

Introduction:

Al-Shahrastānī, Ismaʿilism and Philosophy

Tāj al-Dīn Abu'l-Faṭḥ Muḥammad b. 'Abd al-Karīm al-Shahrastānī (d. 548/1153) has long been known in modern scholarship as the author of the *Kitāb al-Milal wa'l-niḥal*, a comprehensive survey of the religions, sects and philosophical schools, first edited by W. Cureton in 1842–1846.¹ Although written from a distinctly Islamic point of view, the book has continued to attract attention and admiration for its non-polemical objectivity and the wide range of its investigation of the currents of human belief and religious thought. Its chapters on the non-Muslim faiths have been described as 'the high point of Muslim histories of religion'.² A modern French translation of the book with full annotation has been sponsored by UNESCO with a preface paying tribute to the author's spirit of tolerance.³

¹ Al-Shahrastānī, *Kitāb al-Milal wa'l-niḥal*, ed. W. Cureton (London, 1842–1846).

² Guy Monnot, 'al-Shahrastānī', EI2, vol. 9, p. 216.

³ Daniel Gimaret, Guy Monnot and Jean Jolivet, *Livre des Religions et des Sectes*, vols 1–2 (Paris-Louvain, 1986–1993), Preface by M.A. Sinaceur.

Al-Shahrastānī's major work on scholastic Muslim theology, the *Kitāb Nihāyat al-iqdām fī 'ilm al-kalām*, was first published by A. Guillaume in 1934.⁴ It revealed his searching interest in the basic questions of Islamic theology and reflected his expert learning in the Ash'arī school tradition in which he had been brought up. As an outstanding Shāfi'ī Ash'arī scholar, he had indeed taught for three years (511–514/1117–1120) at the Shāfi'ī Nizāmiyya Madrasa in Baghdad made famous by the earlier teaching activity of al-Ghazālī there.

A different aspect of al-Shahrastānī's religious thought was first highlighted by M.R. Jalālī Nā'inī and M.T. Dānishpazhūh in the 1960s. Both scholars noted definite Shi'ī and, more specifically, Isma'īli views in some of his works.⁵ These confirmed charges by several Sunni contemporaries of al-Shahrastānī that he, with all his erudition in the religious sciences, adhered to 'heretical doctrine'. Abū Sa'd al-Sam'ānī (d. 562/1166), who had heard him teach, reported that he was accused of inclining to the 'people of the mountain fortresses', i.e. the Nizārī Isma'īlis in Iran, and of spreading their 'heretical' teaching.⁶

Al-Shahrastānī's Isma'īli views have since been examined in detail by a number of scholars. They are most significant in three of his extant works. The first is a *Majlis*, a sermon in Persian on the two worlds of Creation and Order, delivered by him in Khuwārizm. It was first edited by Nā'inī and has been translated into French and analysed by Diane Steigerwald.⁷ The second is the Qur'an commentary *Mafātīḥ al-asrār wa-maṣābīḥ al-abrār* composed late in his life. Here he mentions

⁴ Alfred Guillaume, *The Summa Philosophiae of al-Shahrastānī* (London, 1934).

⁵ Muḥammad Ridā Jalālī Nā'inī, *Sharḥ-i ḥāt wa-āthār-i Hujjat al-ḥaqq Abū'l-Faṭḥ Muḥammad b. 'Abd al-Karīm b. Aḥmad Shahrastānī* (Tehran, 1343/1964); Muḥammad Taqī Dānishpazhūh, 'Dā'ī al-Du'āt Tāju'l-Dīn Shahrastānī', in *Nāma-yi Āstān-i Quds*, 7, no. 2 (1346/1968), pp. 71–80; 8 (1347/1969), pp. 61–71.

⁶ Al-Subkī, *Ṭabaqāt al-Shāfi'iyya al-kubrā*, ed. A.M. al-Ḥilw and M.M. al-Ṭanāḥī (Cairo, 1388/1969), vol. 6, p. 130.

