In ch. 7, Adamson turns to address two questions of philosophical interest in Rāzī’s medicine concerning (1) the underlying epistemology, and (2) whether his relation to Galen in medicine is similar to that in his philosophical writings. In Adamson’s view, Rāzī was a remarkably systematic physician who relied on a two-tiered method of empirical investigation and systematic causal explanation, or of explaining empirical phenomena within an overarching theoretical framework that is ultimately founded on natural philosophy and metaphysics. In this regard, he remains firmly committed to Galen’s theory of science.

The book’s concluding ch. 8 addresses Rāzī’s ethics, a field on which we have the luxury of building on Rāzī’s original writings—and two of them at that. In a slight departure from Adamson’s own earlier view, Rāzī first appears here as a hedonist, albeit one for whom the highest kind of pleasure is that acquired in the hereafter. Given this eschatological perspective, justice and knowledge do over-ride pleasure in this world, although they ultimately serve an instrumental role by enabling the superior pleasure in the afterlife as a reward for pursuing them in this life. This is not the whole story, however, for the chapter concludes with the observation that Rāzī seems to have conceived of the supreme objective of human life in Platonist terms as becoming like to God. Consequently, Rāzī is no hedonist after all; although he holds that pleasure is a good to be preferred over its opposite, he does not found his ethics on it. Here we have another cause to admire Rāzī’s high level of systematicity, for as we learned in the discussion of Rāzī’s cosmology, the once irrational soul’s laborious course through material existence serves the noble purpose of its becoming rational through learning, and in this regard akin to God.

At the end of the day, one may find it difficult to entirely shed the view of Rāzī as a partially inconsistent thinker with a tendency to mythological explanation. Adamson’s charitable analysis has, however, done an enormous service to Rāzī by piecing together the fragments that we have into a portrait of a philosopher who was a committed and systematic follower of Galen’s brand of critically inclined Platonism. The book is no less a service to the community of scholars who now have a secure foundation for further scholarship on Rāzī and his relations to other thinkers of the formative period.

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All the World Is Awry: al-Maʿarrit and the Luzūmiyyāt, Revisited

There are probably few people who have read Luzūm mā lā yalzam by the prolific poet and prose writer Abū al-ʿAlāʾ al-Maʿarrit (d. 449/1057) from beginning to end; I certainly have not. One of those who may well have done so is
R. Kevin Lacey. In his book he calls the collection (ca. 13,000 verses) ‘long; overwrought; repetitious; excessively clever technically; relentlessly pessimistic and skeptical where not absolutely cynical; misanthropic as well as misogynistic; often borderline if not egregiously sacrilegious’ (p. 33). He is right, and one should read it in small doses only. But it is certainly extremely interesting, controversial, often shocking to believers, and worthy of close study. Lacey builds on pioneering studies by Alfred von Kremer, Tâhâ Husayn, R. A. Nicholson, Pieter Smoor, and others. Most scholars, and Lacey is no exception, are concerned more with the poet’s ideas than with the poems as poetry, which is understandable but regrettable, because it ignores or neglects an essential element of the Luzûm. The poet did not write a systematic treatise but a collection of poems, systematic only in terms of prosody, containing a wholly unsystematic jumble of mutually incompatible ideas. The present book has a relatively short chapter titled ‘The Medium’ that gives some attention to the formal and poetic characteristics, it is true, but much of that chapter is already concerned with what is set out in far greater detail in the much longer chapter called ‘The Message’.

