

Marienza Benedetto*

Rethinking time through the episode of the Sleepers: from Aristotle to Abū'l-Barakāt al-Bağdādī

Abstract

The article proposes to consider the use of the episode of the Sleepers in the philosophical investigations on the status of time. First quoted in Aristotle's *Physics* to demonstrate the dependence of time on motion, which the soul numbers, the episode is cited – through the mediation of Avicenna – in the *Kitāb al-Mu'tabar* or *The book about what has been established by personal reflection* by the philosopher of Jewish origin Abū'l-Barakāt. In his text he proposes to remodel the original history, to imagine a different scenario that accounts, ultimately, for the inevitable time–movement fracture: more than being an accident of movement, time is, in Abū'l-Barakāt's innovative reading, the measure of existence.

Key words: Time, Motion.

Authors: Aristotle, Abū'l-Barakāt, Sleepers.

Ripensare il tempo attraverso l'episodio dei dormienti: da Aristotele ad Abū'l-Barakāt al-Bağdādī

Riassunto

L'articolo si propone di considerare l'impiego dell'episodio dei dormienti nella controversa indagine sullo statuto del tempo. L'episodio, che viene citato per la prima volta nella *Fisica* di Aristotele per dimostrare come il tempo sia imprescindibile dal movimento percepito dall'anima, è riproposto – attraverso la mediazione di Avicenna – nel *Kitāb al-Mu'tabar*, o “Il libro di ciò che è stato stabilito attraverso l'indagine personale” del filosofo di origine ebraica Abū'l-Barakāt. Nelle sue pagine, la proposta è quella di rimodulare l'originaria storia, di immaginare cioè uno scenario diverso che renda

* Researcher, Dipartimento di Studi Umanistici/Facoltà di Filosofia, Università degli Studi di Bari 'Aldo Moro', Piazza Umberto I, Bari, Italy; marienza.benedetto@uniba.it. English translation by Lisa Adams.

conto, in definitiva, del necessario scollimento tempo-movimento: più che essere un accidente del movimento, il tempo è, nella lettura assolutamente innovativa di Abū'l-Barakāt, misura dell'esistenza.

Parole chiave: Tempo, Movimento.

Autori: Aristotele, Abū'l-Barakāt, Dormienti.

«Io conosco molte leggende sui dormienti» affermò Rahman [...]. «Quanti erano nella grotta a dormire?». «La sura si mantiene sul vago, forse il numero non conta: tre, quattro, cinque, sei, escluso il cane. Ma è diventata convinzione comune che i dormienti fossero sette, e col cane otto». «Se le può essere utile, sappia che la sura riprende una leggenda cristiana, quella dei dormienti di Efeso» disse El Madani. «C'è anche un dramma egiziano moderno, Ahl al-kahf, cioè la gente della caverna, dello scrittore Taufik al-Hakim. Lì i giovani cristiani, perseguitati dall'imperatore Decio, cadono in un sonno profondo e si risvegliano ai tempi di Teodosio secondo. Sono in tre, e con loro c'è il cane». «Quindi» concluse Montalbano «chi ha messo i corpi nella grotta conosceva certamente il Corano e magari il dramma di questo egiziano.

Andrea Camilleri, *Il cane di terracotta*¹

We're in the Arab quarter of the city of Mazara del Vallo on the south coast of Sicily. And the story that Camilleri tells in his novel is that of the mysterious death of two young men, found naked in a cave guarded by a terracotta dog. To solve the case, Montalbano moves through that miniature Tunis, happening upon a school in which in that very moment, to twenty or so attentive students, the master is reading and commenting on Surah 18, also known as the Surah of the Cave, *al-Kahf*. In the Koranic tale, God responds to the desire of some young men to protect themselves from the risk of corruption by making them fall into a deep sleep, lasting 309 years, inside a dark cave².

¹ A. Camilleri, *Il cane di terracotta*, Sellerio, Palermo 1996, pp. 542-543. I would like to clarify that after reading my paper at the conference in Porto, I discovered (not without some displeasure) that the same passage from Camilleri had been used in the Introduction by G. Avezù to Gregorio di Tours – Fozio, *I sette dormienti. Una leggenda fra Oriente e Occidente*, edited by G. Avezù, Medusa, Milano 2002, pp. 7-15, esp. pp. 7-8.

² We read in Surah 18: «When the young men betook themselves for refuge to the Cave and said, “Our Lord, bestow on us mercy from Thyself, and provide for us right guidance in our affair”. So we sealed up their ears in the Cave for a number of years. Then we raised them up that we might know which of the two parties would better reckon the time that they had tarried. [...] Thou mightiest deem them awake, whilst they are asleep, and we shall cause them to turn over to the right and to the left, their dog stretching out his forelegs on the threshold. [...] And so we raised them up that they might question one another. One of them said “How long have you tarried?” They said “We have tarried a day or part of a day”. Others said “Your Lord knows best the time you have tarried [...]”. Some say “They were three, the fourth was their dog”, and others say “They were five, the sixth was their dog”, guessing at random. And yet others say “They were seven, the eighth with their dog”. Say, “My Lord knows best their number. None knows them except a few”. So argue not concerning them except with arguing that is overpowering, nor seek

Now, apart from the literary reference, whether pleasing or not, which attests to the long duration of the tale, in the reconstruction offered by Camilleri we already find the first historico-cultural coordinates of an episode whose outlines are anything but clear; an episode that Islam, without much conviction about the number of men implicated, according to Camilleri himself, would borrow from the Christian tradition to indicate a safe haven in God³. What is certain is that Surah 18, with the Sleepers who populate it, represents the place from which, in a philosophical context, the discussion returns to a delicate matter: how can we grasp the passage of time? What, in effect, allows us to measure time between sleeping and waking?

The question, in reality, is part of a broader context: the well-known and too oft discussed definition of the nature of time, as found in Book IV of Aristotle's *Physics*. After stating the premise that it is easier to know the essence of time than to ascertain its existence, since time is evanescent and fleeting, Aristotle defines time as the number of motion according to a before and an after; it means that, on the one hand, time refers to motion, of which it is an accident, while, on the other, as number, it refers to the soul, which alone is able to enumerate⁴. From such a

information about them from any one of them. [...] And they stayed in their Cave three hundred years, and added nine more. Say, "Allāh knows best how long they tarried". To Him belong the secrets of the heavens and the earth [...]» (*The Holy Qur'ān*, Arabic Text and English Translation, trans. by M. Sher 'Alī, Islam International Publications Ltd., Islamabad-Tilford 2015, Surah 18, 10-26, pp. 331-333).