⁷ Diane Steigerwald, *Majlis: Discours sur l'ordre et la création* (Saint-Nicolas, Québec, 1998).

having met a 'pious servant of God' who taught him the true methods and principles of Qur'anic exegesis, affirms the divine authority of the *ahl al-bayt*, the Family of the Prophet, to interpret the Qur'an, and in some passages uses Isma'ili terms and concepts in his exegesis. The extant part of the commentary has been published in facsimile and has been analysed in detail in a series of articles by G. Monnot.⁸ A critical edition is under preparation by M. 'Alī Ādharshab, of which the first volume has already appeared.⁹ The third work is al-Shahrastānī's refutation of Ibn Sinā's theology entitled *Kitāb al-Muṣāra' a*, first edited by Suhayr Muḥammad Mukhtār,¹⁰ and which is here re-edited with an English translation. The key thesis espoused by al-Shahrastānī in this work is the absolute transcendence of God above all being and comprehension as taught by the Isma'ili tradition. Its formulation tallies closely with doctrines he ascribed to the older Ismā'iliyya or Bāṭiniyya in his *Kitāb al-Milal wa'l-niḥal*.¹¹

None of al-Shahrastānī's contemporary Sunni critics suggested that he, while holding what they regarded as heretical views, actually joined the Isma'ili community. Born and educated as a Shāfi'i Sunni, he continued to identify with the Sunni community and followed the Shāfi'i ritual and legal practice to the end of his life. Yet his concept of Sunnism evidently moved far away from the contemporaneous orthodox understanding of it and expanded to allow Shi'i veneration of the Family of the Prophet and recognition of the religious authority

⁸ Al-Shahrastānī, *Mafātīḥ al-asrār wa-maṣābiḥ al-abrār* (Tehran, 1409/1989), 2 vols; Guy Monnot, 'Islam: exégèse coranique', in *Annuaire de l'Ecole des Hautes Études, Sections des sciences religieuses*, 90-9 (1981-1991).

⁹ Muḥammad 'Alī Ādharshab, *Tafsīr al-Shahrastānī al-musammā Mafātīḥ al-asrār wa-maṣābiḥ al-abrār*, vol. 1 (Tehran, 1417/1997).

¹⁰ Suhayr Muḥammad Mukhtār, ed. *Kitāb Muṣāra' at al-falāsifa* (Cairo, 1396/1976).

¹¹ Al-Shahrastānī, *Kitāb al-Milal wa'l-niḥal*, vol. 1, p. 147. The same doctrine is described by al-Shahrastānī as that of the Bāṭiniyya and a group of the Shi'a in his *Kitāb Nihāyat al-iqdām*, ed. Alfred Guillaume (London, 1934), pp. 128-30.

of the Shi'i Imams. In his Qur'an commentary the breadth of his concept expressed itself in an eclectic use of Sunni and Shi'i sources and a range of varying avenues of exegesis. In his *Majlis* and the *Muṣāra'a* his Isma'ili thought prevails more consistently. Al-Shahrastānī can thus be described as Sunni socially and communally, but as Shi'i and Isma'ili in some of his core beliefs and religious thought.

In his *Kitāb al-Milal wa'l-niḥal* al-Shahrastānī describes the teaching of the 'old Bāṭiniyya' in some detail and an objective, detached manner. He then goes on to state that the followers of the 'new preaching' (*da'wa jadīda*), i.e. the Nizārī Isma'ilis in Iran, had abandoned this teaching when al-Ḥasan b. al-Ṣabbāḥ began to recruit men and fortified himself in castles. Al-Ḥasan then concentrated entirely on arguing the need of mankind for a truthful Imam at all times and on explaining the way of identifying him. Al-Shahrastānī quotes the gist of al-Ḥasan b. al-Ṣabbāḥ's argument in his programmatic *Four Chapters* (*al-Fuṣūl al-arba'a*) and some other treatises. He charges, however, in a distinctly critical tone, that al-Ḥasan prohibited the common people from discussing religious sciences and prevented the elite from consulting older books (of the Isma'ili literary heritage) except for those who knew the value of each work and the rank of the author in each discipline. Al-Ḥasan's theological teaching to his followers did not go beyond the statement: 'Our God is the God of Muḥammad'. He told al-Shahrastānī: 'But you say: God is the God of the minds', implying that everyone was merely following the guidance of his own mind.