By way of introduction, Part One of All the World is Awry deals with the poet’s biography and his milieu. It includes rather too many pages of potted histories and surveys of dynasties, sects, and disciplines such as kalâm and falsafa, and it is only on p. 139 that the discussion of the Luzûmîyyât begins. Chapter 3, ‘The Medium’, discusses the rhyme conventions and self-imposed restrictions that gave the collection its title, the poet’s obsession with rhetorical artifice, especially the unrelenting use of paronomasia, and his use of obscure vocabulary. Lacey discusses the incoherences and contradictions, real or seeming, in the collection. Although some contradictions may be only apparent, some others are irreconcilable, such as an explicit affirmation of predetermination against affirmation of free will. The author believes that the poet’s stance may have been somewhere in the middle, ‘neither a strict predeterminist nor a strict believer in free will, but part […] one and part […] the other’ (p. 161). I can also believe that al-Ma’ârî’s views were not static. The poems were clearly composed over a long period; their arrangement, alphabetical by rhyme consonant, precludes ascertaining a clear chronology. He may have been vacillating, like many human beings, between contradictory views, and taking comfort in the view, worded a century before him by the literary critic Qudâmah b. Jâfar, that a poet is free to contradict himself. The same may apply to apparent contradictions regarding the validity of revealed religion or the reality of bodily resurrection. Lacey admits, however, that many contradictions cannot be ironed out. The poet is adept in throwing up smokescreens of rhetorical questions, irony, ellipsis, deliberate vagueness, opaqueness, ambiguity, and punning, to hide his opinions. I agree with Lacey when he says, for instance, that the ubiquitous phrase al-ḥamdū li-llâhî can only be ironical in a verse such as ‘Praise be to God! There’s not a tranquil soul on earth; all of humankind is anxious and tormented’ (p. 166; the italics are the author’s). Pious Muslims, who still use the phrase when mentioning unpleasant matters (al-ḥamdū li-lâhî, alladhî là yahmadu ’alâ makhruḥ siwâh) will probably not even notice the irony. Lacey mentions that earlier scholars, among them Tâhâ Husayn and Nicholson, believed that the poet practised taqiyya, dissimulation, to hide his controversial views, something that he, paradoxically,
makes explicit in a number of verses (kallamtu bi-l-lahni; ladayya sirrun laysa yumkinu dhikrulā; takallumī bi-l-majāzi; law amani kāshfu ma` fi al-sirri akhžānī . . ., pp. 171–2). We can only guess what the poet really believed, but there is a strong hint in the fact that the poems offering a conformist, orthodox view are greatly outweighed by the number of poems with sceptical, agnostic, or outright heretical utterances. Al-Ma‘arri, who famously called himself the hostage of two prisons (his blindness and his seclusion) or even three (with his soul being confined to his body), was in fact also captive in a universe of Arabic language, ‘mesmerised by the medium’ as Lacey says, someone who ‘often loses sight of meaning and emerges as a supremely formidable yet frenzied poet swept away by his own sonority’ (p. 175). I agree with this, even though ‘frenzied’ is not an attribute that one would associate with the austere and dour al-Ma‘arri.

In ch. 4, ‘The Message’, Lacey sets out, not to establish whether or not the poet was sincere in stating controversial views, but exactly what these views are. There are four sections: ‘Humankind as viewed in the Luzūm’; ‘Humankind and God: al-Ma‘arri’s religious philosophy’; ‘Humankind interacting with human-kind: al-Ma‘arri’s social and political views in Luzūm’; ‘Humankind and the totality of being: al-Ma‘arri’s perception of the make-up and dynamics of the universe’. Humans are central: there is hardly a poem that does not mention people. His view on them, for once, is unambiguous: repeatedly he calls upon them to refrain from procreation, as a radical solution to all human problems. His dislike of men, already pronounced, is greatly surpassed by his dislike of women, which probably earns him the title of the worst misogynist in Arabic literature.