³ In the context of a more complete analysis dedicated to the Surah of the Cave, the late Massimo Campanini introduces the "ancient and fascinating" story of the Sleepers as «a legend of Christian origin, but which, sanctified by the Koran, became a staple part of pious Muslim tradition» (M. Campanini, *La Sūrah della caverna. Meditazione filosofica sull'unicità di Dio*, La Nuova Italia, Firenze 1986, p. 1; our trans.). He states, moreover, «The legend is obviously of Christian origin, yet from the primitive, simple tale sprouted multiple versions that enriched the event with details and characters» (p. 17). The Coptic, Syriac and Arabic texts collected at the end of the 19th century by Ignazio Guidi attest to the diffusion of the tale in the Middle East (I. Guidi, *Testi Orientali Inediti sopra i Sette Dormienti di Efeso*, Typography of the Reale Accademia dei Lincei, Roma 1885; anastatic reprint Ulan Press, Belfast 2012).

⁴ Aristoteles, *Physica* IV, 11, 219a1-b2, in which it is explained in what sense time is number – not as a numbering number, but as a numbered number, and therefore as a quantity, or a totality of numbered things. On the question, see at least W. Wieland, *Die aristotelische Physik. Untersuchungen über die Grundlegung der Naturwissenschaft und die sprachlichen Bedingungen der Prinzipienforschung bei Aristoteles*, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, Göttingen 1970; P. Porro, *Forme e modelli di durata nel pensiero medievale. L'aevum, il tempo discreto, la categoria «quando»*, Leuven University Press, Leuven 1996, esp. pp. 1-3, 18-23; U. Coepe, *Time for Aristotle. Physics IV.10-14*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2005; P. Porro, «The Duration of Being. A Scholas-

perspective opened up by Aristotle, motion is indeed the indispensable point of reference for the interpretation of time (there could be no time without motion). Yet, in order for the successive quantity inherent in motion to be perceived, a numbering soul is necessary, i.e. a soul that numbers motion, to be exact. Confirming the inescapable co-implication of these two factors (the objective factor of motion and the subjective factor of the soul), in Chapter 11 of Book IV there is the bizarre account (especially for its precise geographical reference) of the Sleepers of Sardinia:

When the state of our minds does not change at all, or we have not noticed its changing, we do not think that time has elapsed, any more than those who are fabled to sleep among the heroes in Sardinia do when they are awakened, for they connect the earlier ‘now’ with the later and make them one, cutting out the interval because of their failure to notice it⁵.

The reference here, albeit a cursory one, is to an unspecified legend, of which only the commentator Simplicius would attempt to provide a more complete explanation, saying that the Sleepers were the nine children of Heracles and the Daughters of Thespius, who through some supernatural power preserved themselves intact and uncorrupted as if they were sleeping⁶. So the reference serves

tic Debate (and Its Own Duration)», in A. Speer / D. Wirmser (Hrsg.), *Das Sein der Dauer*, de Gruyter, Berlin–New York 2008, pp. 75–88, esp. pp. 75–77; as well as T. Roark, *Aristotle on Time. A Study of the Physics*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2011.

⁵ Aristoteles, *Physica*, IV, 11, 218b22–27; trans. *The Complete Works of Aristotle*, ed. by J. Barnes, Princeton University Press, Princeton 1984, p. 371.

⁶ Simplicius, *On Aristotle's Physics 4.1–5, 10–14*, trans. J.O. Urmson, Cornell University Press, Ithaca–New York 1992, p. 116: «[...] we ourselves are aware every day from sleep that those not conscious of change are also not conscious of time, but Aristotle confirms it from the longer sleep of those who in the myth sleep in the isle of Sardinia with the heroes. For Hercules was said up to the time of Aristotle and perhaps of Alexander the commentator on Aristotle's works to have had nine sons by the daughters of Thespius the son of Thespius, who died in Sardinia; their bodies were said to continue whole and uncorrupted, and to give an appearance of being asleep. These are the heroes in Sardinia». And he adds, a few lines later, still with reference to the same story: «But Eudemus set aside the confirmation from Sardinia and confirmed the doctrine from an event at Athens. ‘For’, he says, ‘it is stated that at a public religious celebration some people were feasting in a deep cave; they got drunk and went to sleep towards daybreak, together with their servants, and slept through the rest of the night, the next day and also the next night. One of them woke up, saw the stars were out and went back again to rest. On the following day, when they woke up, they celebrated the Koureotis a day later than the other people, which is how they discovered what had happened’. The Koureotis was the third day of the Apatouria, as the first was Dorpia, the second Anarrusius and the fourth Epibda. So after the celebration of the second day they slept through the next and the night after, and observed the fourth day as the Koureotis instead of the third».

Aristotle to clarify what accompanies time: time seems inexistent, and the soul perceives itself as permanent in one single and indivisible instant, when it does not distinguish any form of movement or change.

It's interesting that in the medieval reorganisation of Aristotle's formula on time, the achronic experience of the Sleepers wouldn't be proposed in a uniform way; instead it would appear not only in a formally renewed guise, but often substantially different, with inevitable repercussions on the essence itself of time.

To begin to trace the path that will lead us to the Jewish Middle Ages, which is what interests us here, we should go back to Avicenna for a moment, and to what he writes in the *Physics* (II, 10) of his *Kitāb al-Šīfa*⁷. The question relative to time, which announces itself from the opening pages as being as controversial as the question of place, is introduced by the same "temporal puzzles"⁸ as those covered by Aristotle. The list opens with the idea of the inexistence of time, passing through the possible ways of predicating its existence (as the result, for example, of the estimative faculty), and leads to the idea (itself "ingenuous" and "immature") of its identification with a something. And the first thing to be considered is, indeed, motion, which appears here in a close yet curious association with the Companions of the Cave, a group of God-like men, and Aristotle:

Those who made motion itself time said that from among the existing things that we experience, motion is that which includes past and future things, and it is in its nature always to have two parts with this description, and whatever has this description is time. They also said that we believe that there has been time only when we sense motion, such that the sick and afflicted will find a given period of time long that one engrossed in wanton pleasure would find short, because the motions used to measure [the time] are firmly fixed in the memory of the former two, while they vanish from the memory of the one savouring wanton pleasure and rapture. Whoever is not aware of motion is not aware of time, just like the Companions of the Cave; for, since they were unaware of the motions between the instant that they first settled down for a nap and the instant that they awoke, they did not realise that they had slept more than a day. The First Teacher [i.e. Aristotle] also related that something like that happened to a group of

⁷ For a reconstruction of the concept of time in Avicenna, see Y. Shayegan, *Avicenna on Time*, PhD thesis Harvard University, 1986; J. McGinnis, «Ibn Sīnā on Now», *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* 78/1 (1999) 73-106; and A. Lammer, *The Elements of Avicenna's Physics: Greek Sources and Arabic Innovations*, de Gruyter, Berlin 2018, esp. pp. 429-524. And on the idea of time in general in Arab philosophy (including Avicenna), see M. Dag, «Aristotelian Views of Time in Islamic Philosophy», *Ondokuz Mayıs Üniversitesi İlahiyat Fakültesi Dergisi* 1/1 (1986) 40-58.