Al-Shahrastānī then complains that the followers of al-Ḥasan b. al-Ṣabbāḥ, whenever he sought to engage in theological discussion with any of them, would confine themselves to al-Ḥasan's statement 'Our God is the God of Muḥammad', and tell him that they had no need of him and could learn nothing from him. Al-Shahrastānī responded, conceding the need for an authoritative teacher and asking them where that teacher was, what he would impress on him in theology and what he would prescribe for him in rational matters. A teacher, he

suggested, is to be sought not for himself, but for his teaching. In his view, they had thus closed the door of knowledge and opened that of submission and blind imitation (*taqlid*). No person of sound mind would agree to adopt a doctrine without clear understanding or follow a path without evidence.¹²

From these critical remarks it is evident that al-Shahrastānī disapproved of al-Ḥasan b. al-Ṣabbāḥ's policies both in respect to his armed uprising against the Saljūqs and his restriction of the traditional Isma'ili teaching activity. The Isma'ilis were in his view part of the Muslim community, in some respects its core, and should not segregate themselves into a separate community. In spite of his basic espousal of traditional Isma'ili teaching, he was not prepared to join them in their seclusion. The temporary absence of the Imam, moreover, in his view could not justify the suspension of the religious teaching and reasoning based on the guidance of the past Imams. The teacher, as he saw it, was needed not for his physical presence, but for his teaching which awakened and guided the mind to true knowledge. Restriction of teaching, reasoning and debate rather closed the door to it.

The restriction on theological teaching did not last. Al-Shahrastānī's religious views, dismissed by the 'people of the mountain fortresses' as irrelevant during his time, would later attract their interest. The impact of his thought in the Nizārī community, however, seems to have been limited. His works did not become part of the communal literature and were not quoted. Only Naṣīr al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī, in his autobiographical account about his own path to Isma'ilism, mentions him prominently. He refers to him as *dā'ī al-du'āt* and records that his own father's maternal uncle and teacher was a pupil of his. Al-Ṭūsī's father in turn encouraged him to study all disciplines of knowledge and to listen to the discourse of the followers of various schools and doctrines.¹³ The title *dā'ī al-du'āt* here is,

¹² Al-Shahrastānī, *Kitāb al-Milal wa'l-niḥal*, pp. 147–52.

¹³ Naṣīr al-Dīn Ṭūsī, *Contemplation and Action: The Spiritual Autobiography of a Muslim Scholar*, ed. and tr. S.J. Badakhchani (London, 1998). Persian text p. 6, transl. p. 26.

no doubt, to be understood as merely honorary. While al-Shahrastānī was not a member of the Ismaʿīlī *daʿwa*, the passage indicates that his teaching and his works spread Ismaʿīlī thought and encouraged al-Ṭūsī to join the Nizārī community.

His contemporary Sunni critics also faulted al-Shahrastānī for his pursuit of philosophy. The Khwārizmian Maḥmūd b. Muḥammad b. ʿAbbās b. Arslān, author of a history of Khuwārizm, suggested that his inclination to Ismaʿīlī 'heresy' (*ilhād*) was the result of his turning away from the light of the *sharʿa* and his preoccupation with the darkneses of philosophy. He describes him as going to great lengths in backing and defending the doctrines of the philosophers and adds that he attended several of al-Shahrastānī's preaching sessions where 'there was no word of "God has said", nor "the Messenger of God has said", nor any answer to questions of the *sharʿa*.'¹⁴ This description, it should be noted, fits the extant *Majlis* of al-Shahrastānī only partly, for this sermon, while dealing with esoteric cosmology rather than religious law, abounds with quotations from the Qur'an and the hadith of the Prophet.

Ẓahīr al-Dīn al-Bayhaqī, in his supplement to Abū Sulaymān al-Sijistānī's biographies of the philosophers, *Tatimmat Ṣiwān al-ḥikma*, recounts that he criticised al-Shahrastānī for mingling religious exegesis with philosophy (*ḥikma*) and other disciplines in his Qur'an commentary, and told him that the Qur'an should be interpreted on the basis of the interpretation of the Companions of the Prophet and the generation following them (*ṭabīʿūn*). Philosophy, al-Bayhaqī added, must be kept separate from Qur'an exegesis and, in any case, al-Shahrastānī could not hope to combine religion (*sharʿa*) and philosophy in a better way than al-Ghazālī. Al-Shahrastānī was filled with anger at this suggestion.¹⁵ With his ironic reference to al-Ghazālī's 'combining' of religion and philosophy, al-Bayhaqī evidently meant that the latter had studied both disciplines but had kept

¹⁴ ʿAbd Allāb al-Rūmī Yāqūt, *Muʿjam al-buldān*, ed. F. Wüstenfeld (Leipzig, 1866-1873), vol. 3, pp. 343-4.