Lacey stresses, correctly, that ‘al-Ma‘arri was by no stretch of the imagination a philosopher in the strictest sense of the word’ (p. 181). He is a sceptic and often professes agnosticism. There are many interesting and sometimes contradictory poems on the nature of time and the eternity of the cosmos, some clearly heretical or even atheist. In general, however, the poet is interested more in the practical issues of life than in abstract, theoretical issues. Humans are essentially ignorant and prone to evil, but reason may lead to knowledge and being good. It is unclear whether he believes that evil and ignorance are predetermined or that reason can, for some, be a way out of this and that humans have a measure of free will. His views on the reality of resurrection are notoriously contradictory, although it is fairly clear that he did not believe in a bodily resurrection. He is sceptical about prophethood (incidentally, the verses beginning ‘Don’t regard what the prophets say as true’, wa-lā taḥsab maqāla l-rusla haqqan, quoted by Tāhā Husayn without a source and not in Luzūm, as mentioned p. 412, are in fact the entries on the poet in Yāqūt’s Mu‘jam al-udabāʾ and Ibn al-Jawzī’s al-Muntaẓam). Lacey is rightly scathing about attempts to categorize the poet as belonging to a particular religious sect or philosophical system.

The Arabic of all translated poems is provided. But I do not understand the decision to give, in the English text, words in Arabic script together with a transliteration, e.g. ‘shi’r/شعر’. This is done innumerable times and it is not only superfluous (the transliteration is as a rule less ambiguous than unvowelled Arabic) but it cluttered the pages uncomfortably, to this reader at least.
Fortunately, it is not done consistently. Sometimes both the transliteration and the Arabic are wrong: al-Rāzī’s book called ‘al-Hāwī ’al-ḥawālī’ (p. 109, read al-Hāwī ’), ‘al-Sharīf al-Rādī’s ‘al-sharīf al-rādī’ (p. 126, for al-Rādī), the ‘romantic prelude (nasīb), Ibn Mājā’s ‘Ibn Mājā’ (p. 124, for Mājā), ‘ustudī’ (p. 179, for ustudī’at), ‘al-Juhānī’s ‘al-Juhānī’ (p. 369, read al-Juhānī), ‘Mihyār . . .’ (p. 133, read Mihyār), ‘al-Shāhīj’ (passim, for al-Shāhīj).

A sub-editor should have corrected some minor errors in the English, the most glaring of which is ‘PRINCIPLE WORKS CITED’ in large capitals on pp. 443–51; on p. 37 ‘principal’ is used where ‘principle’ is meant. One also notes ‘pubic’ (p. 47), Sammānīd (pp. 47, 61, for Sāmānīd); ‘universitatis litteratum’ (pp. 94, 95, for universitas litterarum); ‘Weltanshauung’ (p. 177), ‘homo sapien’ (p. 192). There are some errors in transliteration: ‘Khalawyah’ (p. 10, for Khālawayh); ‘Furrajah’ (p. 17, for Fūrajah); ‘ibn Fallāh’ (p. 23, ibn Falāh); ‘Sammānīd’ (p. 61, Sāmānīd); ‘al-Jubā’ (p. 100, al-Jubbā’); ‘al-Atāhiyyah’ (p. 131, al-Atāhiyyah); ‘a’īmaḥ’ (p. 275 twice, for a’imma); ‘ibn al-Habāriyyah’ (p. 399, Ibn al-Habārīyya); ‘tāziyyaṭ’ (p. 436, tawāziyyaṭ). Yatīmat al-dahr is mistranslated as ‘The Unique Epoch’ (p. 133). ‘Abd al-Qādir al-Jurjānī (p. 134) is an error for ‘Abd al-Qāhir al-Jurjānī; on the same page he is confused with al-Qādī ‘Ali ibn ‘Abd al-Azīz al-Jurjānī, author of ‘al-Wisātah’ (read al-Wasātah). The poet’s famous ode in his earlier collection Saqāt al-zand beginning Ghayru muṣjdīn is not an elegy on his father (p. 31) but on a Hanafi jurist of uncertain identity called Abū Hamza (cf. Shurīh Saqāt al-zand), perhaps a relative (as said by al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī). In ‘no one has never suggested that al-Mahāsinī’s boast of life-long celibacy was a false claim’ (p. 341) one should surely read ‘ever’ and ‘al-Mā’ārri’s.