⁸ Cf. Avicenna, *The Physics of The Healing. A Parallel English-Arabic Text*, trans. by J. McGinnis, Brigham Young University Press, Provo, Utah 2009, p. 220, notes 2-3.

godlike men, and history reveals that they were before the Companions of the Cave. These are the early views about time before the maturity of philosophy, but all of them are incorrect⁹.

Rather than try to understand why Avicenna speaks of incorrect theories, and what is, in his view, the correct theory, what counts is that, in the presumed equivalence between perception of motion and perception of time, the reference, in some way obligatory for an Arab philosopher, to the Companions of the Cave appears. The reference not only places Avicenna's subject matter in its specific Islamic context, but it airs a clarification that, at least in form, removes it even further from Aristotle. Indeed, Avicenna immediately adds that the Sleepers in Aristotle's *Physics* are to be considered as historically antecedent to those in the Cave. The renewed, or refreshed, guise with which Avicenna evokes the episode of the Sleepers nevertheless does not change its more profound meaning: despite the novel elements (the indigenous imprint in mentioning the Companions of the Cave, on the one hand, and the collocation along an ideal timeline of Aristotle's Sleepers and those in the Koran, on the other), the episode is used by Avicenna, like Aristotle, to explain that time is not identifiable with motion, but nevertheless it cannot exist without it, since it is an accident of motion.

At this point, we could go through all the other occurrences of the theme in Avicenna's production; and recall, for example, that it returns in a more general form (that is, without the additional corrections or revisions) in his analysis of

⁹ Avicenna, *The Physics of The Healing*, cit., pp. 224-225 (our italics); Avicenna Latinus, *Liber Primus Naturalium. Tractatus Secundus de motu et de consimilibus*, éd. S. Van Riet – J. Janssens – A. Allard, Académie Royale de Belgique, Bruxelles 2006, II, 10, pp. 313-314: «[...] qui posuerunt motum esse ipsum tempus dixerunt quod inter omnia quae videntur esse ipse motus tantum est qui recipit in se praeteritum et praesens, et quod in natura eius est ut habeat semper duas partes ad hunc modum, et quicquid est sic est tempus. Nos enim non putamus esse tempus nisi cum sentimus motum. Infirmo enim vel dolenti elongatur tempus, et abbreviatur voluptuoso, ideo quod motus diversi retinentur memoriter in mentibus illorum duorum, sed delentur de memoria voluptuosi propter voluptatem eius et sospitatem. Qui autem non percipit motum, non percipit tempus, sicut dormientes in caverna qui, quia non perceperunt motus qui fuerunt inter principium recumbendi et dormiendi et inter horam expergescendi, nescierunt se nisi una die dormivisse. Auctor autem primus significavit quod aliquibus hominibus divinis contingit simile huic, et significat era quod isti antea fuerunt quam dormientes cavernae. Hae sunt dictiones antiquae de certificatione esse temporis. Nullae autem istarum verae sunt».

¹⁰ Avicenna, *Kitāb al-Nağāt*, ed. M. Fakhry, Dar al-afaq al-ğadida, Beirut 1985, pp. 152-153: «He who is not aware of motion, is not aware of time. This was just the case with the Companions of the Cave» (translation from Arabic by Benedetto). We find the same reference to time and the

time in *Kitāb al-Nağāt*¹⁰. Or else, leaving Avicenna to one side for now, we could consider the ways in which the episode of the Sleepers intersects with the figure and work of Averroes.

If, indeed, we don't want to give credit to the words of Jorge Luis Borges, according to whom, during a dialectically intense dinner, the tale of the Sleepers of Ephesus was shown and not simply recounted to Averroes¹¹, there would at least be Book IV of the *Long Commentary on Aristotle's Physics* to vouch for Averroes' curious form of familiarity (philosophical and/or religious) with the episode¹².

The framework within which, in these pages, the Aristotelian topic of the perception of time in parallel with the perception of motion is collocated, albeit with some uncertainty, is Islamic («...sicut accidit illis hominibus, quos [...] forte erant illi, quos Macumet numeravit in Alcorano») ¹³. Yet, through a strange paradox, the explanation of the relation between time and the multiple typologies of motion is unexpectedly entrusted to Plato: discussing what type of motion time is an "accident" of, Averroes writes that any one not able to perceive celestial motion would not be able to perceive time either, «ut dicit Plato de incarceratis a pueritia sub terra, secundum quod, si non comprehenderetur nisi per comprehensionem alicuius motus sensibilis, verbi gratia motus coeli, tunc isti incarcerati non sentirent tempus, quia nunquam senserunt motus corporis coelestis»¹⁴.

Companions of the Cave in Fakhr al-Dīn ar-Rāzī, *al-Mabāḥiṭ al-Mašriqiyyah*, Dairatul-Mārif-il-Osmania, Hyderabad 1343/1924, vol. 1, p. 653.

¹¹ J.L. Borges, «Averroës' Search», in J.L. Borges, *Labyrinths: Selected Stories and Other Writings*, trans. J.E. Irby, New Directions, New York 1964, pp. 148-155, p. 152: «Let us imagine that someone shows a story instead of telling it – the story of the seven sleepers of Ephesus, say. We see them retire into the cavern, we see them pray and sleep, we see them sleep with their eyes open, we see them grow while they are asleep, we see them awaken after three hundred and nine years, we see them hand the merchant an ancient coin, we see them awaken in paradise, we see them awaken with the dog».

¹² I say "at least" because, in the shorter *Epitome of the Physics*, we find – in order to explain the correlation between the perception of movement and the perception of time – the reference to "demigods who were sleeping". I'm following Puig's translation here from the Arabic of *muta'allihūn* as "semidioses" (Averroes, *Epitome de Fisica*, trans. J. Puig, Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas, Madrid 1987, p. 159), preferring it – as kindly suggested to me by Matteo di Giovanni – to the more mystifying interpretation of the term as "some ascetics", which instead M. Fakhry proposes, in his *Averroes: His Life, Work and Influence*, Oneworld, London 2001, p. 50.