¹⁵ Ẓahīr al-Dīn ʿAlī al-Bayhaqī, *Taʾrīkh ḥukamāʾ al-islām*, ed. Muḥammad Kurd ʿAlī (Damascus, 1365/1946), p. 143.

them strictly apart and in fact distanced himself from philosophy in his religious works. Al-Shahrastānī's angry reaction at the mention of al-Ghazālī as a model for him is significant for his attitude to his celebrated predecessor at the Nizāmiyya in Baghdad.

THE KITĀB AL-MUṢĀRA'Ā

Al-Shahrastānī dedicated his *Kitāb al-Muṣāra'ā* to Sayyid Majd al-Dīn Abu'l-Qāsim 'Alī b. Ja'far al-Mūsawī, amir and *naqīb* (syndic of the 'Alid nobility) of Tirmidh, a high official in the government of the Saljūq Sultan Sanjar. He mentions that he had earlier presented to the Sayyid his *Kitāb al-Milal wa'l-niḥal*, which had attracted his patron's interest and earned his praise. The *Kitāb al-Milal wa'l-niḥal* had in fact, it is known, been dedicated to al-Shahrastānī's previous patron, Sanjar's vizier Naṣīr al-Dīn Maḥmūd b. Abī Tawba al-Marwazī. When the vizier fell out of favour and was imprisoned in 526/1132, al-Shahrastānī attached himself to Majd al-Dīn al-Mūsawī. He removed the dedication to Naṣīr al-Dīn from the book and presented a copy to his new patron.

Al-Shahrastānī goes on to announce that he now intends to engage in an intellectual wrestling match (*muṣāra'ā*) with Ibn Sīnā (Avicenna), whom he describes as the universally recognised grand master of philosophy of all time, and calls upon Majd al-Dīn to act as a judge between the two contestants in this dispute. This invitation indicates that his patron was no stranger to the philosophical issues involved in the discussion and that al-Shahrastānī was aware of his expert knowledge and views. Al-Shahrastānī had, probably in the time of his employment by Majd al-Dīn, consulted some of the contemporary philosophers, presenting to them his own views and objections to Ibn Sīnā's discourse and asking for their opinions. Thus he exchanged letters with the physician and philosopher Sharaf al-Zamān Muḥammad b. Yūsuf al-Īlāqī (d. 536/1141) on the question of existence and how it is necessitated in the existents, on the relationship between the cogniser and the objects of

knowledge and on the absolute knowledge of the Necessary Being, God.¹⁶ He submitted objections to Ibn Sīnā's views by letter to the Qāḍī Zayn al-Dīn 'Umar b. Sahlān al-Sāwī, a pupil of Īlāqī and expert on logic noted for his *Kitāb al-Baṣā'ir al-Naṣiriyya* which he had dedicated to the vizier Naṣīr al-Dīn al-Marwazī.¹⁷ According to al-Sāwī's extant reply to one of al-Shahrastānī's letters, the objections, though formulated by the latter, had come to him from someone to whom al-Shahrastānī felt deeply obliged.¹⁸ Most likely his patron, the Naqīb Majd al-Dīn al-Mūsawī, is meant. The same objections, in different form, are discussed in the *Muṣāra'a*. To what extent al-Shahrastānī was influenced by the views of these correspondents must remain the subject of future research.

Al-Shahrastānī remarks that he has chosen some of the most solidly argued statements of Ibn Sīnā in the theological part (*ilāhiyyāt*) of his *Shifā'*, in the *Najāt*, *Ishārāt* and *Ta'liqāt* for his discussion. He imposes on himself the condition of dealing with his opponent only in his discipline and not to oppose him on mere expressions on whose meaning and reality they both agreed, wishing to be neither a disputatious *kalām* theologian (*mutakallim jadālī*) nor an obstinate sophist. His distancing himself from being a 'disputatious *kalām* theologian' deserves special note. Throughout his book, he does not quote or mention al-Ghazālī's famous refutation of the philosophers, the *Tahāfut al-falāsifa*, even though several of the questions discussed by him had also been treated by al-Ghazālī. Did he disapprove of al-Ghazālī's work because he considered it merely the product of a disputatious *kalām* theologian? This must seem likely in view of the substantial differences in approach and aim between the two books.

