Damien Janos (ed.). *Ideas in Motion in Baghdad and Beyond: Philosophical and Theological Exchanges between Christians and Muslims in the Third/Ninth and Fourth/Tenth Centuries*. Leiden: Brill, 2015. ix+ 479 pages. ISBN: 9789004306028.

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The society that grew up in the major cities of the Islamic world between about 750 and 1100 can be considered among the most culturally advanced and intellectually sophisticated that had yet existed, rivalling Periclean Athens and Augustan Rome. The world over which the Muslim Arabs extended their rule from the seventh century remained intact in many of its aspects, with the state structures and infrastructures of the earlier Byzantine and, to some extent, the Sasanian empires still largely visible beneath the overlay of Islamic nomenclature and belief. Intellectually, the Muslims at this time were most often the learners, taking ways of thinking and many of the topics of their thought from their Persian, Jewish and, most prominently, Christian subjects. These subjects frequently occupied senior (though rarely executive) positions in the state, and there are clear signs that they were able to ignore with impunity their status as clients in an Islamic society.

In this world where the Qur'ān and sayings of the Prophet Muḥammad vied with more ancient sources of thought, tensions between the old and the new produced a variety of reactions. Those Muslims who shunned anything that did not bear the authority of the Prophet and the revelation usually refused to be drawn into debates about topics on which there was no clear sign. Others who took the Qur'ān as the basis of their explorations sought ways in which the new and the old could be used in harmony, with methods and insights from Greek philosophers providing hermeneutical tools for use on their sacred texts. Yet others took on the old learning so thoroughly that they were condemned for their un-Islamic ways and compelled to defend themselves against the charge of apostasy. In addition to these were Christians who continued to pursue their blending

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of doctrine with philosophies from the ancient world, sometimes explaining their activities to Muslims who, they suspected, did not grasp their ideas, and to Muslim authorities who developed, and sometimes applied, legal frameworks intended to prevent non-Muslims from advancing too far in society. All of this makes the social, religious and intellectual mix of the early imperial Islamic world a complex challenge to interpret.

The outline of the make-up of society in Iraq during the early Islamic period is reasonably well known. What is less well known are the constituents of the intellectual fuel that provided energy for the leading scholars and their followers, as well as the ways in which scholars with differing views interacted. The gap between the traditions of the world of Late Antiquity and of early Islam has often appeared as a chasm, and the attempt to cross it is hindered both by the lack of documentary evidence originating from the first centuries of Islam and also by the academic and linguistic rift between the study of Greek and Syriac intellectual traditions during the fifth and sixth centuries and the Islamic Arabic disciplines that grew under the aegis of the Qur'ān.

Hence the value of this book, which is devoted to exactly these questions of how teachings from the pre-Islamic eastern Mediterranean world were transmitted into the Islamic world and the effect they exerted there. Despite its title, it is mainly about Greek philosophical ideas in the world of Christian Arabic thought and their impact on the developing discipline of philosophical thought in Islam. Although references are made to discussions of a theological nature and to Muslim theological experts, it is really a book about philosophical currents in the early 'Abbasid world. It shows how intimately Christian and Muslim intellectuals shared philosophical ideas on what appears to have been an equal footing, how Muslims were more often the recipients than the initiators of ideas, and how revelation played a far less fundamental role in the pursuit of knowledge than human intellect. But maybe this serves to indicate the comparatively narrow limits within which the chapters were written. This is not a book for beginners, since it seeks to show through a close study of texts, and the terms and concepts within them, the interpenetration that was taking place within a particular sector of the intellectual traditions known from the early Islamic world with little reference to what was going on outside. It helps establish links of knowledge and influence between Muslim and non-Muslim intellectuals, although its findings require and deserve to be fitted into a wider intellectual, social and cultural context.

The book comprises eleven essays, together with a short introduction and a bibliography of studies on "Syriac and Arabic Christian philosophy and the Bagh-

dad school" (an indication of its scope). They are grouped in chronological order, from intellectual activities during the earliest years of the Islamic era to the period of Ibn Sīnā's immediate precursors in the tenth century, with a few forays into the time of Ibn Rushd and beyond. The book's main weight is concentrated on the tenth century and exchanges in the philosophical world of Baghdad, and its main focus is on texts and the relationships among them.

The chapters covering the earliest period include essays on the Christian philosophers of ninth- and tenth-century Baghdad and their transmission of precise forms of Aristotelianism into the Islamic world, the role of Egyptian monks in transmitting popular forms of philosophy, and the varying perceptions of the term '*aql* (reason) evidenced in the writings of the earliest Christian theologians who wrote in Arabic. The authors frequently resort to hypothesis and call for further research – a central feature of an essay here on the background of the *Theology of Aristotle*, the influential adaptation of Plotinus – thus attesting to both the fragmentary state of the information that has survived from the ninth century and earlier, and also to the comparative lack of its systematic study from the viewpoint of links and influences from Late Antiquity to the Islamic era.

Following these chapters come six further chapters on leading tenth-century philosophical figures, among whom the Nestorian translator and philosopher Yaḥyā ibn 'Adī features prominently, and on the problems that intellectuals encountered and raised among themselves. These all show the continuity of thought between the Islamic world and earlier times. While there are mentions of Muslim theologians (*mutakallimūn*) and the differences between them and the philosophers, there is little to suggest how the discussions and reflections explored here related to the wider context of rapid political and social change.

This feature reflects the character of the whole collection, which is clearly aimed at a specific audience of philosophically interested readers. Thus, individual scholars such as the Mu'tazilite leaders Abū al-Hudhayl al-'Allāf, Ibrāhīm al-Naẓẓām and the lesser known Abū al-Ḥusayn al-Baṣrī are mentioned with little or no introduction. While many likely readers will know something about a giant such as Abū Naṣr al-Fārābī, they may appreciate more information about lesser luminaries. In the same vein, terms from the discourse's specialist context found in many of the essays are used without gloss or explanation. These are precise studies on precise topics usually arising from specific texts, with the focus directed on the texts alone rather than the contexts within which they arose.

One can appreciate the point of this, because both theological and philosophical works in Arabic from this general period hardly ever bring in details about the

place or time of their composition and frequently omit even the author's name. But they were, of course, written at a particular time and place and almost challenge readers to find links between their contents and contexts. How, for example, do the topics discussed in the works of the tenth-century Baghdad philosophers relate to topics in the works of contemporary Muslim theologians? Little, maybe too little, is said about this, and there is no reference to such theological masters as the Ashʿarite Abū Bakr al-Bāqillānī or the Muʿtazilite ʿAbd al-Jabbār al-Hamadhānī. It would have been appropriate and instructive in a book with the sub-title "Philosophical and theological exchanges between Christians and Muslims" to compare the philosophical preoccupations explored here with the theological arguments that developed in parallel to them. Was there any borrowing, were terms used in common and why was there so much open antipathy?

There are rich seams in the essays gathered here, and specialists in medieval philosophy (in the main) will benefit from them. Researchers in the *kalām* tradition or in inter-religious relations will have to work harder to find the value they contain, while the task of linking the ideas in them to the wider history of the times in which they were debated lies somewhere in the future. What they make undeniably clear is that the lines of continuity from the intellectual world of the pre-Islamic past remained strong and unbroken, despite all of the political and religious upheavals that might have disrupted or broken them.