¹³ Averroes, *Aristotelis De Physico Auditu Libri Octo*, Venetiis 1552, p. 178B.

¹⁴ Averroes, *Aristotelis De Physico Auditu Libri Octo*, cit., p. 178H.

Beyond this account of the rough *translatio* of the same story, what is of interest here is that the two terms, time and motion, cease to constitute a single and indissoluble plexus in the Judeo-Arabic philosopher, Abū'l-Barakāt al-Baġdādī, who elaborates all his reflections on the basis, or better, in open polemic, with Aristotle's philosophy as transmitted in Avicenna's *The Healing*.

Born in Balad, near Mosul, around 1077 to a Jewish family, Abū'l-Barakāt enjoyed but scarce recognition in the Jewish world closest to him, perhaps because of his conversion to Islam in later life for motives that are still unclear today¹⁵: speculations are among the most disparate (from wounded pride, to a fatal error in diagnosing the wife of the Caliph al-Mustanġid, whose physician he was, to fear of execution after being taken prisoner); however, they would all seem to converge on one fact, that it was a conversion of convenience, dictated by the need to safeguard his reputation, if not his life¹⁶.

-
- ¹⁵ On the relative oblivion in which Abū'l-Barakāt had fallen in a Jewish context, Sirat writes: «[...] he is seldom cited in Jewish philosophy, although certain parallels with Abraham bar Hiyya and Hasdai Crescas may be significant. On the other hand, he was quite often quoted and used by Arabic philosophers, who seem to have forgotten his Jewish origins; in particular he strongly influenced the famous twelfth-century author Fakh-al-Din-Razi» (C. Sirat, *A History of Jewish Philosophy in the Middle Ages*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1990, p. 132). Cf. what Freudenthal and Zonta say in this regard, in G. Freudenthal – M. Zonta, «Avicenna among Medieval Jews. The Reception of Avicenna's Philosophical, Scientific and Medical Writings in Jewish Cultures, East and West», *Arabic Science and Philosophy* 22 [2012] 217–287, esp. p. 221: «Despite his apostasy, there was no animosity to Abū al-Barakāt among Jews; he played a role, albeit minor, in later Jewish thought. The *Kitāb al-Mu'tabar* was copied over in Hebrew characters [...]. As noted by Y. Tzvi Langermann (Y. Tzvi Langermann, «al-Baġhdādī, Abū'l-Barakāt», in E. Craig [ed.], *Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Routledge, London 1998, c. 1, pp. 636-638), “al-Baġhdādī's works continued to be studied at the yeshivah of Baġhdad, then the centre of Jewish conservatism, into the thirteenth century [...]”. Abū al-Barakāt is thus a thinker who was a Jew not only by birth but also (until his conversion) by social identity and who engaged seriously with Avicenna. He left his marks on both the Muslim and Jewish intellectual worlds». Together with the earlier study by M. Zonta, «Avicenna in Medieval Jewish Philosophy», in J. Janssens – D. De Smet (eds), *Avicenna and His Heritage*, Leuven University Press, Leuven 2002, 267-279; the paper, co-authored by Freudenthal – Zonta, remains an indispensable point of reference in tracing Avicenna's circulation in a Hebrew context, beyond the observations it has elicited: S. Harvey, «Some Notes on “Avicenna among Medieval Jews”», *Arabic Science and Philosophy* 25 (2015) 249-277, with the reply by G. Freudenthal – M. Zonta, «Note on “Some Notes on ‘Avicenna among Medieval Jews’” by Steven Harvey», *Arabic Science and Philosophy* 26 (2016) 309-311.
- ¹⁶ On Abū'l-Barakāt's conversion to Islam, see S. Stroumsa, «On Jewish Intellectual Converts to Islam in the Early Middle Ages», *Pe'amin* 42 (1990) 61-75 [in Hebrew]; and R.D. Marcotte, «La conversion tardive d'un philosophe: Abū al-Barakāt al-Baġhdādī (mort vers 545/1150) sur 'L'intellect et sa quiddité'», *Documenti e Studi sulla Tradizione Filosofica Medievale* 15 (2004) 201-226.

Not much more interested in the figure of Abū'l-Barakāt has been philosophical historiography: after the pioneering scholarship of Shlomo Pines in the 20th century, followed by many decades of silence, historiographical attention has only recently begun to focus on this philosopher once again¹⁷, even though he himself claimed to have reached the same level as Aristotle¹⁸. And while the comparison may seem a little too audacious, it is undeniable that Abū'l-Barakāt made an important contribution to the history of philosophy, by upsetting a whole tradition – the Aristotelian one – and more especially by revolutionising the then dominant theory of time, with the proposal of a radical disconnection between the notion of time and that of motion¹⁹.

And that is just what he does in his main work, though it is not the only one to have been composed: for, apart from a treatise of uncertain authorship, often attributed to Avicenna, on the causes of the visibility of the stars at night and their invisibility in daylight, he also wrote a Judeo-Arabic commentary on Ecclesiastes, which is still on the whole unedited²⁰. The work, which the sparse biblical refer-

¹⁷ See, specifically, S. Pines, *Studies in Abu'l-Barakāt al-Baghdādī: Physics and Metaphysics*, Magnes Press, Jerusalem 1979, reprinted 2000; and the double monograph, in which the author's stated intention is to complete and perfect Pines' study, M.M. Pavlov, *Abu'l-Barakāt al-Baghdādī's Scientific Philosophy. The Kitāb al-Mu'tabar*, Routledge, New York 2017; *Abu'l-Barakāt al-Baghdādī's Metaphysical Philosophy. The Kitāb al-Mu'tabar*, Routledge, New York 2017. For an updated bibliography, see, T. Tunagöz, «Works on Abū'l-Barakāt al-Baghdādī: A Bibliographical Essay», *Çukurova University Journal of Faculty of Divinity* 17/1 (2017) 187-225.

¹⁸ Apropos, there is an 11th century testimony in a Biographical Work on Learned Men of the Islam, il *Tatimmat šiwān al-ḥikma* ("Continuation of the Receptacle of Wisdom") by 'Alī al-Bayhaqī: at the beginning of the section dedicated "the only of his time (*awḥad al-zamān*): Abū al-Barakāt ibn Malkā, the doctor" we read «the philosopher of the Iraqis and he who claimed to have reached the same level as Aristotle: he had a lively mind and produced many works (compilations), such as *Kitāb al-Mu'tabar*, the book of *Al-naḥs wal-tafsīr* ("Soul and Interpretation") and others; he lived ninety years and was struck down with leprosy, which he treated and cured himself» ('Alī al-Bayhaqī, *Tatimmat šiwān al-ḥikma*, ed. M. Shafī', University of Panjab, Lahore 1935, p. 150; translation from the Arabic by Benedetto).