Al-Ghazālī's *Tahāfut* falls squarely within the tradition of

¹⁶ See Ādharshab, *Tafsīr al-Shahrastānī*, vol. 1, p. 57. A facsimile edition of the text is provided by Muḥammad Riḍa Jalālī Nā'inī, *Dū maktūb* (Tehran, 1369/1990).

¹⁷ See the quotation from 'Imād al-Dīn al-Iṣfahānī's *Ta'riḥ dawlat Āl Saljūq* in Ādharshab, *Tafsīr al-Shahrastānī*, vol. 1, p. 27.

¹⁸ MS Kazan n. 1125, fol. 107.

Ash'arī theological apologetics and polemics. Its avowed aim was to destroy the basis of philosophy itself, not to correct some views of the philosophers. Although al-Ghazālī insisted that the book was intended only to refute and not to defend any specific religious doctrine and that he would set forth the true doctrines in a separate work, his yardstick of the truth was in fact the Ash'arī creed. On its basis he chose to refute the philosophers in twenty issues, charging them with infidelity (*kufr*) punishable with death in three of them, and with heretical innovation in the others. In the common style of *kalām* polemics, he pictured the philosophers as maliciously motivated to dupe the public by trickery and obfuscation and their followers as frivolous fools.

Al-Shahrastānī, in contrast, does not question the legitimacy of philosophy as a supreme discipline of wisdom. He proposes to challenge Ibn Sīnā, whom he recognises as the foremost expert in it, on his own ground in specific questions, relying on chosen quotations from his major works. While he sharply criticises some of his views and the contradictions which he perceived in them, he never raises the issue of infidelity or heresy. In all questions he counters Ibn Sīnā's theses, repudiated by him with his own, which, he asserts, were based on the guideline (*mi'yār*) of the prophets.

On the need for such a guideline, there was obviously agreement between al-Ghazālī and al-Shahrastānī. Given this guideline, however, al-Ghazālī saw the use of human reason in religious thought as confined by traditional Ash'arī interpretation of Qur'an and hadith, leading him to denounce philosophical inquiry into metaphysics and theology. For al-Shahrastānī, the guideline was rather the solid foundation for sound rational inquiry into the truth. He justified his daring challenge of Ibn Sīnā by assuring his patron Majd al-Dīn that he himself had risen from the depth of blind acceptance (*taqlīd*) in religion to the pinnacle of rational investigation of the truth and submission to it (*taslīm*), as he had drunk a cup from the paradisaical wellspring of prophethood.

The basic idea espoused by al-Shahrastānī against Ibn Sīnā

was, as noted, the absolute transcendence of God beyond existence and comprehension by human reason. God, he maintained, was the existentiator of existence (*mūjid al-wujūd*), the giver of both existence and non-existence. God was above all opposites—such as truth and falsehood, unity and multiplicity, knowledge and ignorance, life and death, good and evil, power and impotence—and their sovereign judge (*ḥākim*). As Naṣīr al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī noted in his refutation of the *Muṣāraʿa*, this was the doctrine of the Taʿlīmīyya, the Ismaʿīlis, who said: God is neither existent nor non-existent, rather He is the foundation of being and non-being.¹⁹ In one form or another, this view had been upheld by the Persian Ismaʿīli writers at least from Muḥammad b. Aḥmad al-Nasafī (d. 332/943) on. Al-Ghazālī denounced it in his *Fayṣal al-tafrīqa bayn al-islām waʾl-zandaqa* as unambiguous unbelief.²⁰ Al-Shahrastānī was certainly aware of the condemnation. His adoption of it clearly reveals his repudiation of Ghazālīan orthodoxy.

