Ġurġānī himself. This disciplinary area of study excluded the consideration of, inter alia, comparison (*tašbih*), language that went beyond the lexicon (*mağāz*), antithesis (*muṭābaqaḥ*), and paronomasia (*tağnīs*), all of which still inevitably consisted of analysis of the poetic manipulation of *ma‘ānī* and were dealt with in ‘*ilm al-bayan*’ and ‘*ilm al-badī‘*’. (See Noy, Harb, and William E. Smyth.)⁷⁵ After the eleventh century *ma‘nā* was used both as a disciplinary label and to do theoretical work across multiple disciplines. Scholars writing in Arabic across the madrasa centuries continued to use the word *ma‘nā* to develop and to name their studies of what language was and how language worked. *Ma‘nā* remained core conceptual vocabulary for many centuries after our four scholars’ deaths.

73. El-Rouayheb (2015, 32), Ibrahim (2013, 396).

74. . . . أن معنى قول النحاة . . . فإن الحرف يدل على معنى في غيره وتحصله بما هو معنى فيه . . . والموصول أمرٌ مُتَّبِعٌ مِنْهُمَّ يتبعين عنده بمعنى فيه. Al-Īǧī (2010, 10.14, 21–22), as-Samarqandī (2010, 29.13–19). For more on ‘*ilm al-waḍ‘*’, see Weiss (2014).

75. Harb (2013, 84f), (2015, 302); Noy (2016); Smyth (1986).