¹⁹ At the moment there is only one specialised study, which is still unpublished, on the question of time in Abū'l-Barakāt: D. Mehmet, *The Philosophy of Abū'l-Barakāt al-Baghdādī with Specific Reference to his Concept of Time*, PhD Dissertation, Durham 1970. A chapter in Pavlov is dedicated to time (but not only) in *Abū'l-Barakāt al-Baghdādī's Metaphysical Philosophy*, cit., pp. 81–133. In general, on Abū'l-Barakāt contributions to physics (with an innovative theory on motion too), see S. Nony, «Les audaces de la Physique arabe du XII^e siècle dans la synthèse d'Abū'l-Barakāt al-Baghdādī», *Mideo* 29 (2012) 27-50; and by the same author, *Les variations du mouvement. Abū'l-Barakāt, un physicien à Bagdad*, Routledge, New York 2016.

²⁰ In this case too we are indebted to S. Pines, «A Study of Abu'l-Barakāt's Commentary on the Ecclesiastes», *Tarbiz* 33 (1964) 198-213.

ences allow us to collocate in the period before his conversion to Islam, is significantly entitled *Kitāb al-Mu'tabar*, or “The book about what has been established by personal reflection”, indicating, as explicitly stated in the introduction, that while following the classical division of the sciences in Logic, Physics (including Psychology) and Metaphysics, there will also be personal thoughts and intuitions expressed in it, well beyond an entire philosophical tradition²¹.

Hence the need to traverse the history of philosophy phylogenetically – from the time when the philosopher used oral communication, for fear of being misunderstood, to the passage to an enigmatic form of writing, up to the modern age, in which the philosopher confines himself simply to interpreting the texts of the past, with varying degrees of success. Such an effort of the “hermeneutics of philosophical language” serves Abū'l-Barakāt in order to declare his dissatisfaction with the reflections of the ancients, as well as the moderns, who are mere interpreters of the former²². And so he concludes that, while even sharing some of what has already been expostulated in the past (and sometimes reproducing it to the letter), he will be the mouthpiece of ideas that have never been formulated, or at least never expressed²³.

²¹ On the last part of the work, cf. F. Griffel, «Between al-Ghazali and Abu l-Barakat al-Baghdadi: The Dialectical Turn in the Philosophy of Iraq and Iran During the Sixth/Twelfth Century», in P. Adamson (ed.), *In the Age of Averroes: Arabic Philosophy in the Sixth/Twelfth Century*, The Warburg Institute–Nino Aragno, London–Turin 2011, pp. 45-76, in part. pp. 65-66.

²² Cf. Pines, *Studies*, cit., pp. 98-99: «Lorsque le destin voulut que je m'occupasse des sciences philosophiques, je me mis à lire les livres des anciens, qui traitent d'elles, ainsi que les explications, interprétations et commentaires composés par les savants modernes (litt. postérieurs). Mais, bien que je fusse un lecteur très appliqué, je ne recueillis qu'un maigre savoir car beaucoup de discours des anciens étaient difficiles à comprendre à cause de leur concision et il était rare que le sens fût clairement dégagé et résumé; de plus, (la justesse de) l'énoncé de la pensée avait souffert d'être traduit d'une langue dans une autre. Quant aux discours des modernes (litt. postérieurs), leur prolixité, le peu de rapport qu'on y trouve entre la preuve et la chose à prouver, entre la démonstration (proposée) et la voie droite et, en de nombreux passages, le manque d'une analyse et d'une exposition véritables dues à l'obscurité (du langage) et aux écarts (de la pensée), sont autant de facteurs qui font que (d'une part) ces ouvrages sont d'une compréhension difficile à cause de leur style et que (d'autre part) il est malaisé de les interpréter et d'en extraire un (vrai) savoir en raison de (leur façon de manier) les arguments et les preuves».

²³ Cf. Pines, *Studies*, cit., pp. 99-101: «...j'appliquais ma réflexion et ma pensée spéculative à étudier et à comprendre les idées et à approfondir les sciences. (Et il arriva ceci): ma pensée qui, sur quelques points, s'étant trouvée d'accord avec les opinions d'une partie des anciens et en désaccord avec certains d'entre eux sur d'autres questions, est parvenue (quelquefois), à force de scruter le livre de l'être, à des conclusions qui n'ont jamais été formulées ou qui (du moins) n'ont pas été transmises. [...] Voilà pourquoi, ayant été prié de nouveau et par des personnes

First of all is the idea – which runs through the entire work like a *leitmotif* – that there are *a priori* truths (*awwaliyya*), which are self-evident and indubitable; even though they are far removed from the perception of the senses, they are known with immediate certainty, before any other thing. These are the soul (*nafs*), existence (*wuġūd*) and time (*zamān*); notions which, in virtue of the innate instinctive ability with which they are grasped, force Abū'l-Barakāt to invalidate any possible *a posteriori* theory of the dominant philosophy in that epoch.

Now, the fact that Abū'l-Barakāt speaks of *a priori* knowledge with regard to the first two elements (soul and existence) is hardly surprising. In the teaching already derived from Avicenna's thought-experiment of the flying, or floating, man, it is impossible not to recognise immediately one's own selfhood (*dāt*): even in the absence of any perception of one's own body in the outside world and in the absence of cognitive elements that allow one to interpret oneself, man recognises himself as himself, and therefore not only his own existence, but also, in general, the existence of both real things and mental forms²⁴. It is all too obvious, then, considering such an immediate, primarily known perception, that the terminology

qui avaient droit à une réponse favorable, je donnai suite à leur requête et composai ce livre traitant des sciences philosophiques qui ont pour objet ce qui existe, la physique et la métaphysique. Je l'ai intitulé *Kitāb al-Mu'tabar*, parce que j'y ai mis ce que j'ai connu (par ma propre intelligence), établi par une réflexion personnelle, vérifié et parfait par la méditation; je n'ai rien transcrit que je ne l'aie compris et je n'ai rien compris et accepté sans méditation et réflexion personnelles (*i'tibār*). En adoptant telles ou telles opinions et doctrines je ne (me suis pas non plus laissé guider par le désir) de me trouver d'accord avec les grands (noms) à cause de leur grandeur ou en désaccord avec les petits à cause de leur insignifiance. C'est que mon but en tout cela était la vérité et que (en regard de celle-ci) la conformité de mes opinions avec celles des autres ou leur divergence n'était qu'un accident».