Al-Shahrastānī did not object to Ibn Sīnā's designation of God as the Necessary Being (*wājib al-wujūd*), but insisted that existence could be predicated of God only equivocally (*biʾl-ishtirāk*), as meaning that He is the giver of existence and its opposite. In his refutation, al-Ṭūsī suggested that the opinion that existence belonged amongst equivocal terms was the doctrine of the Ashʿarī school and of the Muʿtazilī Abuʾl-Ḥusayn al-Baṣrī.²¹ The ontological basis of the doctrine of these *kalām* theologians, however, was entirely different. For al-Shahrastānī it was a necessary complement to his concept of divine transcendence. Thus he extended the principle of equivocality also to all other descriptions and attributes of God. God is one in the meaning of His giving unity, knowing in the meaning that He gives knowledge, powerful in the meaning that He gives power to the powerful.

¹⁹ Naṣīr al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī, *Maṣāriʿ al-muṣāriʿ*, ed. Ḥasan al-Muʿizzī (Qum, 1405/1984), pp. 82–3.

²⁰ Abū Ḥamid Muḥammad al-Ghazālī, *Fayṣal al-tafrīqa bayn al-islām waʾl-zandaqa*, ed. Sulaymān Dunyā (Cairo, 1960), p. 198.

²¹ Al-Ṭūsī, *Maṣāriʿ*, p. 83.

The *Muṣāraʿa* was initially planned to deal with seven issues of theology. In the first, al-Shahrastānī questions Ibn Sīnā's division of existence into the necessary and the contingent. He argues that Ibn Sīnā's Necessary Existent, God, cannot be part of divisible existence since this would require Him to belong to a species, separated from contingent things by a differentia. In reality existence cannot be predicated of the Necessary Existent in the same way as it is of the contingent things. Only the existence of the latter can be subject to rational division. Al-Shahrastānī then proposes a comprehensive division of contingent beings in contrast to the division set forth by Ibn Sīnā in his *Kitāb al-Najāt*. In the second issue, on the existence of the Necessary Existent, he pursues further his argument on the equivocity of the term existence in relation to God. He suggests that Ibn Sīnā realised that existence could not apply to the necessary and the contingent in the same way, and that he therefore invented the concept of analogous (i.e. ambiguous) terms as distinct from univocal and equivocal terms. Yet Ibn Sīnā's definition of existence as an analogous, rather than univocal, term does not change the fact that existence would apply essentially to both the necessary and the contingent. Existence, al-Shahrastānī insists, can apply to the Necessary Existent only equivocally.

The third issue deals with the unity of the Necessary Existent. Al-Shahrastānī objects to Ibn Sīnā's treatment of the Necessary Existence as a species before proving the unicity of God, and to his thesis that from the One only a single intellect can proceed. He affirms that the reality of God is necessarily known by innate disposition (*fiṭra*) and that all things are equally in immediate relation to God, irrespective of their sequence and ranking in the universe. The fourth issue concerns the knowledge of the Necessary Existent. Al-Shahrastānī objects to Ibn Sīnā's description of God as intellect, intellecting and intelligible and to his assertion that God knows everything only by way of universals. He maintains that the nature of divine knowledge is beyond the comprehension of the human mind and that it relates equally to universals, particulars, and

changing times and places. In the fifth issue, al-Shahrastānī deals with the temporality of the world. He rejects Ibn Sīnā's thesis that the world is co-eternal with the Creator and affirms that God is beyond both space and time. Eternal circular motion of the heavenly bodies and infinite time, he seeks to prove, are just as impossible as infinite space.

At the end of the fifth issue, al-Shahrastānī states that adverse circumstances and disasters prevented him from completion of the book as planned and he will confine himself to presenting a number of philosophical problems, doubts and perplexities. The sixth issue had originally been intended to deal with the enumeration of the principles (*mabādī*) of the higher world. It is likely that the seventh issue was to be devoted to the question of the Intellect that is the Giver of Forms, which is now treated briefly at the end of the book. Al-Shahrastānī here agrees with the philosophers about the need for an active Intellect to bring human intellects from potentiality to actuality. He questions, however, why their Active Intellect (*'aql fa'āl*) should be identified with the Intellect of the lunar sphere, the one closest to earth. Could it not be any of the higher Intellects or even the Necessary Existent? And if closeness to humanity is a consideration, could it not be a human intellect that is active and supported by holy power? Al-Shahrastānī evidently had in mind here the Intellect of the prophets and Imams which, according to Isma'ili teaching, conveys the spiritual truths emanating from the hierarchy of higher Intellects to the faithful.