The many translations are by and large reliable. I have noted some errors. The performing ‘songstress’ (pp. 16 and 358) is not a woman, nor she is ‘made of silver’: she is a grey dove (mina l-wurqi; waraqī would not scan properly). On p. 145 jiltun ghayru inṣī is not ‘people who are inhuman’ but ‘a kind that is not human’, i.e., animals, as the context makes clear. Tālaba l-khasā’isa is not ‘he pursued the wicked’ (p. 150) but ‘he pursued wicked things’. Agḥfarun bi-Iṣhblā is not ‘goats in Ishbil’ (p. 151) but ‘goats in Seville’. Mā zāla ḥāti rāṣidī wa-hwa ākhidū (pp. 157–8) is probably not about the stars (‘Pisces’) but a reference to Jonah/Yūnus (cf. Q. 37:142 ‘and the fish swallowed him’). A sāliḥ is not ‘a reformer’ (p. 205) but ‘an upright, pious, virtuous man’. For ‘the Arabs of Tā’ (p. 266) read ‘the tribe of Ṭayyi’ (or Ṭayyi). Rendering Yā sā’du wayyaka hal aḥṣasta man bula’ū as ‘Alas Sa’d! Are you aware of those swallowed by it?’ (p. 294) does not make much sense and misreads bula’ as if it were a passive verb, buli’: one ought to be told that Sa’d Bula’ is the name of one of the lunar stations. The point is that Bula’ on its own has no meaning, hence the poet asks, rhetorically, ‘Are you aware who Bula’ is?’ Likewise, ‘They say ‘Adam was furry; humans are like truffles’, | Man has been ignorant but he has not been furry’ (p. 322) remains mysterious because it is not explained that banāt awbar (a kind of inferior truffle) literally seems to mean ‘daughters of Awbar’, or ‘. . . of something hairy’. The translation of jahila mru’un mà awbarū is ‘A man does not know what awbarū is’, because on its own the word is meaningless (Nicholson’s
rhymed translation in ‘The Meditations of Ma‘arrī’ is not helpful, either\(^1\)). A similar Ma‘arrīan play on *ibn ʿirs* (‘weasel’) in the following poem (p. 322) is again left unexplained.

There are many endnotes with excursuses of several pages long, which makes reading the book often cumbersome. Yet the drift is clear enough to follow. The author does not offer a radically new view of al-Ma‘arrī, but his detailed, painstaking discussions of the many topics in *Luzūm* give a convincing picture of the deliberately unclear beliefs of a great poet who relished teetering on the brink of unbelief and blasphemy, but who, unlike perhaps most other poets, practised in his own life what he professed repeatedly and unambiguously: strive to be rational, do not harm living beings, be abstemious, do not procreate.

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**Reintroducing Philosophy: Thinking as the Gathering of Civilization, According to Contemporary, Islamicate and Ancient Sources**


This book covers a great deal of ground. It includes the constant presence of Heidegger, excerpts from Islamic, Indian and Chinese philosophy, and a great number of modern European and American thinkers from Kant up to today. It was my intention to concentrate on Shaker’s account of Islamic philosophy, since for readers of this journal that presumably would be of most interest. He writes a good deal on Mullâ Șadrâ and a range of other thinkers within that tradition like al-Qânawî and the *falāsifa*. On the whole his comments on these thinkers are sensible and perceptive, and there is nothing controversial here. What is more challenging is the central claim that Islamic science had a significant effect on science as a whole, something we are told that has been willfully ignored and misrepresented, and the non-Islamic world has imposed its views on an unwilling Islamic public. Those nasty Europeans with their imperialistic ways and materialist science forced Islamic science to reject its roots and mimic the Western variety. On the other hand, we are told that the Orientalists at the same time did their best to obscure the roots of Western science in the earlier discoveries in the Islamic world. This is of course familiar territory, although Shaker is critical of the idea of the Islamization of knowledge which has been proposed in modern times, seeing that quite rightly as an evasive strategy when dealing with the religion/science dichotomy. He does not go into much detail here on this point, or indeed on any point. For a very long book (over 750 pages) there is a