²⁴ On the recurrence and development of Avicennian psychology in Abū'l-Barakāt, see S. Pines, «La conception de la conscience de soi chez Avicenne et chez Abu'l-Barakāt al-Baghdādī Poetics and Metaphysics», *Archives d'histoire doctrinale et littéraire du Moyen Âge* 21 (1954) pp. 21–98; reprinted in Pines, *Studies*, cit., pp. 181–258. Among the more recent studies, see J. Kaukua, «Self-awareness without substance: from Abū'l-Barakāt al-Baghdādī to Suhrawardī», in Idem, *Self-Awareness in Islamic Philosophy: Avicenna and Beyond*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2015, pp. 104–123; and again by J. Kaukua, «Self, agent, soul: Abū'l-Barakāt al-Baghdādī's critical reception of Avicennian psychology», in J. Kaukua / T. Ekenberg (eds), *Subjectivity and selfhood in medieval and early modern philosophy*, Springer, New York 2016, pp. 75–89; and F. Benevich, «Perceiving Things in Themselves: Abū'l-Barakāt al-Baghdādī's Critique of Representationalism», *Arabic Science and Philosophy* 30 (2020) 229–264: compared with Avicennian psychology, what here emerges clearly is the form of 'direct realism' to which Abū'l-Barakāt adheres (i.e. «one and the same immaterial soul – the first-person subject of perception – directly perceives both universal concepts and sensible particulars through the same epistemic procedure»), p. 232).

employed in order to define existence would be less well known than the term it claims to define, which is inadmissible:

When a man apprehends a [certain] thing with one of his senses, as for instance, his sight, hearing, the sense of smell, of taste or of touch and has knowledge of it and of his apprehending it, he says of that thing that it exists, meaning thereby not its being apprehended, but its being liable to be apprehended, before or after he or someone else apprehended it. For the thing is in itself liable to be apprehended and consequently is apprehended by [whoever] apprehends it. And it is in this state before, at the time of, and after its being apprehended. It is this state that is named existence (*wuġūd*), and because of it a thing is described as an existent, which is being liable to be apprehended. Hereupon the mind, having considered [the matter, acquires] the knowledge that [the fact of] being apprehended is not bound up with existence, being merely a thing that comes to the existent in its existence from [the person] who apprehends it and not a thing belonging to [the existent] in itself, and that only its being liable to be apprehended is an attribute belonging to it in and through itself. Thereupon we see that there are things that are apprehended by one [person], and not by another, and that the fact that they are such as not to be apprehended by [a person] incapable of apprehending them does not detract from their existence. For they exist in the same way whether he apprehend them or not. It is accordingly possible that some existents are not apprehended [at all], or not by some of those capable of apprehension. Thus apprehension is not a condition for existence, whereas existence is a condition for apprehension. On the other hand, the recognition and the knowledge [...] of the existence of the existent are due only to his apprehending the latter. Accordingly it is not correct to define the existent as that which is apprehended or as that which is obtained through apprehension. For existence and existent are words whose meaning is apprehended through a priori knowledge [...]; and do not require a definition explaining the terms, except – by God – to the extent to which a language may be interpreted in, and translated into, another language²⁵.

If such is the case, that is, if knowledge of soul and existence can only be *a priori* applied to time, how does *a priori* knowledge work? In what sense can man be said to be firmly rooted in an awareness of time? Are we not perhaps used to the exact opposite, to considering the reality of time as extremely elusive?

Well, according to Abū'l-Barakāt, time loses its ontological fragility, which a whole tradition had attributed to it, and begins to enjoy an effective existence, when it moves from the domain of physics, in which it had been confined by an indissoluble bond with motion, and passes to the more legitimate one of metaphysics, thus becoming itself an *a priori* concept, of which one is aware through and together with the awareness of oneself and of existence²⁶.

²⁵ Pines, *Studies*, cit., pp. 148–149.

²⁶ Pines, *Studies*, cit., p. 150: «What is intellectually cognised of the *esse* which is mentally conceived is an intellectual notion comprising both that which is perceived by the senses and that which is not. The mind has a representation of it, and the soul is aware of it for and by its own

Abū'l-Barakāt does himself introduce the notion of time in the *Book of Physics*, in chapter 17; but here the purpose seems to be precisely that of questioning the relation of time to motion; then to have it crumble conclusively in the *Book of Metaphysics*. The question is posited in the former in terms of a failure to recognise the nature of time. Ordinary people, here placed on a level with Aristotle, mistakenly believe that time, by the simple fact of passing and renewing itself, is the measure of motion (*miqdār al-ḥarakah*). If it really were an accident of motion, however, we would have to concede its interruption, if not its non-existence, in cases of rest or immobility, which is completely irrational – writes Abū'l-Barakāt – because the knowledge, solid and primary, one has of time attests to the fact that it precedes motion, logically and ontologically, thus collapsing the widely-held and long-shared sequence “perceive motion → perceive time”²⁷.

As proof of his argument, which suddenly precipitates motion into a position of subordination with respect to time, Abū'l-Barakāt returns to the story of the men in the cave: the Sleepers were not aware of time elapsing, not because they could not perceive any motion, but, more simply, because of the condition in which they found themselves, and which unites anyone who sleeps in a state of unawareness of both time and motion²⁸.

Faced with a tradition that recounts, with a certain obviousness, that the men in the cave woke up without realising how much time had elapsed, one should try instead to imagine a different scenario, perhaps a philosophically more intriguing one, by reinventing the narration of the same story, in which the men in the cave,

self, prior to its being aware of any [other] thing [...]. The soul has a similar awareness of time by, and together with, its own self and existence prior [to its being aware] of any [other] thing of which it is aware and which it considers in its own mind» (III, 39).

²⁷ Abū'l-Barakāt al-Baghdādī, *Kitāb al-Muṭabar*, ed. S. Yalčkaya, 3 vols., Hyderabad 1938-1939, II, 17, p. 71: «... its knowledge is firm in the intellect, so much so that we cannot conceive of removing it in the presence of motion, and with its non-existence, before it and after it. [...] Its knowledge is prior in the mind with respect to the knowledge of motion, and therefore its existence is prior to that of the motion». Translation from the Arabic by Benedetto.