The disasters to which al-Shahrastānī alludes have commonly been identified with the crushing defeat of Sultan Sanjar by the Qarā Khitāy at Qatwān near Samarqand in 536/1141. It is less likely that he was referring to a temporary imprisonment of his patron, the Naqīb Majd al-Dīn, at an earlier date.²² In 536/1141, the defeated Sultan fled to Tirmidh and then to Balkh, while the Khuwārizm-Shāh seized and sacked his capital, Marw. In the battle al-Shahrastānī's philosophical

²² See Nā'inī, *Dū maktūb*, pp. 23-4.

correspondent al-Īlāqī was killed. It is not known whether al-Shahraṣṭānī was in Tirmidh or in Marw at the time. As Sanjar's reign began to collapse, the intellectual courtly milieu that had encouraged al-Shahraṣṭānī in his philosophical pursuits evidently vanished. He was in no mood to complete his *Muṣāraʿa* as planned.

With its truncated ending, the book probably never had a wide readership. During the time that the Nizārī community was seeking a rapprochement with a broadly conceived Sunnism under the 'Abbasid caliph al-Nāṣir li-Dīn Allāh, the Sufī Shaykh Shihāb al-Dīn 'Umar al-Suhrawardī seems to have been attracted to al-Shahraṣṭānī's Isma'īlī thought. In his *Rashf al-naṣā'ih al-īmāniyya wa-kashf faḍā'ih al-yūnāniyya*, written in 621/1224, he polemically denounced both *kalām* theology and Greek-inspired philosophy and adopted some of the terms and concepts of al-Shahraṣṭānī's *Majlis* and *Muṣāraʿa*.²³ It was about the same time that Naṣir al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī, partly under the influence of al-Shahraṣṭānī's thought, joined the Nizārī Isma'īlī community.

The subjugation of the Isma'īlīs by the Mongol conquerors after the fall of their seat of power at Alamūt in 654/1256 opened a period of severe religious persecution. Al-Ṭūsī now abandoned Isma'īlism and backed the Twelver Shi'ī community to which he had originally belonged. In order to distance himself from the Isma'īlī teaching he had earlier espoused, he composed a refutation of the *Kitāb al-Muṣāraʿa*. His *Maṣāriʿ al-muṣāriʿ* offered a brilliant and incisive defense of the philosophy of Ibn Sīnā, in which he exposed the inadequacy and flawed logic of al-Shahraṣṭānī's criticism. Yet al-Ṭūsī's own highly polemical attack on al-Shahraṣṭānī, describing him as a mere populist preacher picking his ideas at random from various schools without properly understanding them, fails to do justice

²³ See Angelika Hartmann, 'Ismā'īlitische Theologie bei sunnitischen 'Ulamā' des Mittelalters', in Ludwig Hagemann and Ernst Pulsfort, eds, *Ihr alle aber seid Brüder: Festschrift für A. Th. Khoury zum 60. Geburtstag* (Würzburg-Altenberge, 1990), pp. 190–206; and her 'al-Suhrawardī, Shihāb al-Dīn Abū Ḥafṣ', EI2, vol. 9, pp. 778–82.

to the latter's thought, which rested on a different, but equally coherent philosophical vision with a vital religious impulse.

Al-Ṭūsī's refutation further blunted the potential impact of al-Shahrastānī's book in the Muslim world. It was now mostly read embedded in al-Ṭūsī's work. The latter enjoyed a certain popularity among Twelver Shi'i students of philosophy, as indicated by the survival of numerous, though badly corrupted, manuscripts of it in Iranian libraries. Mullā Ṣadrā (d. 1050/1640) quoted an argument of al-Shahrastānī from it, siding with al-Ṭūsī's polemical refutation.²⁴ Among orthodox Sunnis, on the other hand, al-Ṭūsī's defence of Ibn Sīnā's philosophy aroused some sympathy for al-Shahrastānī's work. The Ḥanbalī Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya (d. 751/1350) in his *Ighāthat al-lahfān min maṣāyid al-shayṭān* noted with satisfaction that al-Shahrastānī had refuted some of Ibn Sīnā's heresies, which al-Ṭūsī, the 'supporter of atheism' (*naṣīr al-ilhād*), then attempted to reconfirm.²⁵ From his description of the contents of the two books, it seems unlikely that he had read them seriously. Al-Ghazālī's *Tahāfut* evidently provided the most persuasive answer to Ibn Sīnā's philosophy from the Sunni point of view. Since in modern times philosophy is no longer so predominantly identified with the Peripatetic tradition, al-Shahrastānī's book may perhaps come to be appreciated as a philosophical response from a broad spiritual perspective.