²⁸ Abū'l-Barakāt al-Baghdādī, *Kitāb al-Muṭabar*, cit., II, 17, p. 73: «The discourse of those who say that whosoever is not conscious of motion does not sense time, is reversed; in other words, whosoever does not sense time does not sense motion. Because the man who senses motion senses a before and an after in a distance in which the before and the after never unite; instead they unite in the mind. And that prior and posterior in a prior and a posterior is time. Those who were adduced as an example, that is, the men in the cave, did not feel time, just as they did not feel anything else; they had completely lost consciousness, since the sleeper senses nothing, neither motion nor time». Translation from the Arabic by Benedetto.

rather than falling asleep, remain awake. In such an instance, though immersed and deprived of the ability to move, these men would still be aware of the passing of every single hour:

If they were nevertheless in the cave and in the dark, but in a waking state, not an hour would pass without their being aware of it, since if one of us were in a similar state, of rest and immobility, without perceiving anything with our own sight, or feeling the motion of what moves, we would be aware of the time spent in that state and could imagine the motions that are suitable for that time. We could therefore say that, at such and such a time, we would have gone a certain distance, and imagine the passing of hours with our own sense of time, saying, for example, that a given hour has come or is near. Thus, being aware of time together with being unaware of motion...²⁹.

Time, therefore – writes Abū'l-Barakāt, at the end of his 'physical' discourse on the subject – cannot be conceived as an *'ard*, an accident (specifically, as an accident of motion): it is not something that inheres or is added to something else, like whiteness and blackness, or even hot and cold, which depend for their being on the place in which they are found³⁰. What, then, is it all about?

The status of time, so far outlined as a mere negative, with information relating to what time is *not*, is instead defined with precision in the third book of the *Kitāb al-Mu'tabar*. In chapter 8 of the *Metaphysics*, the question receives an 'adequate' treatment (as we read in the subtitle itself: *fī al-zamān 'alā waḡhin yalīq biḥadā al-'ilm*, that is, *on time, in an adequate way for that science*), opening straight away with a distinction – between incomplete and sensible knowledge, on the one hand, and complete and intelligible knowledge, on the other – which places the knowledge of time beyond sense perception, but still on the far side of the intelligible.

All, indeed, agree on perceiving immediately – Abū'l-Barakāt reiterates once again – through the spirit, and not through the senses, the existence of time; disagreement arises in the attempt to move to a more complete form of knowledge, while still claiming that it is nevertheless rooted in the sphere of physical phenomena³¹.

²⁹ Abū'l-Barakāt al-Baḡdādī, *Kitāb al-Mu'tabar*, cit., II, 17, p. 73. Translation from the Arabic by Benedetto.

³⁰ See Abū'l-Barakāt al-Baḡdādī, *Kitāb al-Mu'tabar*, cit., II, 17, p. 74.

³¹ Abū'l-Barakāt al-Baḡdādī, *Kitāb al-Mu'tabar*, cit., III, 8, p. 36: «Some say it is a name that has no meaning, while others say it has a meaning perceived by the senses and is motion. Others say it is not perceived by the senses, but is intelligible through reason, and is the measure of motion. Still others say it is a substance, while others say it is an accident. Some say it is neither

Now, the fact that time is connected with motion is indisputable; indeed, we could not measure one without the other (moreover, in a relation of reciprocity, such that, as Abū'l-Barakāt explains, «...we call “day” the time measured with the motion of the sun from the moment of its rising until it returns to shine once again. But we also speak of the distance of one day or two days, meaning the distance that something in motion traverses in a day or two»)³².

It would be far from the truth, however, if it were not admitted that, in addition to motion, time also accompanies rest: motion and rest are, in fact, both *in time, with time, and delimited by time*, with the result that there is nothing scandalous, indeed it is absolutely preferable, to define time through what unites all beings (whether they are in motion or at rest): namely existence. Much more radically than motion, it is existence that is measured according to the degrees of more and less, if it is true, as it actually is, that any being, by the mere fact of existing, exists in time.

From such a novel perspective, which raises time to the ‘measure of existence’, it is evidently no longer possible to conceive of the removal of time, just as the removal of existence is inconceivable (but not the passage from existence to non-existence)³³. In unequivocal terms, Abū'l-Barakāt writes:

Consequently, time should be defined as the measure of existence, rather than as the measure of motion, since it equally measures the state of rest. And, indeed, both what moves and what is at rest participate in existence. [...] So, just as it cannot be conceived that the notion of existence can be suppressed by the soul, so it cannot be for that of time³⁴.

Taking to the limit such a radical rethinking of Aristotle’s theory, which sub-

a substance nor an accident. Some say it is being and others say it is non-being. Some say it has a permanent existence and others say it has a non-permanent existence. All this, through enquiry and rational meditation, and all this was said in accordance with physical phenomena». Translation from the Arabic by Benedetto.

³² Abū'l-Barakāt al-Baġdādī, *Kitāb al-Muḥtabar*, cit., III, 8, p. 36. Translation from the Arabic by Benedetto.

³³ Abū'l-Barakāt al-Baġdādī, *Kitāb al-Muḥtabar*, cit., III, 8, p. 40: «... it cannot be said about existence that it is existent or non-existent, because only what is existent can become non-existent. This [concept] is part of the things we have not mentioned in the natural sciences and contradicts the claim that time has no existence, because its existence has proved more knowable than the existence of the other things that exist in it and are bound to it» (*mimā wuġadu ma'ahu wa yata'alaqu bihi*). Translation from the Arabic by Benedetto.

³⁴ Abū'l-Barakāt al-Baġdādī, *Kitāb al-Muḥtabar*, cit., III, 8, p. 39. Translation from the Arabic by Benedetto.

tracts time from the physical dimension and releases it from motion once and for all, what Abū'l-Barakāt achieves is therefore:

1. In an unexpected reversal of terms, it is no longer time that follows motion, but motion that is an accident of time: motion presupposes, in fact, the before and after which constitute time. The result that radically and irremediably distances Abū'l-Barakāt from Aristotle and the whole Peripatetic Tradition is thus incontrovertible: it is possible to conceive time without motion (time continues to flow, infinitely, even without motion), but the opposite, motion without time, cannot be conceived, because motion is always in the continuity of time and with time.