²⁴ Muḥammad Ṣadr al-Dīn al-Shīrāzī, *al-Hikma al-muta'āliya fī l-asfār al-'aqliyya al-arba'a* (Beirut, 1981–1990), vol. 6, p. 39.

²⁵ Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya, *Ighāthat al-lahfān min maṣāyid al-shayṭān*, ed. Muḥammad Ḥamid al-Fiḳī (Cairo, 1358/1939), vol. 2, p. 267.

THE EDITION

The present edition of the *Kitāb al-Muṣāraʿa* is based primarily on two manuscripts:

1. The MS A 1103 of the Landesbibliothek of Gotha, on which the previous edition by Suhayr Muḥammad Mukhtār was based. My thanks are due to the authorities of the Gotha Library for providing me with a microfilm of the manuscript. According to the colophon, it was written by Faḍā'il b. Abi'l-Ḥasan al-Nāsikh al-Shāfi'i and completed on 10 Šafar 590/20-23 February 1194. Several folios are missing, a few are displaced, and in some places words have become unreadable. In general, however, the quality of the text is fair. In the annotation to the edition, the manuscript is identified by the letter *alif*.
2. The MS n.1124, fol. 5b - 98a, of the library of Kazan. This manuscript was noted by Th. Menzel in *Der Islam*, 18 (1928), p. 94. My thanks are due to Dr Nuriya G. Garayeva of Kazan and to the authorities of the library of Kazan for kindly providing me with a microfilm of the manuscript. The copyist of the manuscript is not named, and it is not dated, but appears from the handwriting to be considerably later than the Gotha manuscript. While the text of the book is complete, some folios were evidently displaced at some stage in the transmission. This was not noticed by the next copyist, so that the text abruptly jumps in several places of the manuscript. The proper sequence could be restored by comparison with the Gotha manuscript and the text preserved in al-Ṭūsī's *Maṣāriʿ al-muṣāriʿ*. The manuscript is well preserved and readable, but the quality of the text is generally somewhat inferior to that of the Gotha manuscript. In the annotation, it is identified by the letter *bā'*.

Apart from these two manuscripts, the text of the *Kitāb al-Muṣāraʿa* as quoted in al-Ṭūsī's refutation *Maṣāriʿ al-muṣāriʿ* has also been compared in establishing the text of this edition.

Particularly useful in this respect was the Istanbul MS Aya Sofya 2358, which preserves the text of the *Kitāb al-Muṣāraʿa* generally better than the Iranian manuscripts of al-Ṭūsī's work. Since al-Ṭūsī's work is to be re-edited separately, the variants provided by these manuscripts have not been noted in this edition of al-Shahrastānī's book.

The title of the book is given as *Kitāb Muṣāraʿat al-falāsifa* in the Gotha MS. In the Kazan MS it is called *Kitāb al-Muṣāraʿa li'l-Shahrastānī ma'a al-Shaykh al-Ra'īs Abī 'Alī Ibn Sīnā, rahimahu'llāh*. In his refutation, al-Ṭūsī states that it is known as *al-Muṣāraʿāt*. For the present edition, the title *Kitāb al-Muṣāraʿa* has been chosen.

Wilferd Madelung

NOTE ON THE TRANSLATION

In translating al-Shahrastānī's text, the aim has been to combine accessibility with accuracy (for example in putting Arabic technical terms into English). In the interests of accessibility, square brackets have been used sparingly. Ellipses have thus sometimes been filled out in the English without this being made explicit. Such cases will be obvious to those who co-ordinate the Arabic with the English. For all that, the translation avoids paraphrasing al-Shahrastānī and tries to mirror his speech and thought closely.

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Toby Mayer