2. The second consequence – which Abū'l-Barakāt limits himself just to introducing in chapter 8 of the *Book of Metaphysics*, without any further, necessary, exposition – is that God is not above or beyond time, but is Himself in time. Indeed, if time is the measure of existence, and no longer of motion, there can be but one time, common to God and to all creatures, because there is but one being, whether it is necessary or contingent. So, when we predicate eternity with reference to God, according to Abū'l-Barakāt, we have to admit that we are simply using a different name to mean, in a more intense form, time: indeed, what else is eternity, if not permanent existence?³⁵

³⁵ Abū'l-Barakāt al-Baġdādī, *Kitāb al-Mu'tabar*, cit., III, 8, p. 40: «Man conceives of a time before all temporal beginning; he conceives it with his spirit and with his intelligence. And a time that is a beginning not preceded by time is not intelligible. [...] the spirit does not conceive of an existence that does not have a duration or a time – whether it is the existence of the Creator or the existence of a creature. So, there can be no reflection on what language says without reference to the spirit and intelligence. And those who affirm this, I mean the abstraction of the existence of the Creator from time, are the same who affirm that time is the measure of motion and the Creator does not move, therefore He is not in time. We have explained that the existence of every being is in a duration, which is time, and one cannot conceive of an existence that is not in time. Those who abstracted the existence of the Creator from time said that He exists in eternity, in time without beginning or end; indeed, that His existence coincides with eternity and time without beginning or end. So they replaced the term 'time' with another [...]. In fact, when asked: "What are eternity and time without beginning or end?" they said: "They are perennial permanence not accompanied by motion". Now, permanence is an attribute of duration and time. So they have changed the name, but the intelligible meaning is the same, designating what moves and what doesn't. So the denomination differs according to the different attribution of a single intelligible, which is that of duration and time» (Translation from the Arabic by Benedetto). On the specific question of the eternity of God (and on the alternative eternity-creation of the world), see Pavlov, *Abū'l-Barakāt al-Baġhdādī's Metaphysical Philosophy*, cit., pp. 95-104; and A. Lammer, «Two Sixth/Twelfth-Century Hardliners on Creation and Divine Eternity: al-Sahrastānī and Abū'l-Barakāt al-Baġdādī on God's Priority over the World», in A. al Ghouz (ed.), *Islamic Philosophy from the 12th to the 14th Century*, Bonn University Press and V&R Unipress, Göttingen 2018, pp. 233-278

At this point, a further clarification perhaps deserves a mention.

The literature of the Jewish Middle Ages abounds in theories on the reality of time and its nature. The Aristotelian formula of time as the number of motion is adopted by many writers, and in a constant manner. In the twelfth century, Maimonides himself canonises the revival when, in the second part of the *Guide to the Perplexed*, as part of a larger project discussing the alternative between creation and eternity of the world, he gives time the status of accident inherent to another accident (i.e., movement)³⁶.

From the fourteenth century onward, however, there are no lack of positions which, abandoning the canon established by Maimonides, reveal themselves to be far removed from Aristotle. One such case is that of the Spanish Jew, Ḥasdai Crescas (1340-1410/11) who, in his main work, *The Light of the Lord* (in the original

³⁶ Maimonides speaks of it, curiously, when he presents the opinion of the faithful (*of all who believe in the Law of Moses our Master*) on the creation of the world. In order to explain that time itself is created, he writes: «...through His will and His volition, God brought into existence out of nothing all the beings as they are, time itself being one of the created things. For time is consequent upon motion, and motion is an accident in what is moved. Furthermore, what is moved — that is, that upon the motion of which time is consequent — is itself created in time and came to be after not having been. [...] time is indubitably an accident. According to us it is one of the created accidents, as are blackness and whiteness. And though it does not belong to the species of quality, it is nevertheless, generally stated, an accident necessarily following upon motion, as is made clear to whoever has understood the discourse of Aristotle on the elucidation of time and on the true reality of its existence. We shall expound here a notion that, though it does not belong to the purpose that we pursue, is useful with regard to it. This notion is as follows. What caused the nature of time to be hidden from the majority of the men of knowledge so that that notion perplexed them — like Galen and others — and made them wonder whether or not time had a true reality in that which exists, is the fact that time is an accident subsisting in an accident. For the accidents that have a primary existence in bodies, as for instance colours and tastes, can be understood at the outset and a mental representation can be had of their notions. But the nature of the accidents whose substrata are other accidents, as for instance the glint of a colour and the curve and circularity of a line, is most hidden — more particularly if, in addition, the accident that serves as a substratum has no permanent state, but passes from one state to another. For in consequence the matter becomes even more hidden. In time both characteristics are conjoined. For it is an accident concomitant with motion, the latter being an accident in that which is moved. Moreover, motion has not the status of blackness and whiteness, which constitute a permanent state. For the true reality and substance of motion consist in its not remaining in the same state even for the duration of the twinkling of an eye. This accordingly is what has rendered it necessary for the nature of time to be hidden» (Moses Maimonides, *The Guide of the Perplexed*, II, 13, trans. S. Pines, Chicago 1965, pp. 281-282). In actual fact, already in the first part of the *Guide*, discussing the nature of divine attributes, Maimonides assigns to time the status of accident (I, 52).

Hebrew, 'Or Adonay), for theological rather than strictly philosophical motives, pens a severe critique of Aristotelian physics³⁷. As one might expect, the criticism (in Chapter 11, Book I, Part 2) involves, once again, the definition of time which – as already in Abū'l-Barakāt, but independently of him – becomes the measure, by the soul, of both motion and rest, wherein rest is understood in its strongest sense as pure supposition of motion without its actual existence³⁸.

Or again, along the same lines, there is the anti-Aristotelian case of Joseph Albo, who in Chapter 18, Treatise 2, of his *Book of Principles* (in Hebrew *Sefer ha-'Ikkarim*), argues for, and consolidates, the theory of God's independence from time, even in the 'extreme' definition of time, which is that, of Rabbinic memory, of «unmeasured duration conceived only in thought»³⁹. As a simple

³⁷ Fundamental in this respect is H.A. Wolfson, *Crescas' Critique of Aristotle. Problems of Aristotle's Physics in Jewish and Arabic Philosophy*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge 1929. See also W.Z. Harvey, *Physics and Metaphysics in Hasdai Crescas*, J.C. Gieben, Amsterdam 1998; by the same author, «Hasdai Crescas's Aristotle: Transmission, Translation, Transformation», in Robert Wisnovsky et al. (eds.), *Vehicles of Transmission, Translation, and Transformation in Medieval Textual Culture*, Brepols, Turnhout 2011, pp. 249-258; and J.T. Robinson, «Hasdai Crescas and anti-Aristotelianism», in D.H. Frank – O. Leaman (eds), *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval Jewish Philosophy*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2007, pp. 391-413.

³⁸ Taking up Crescas' own words: «[...] since it is self-evident that rest is said to be great when something rests for a long time, and small when it rests for a short time, it is evident that time is measured with respect to rest without there being actual motion. Even if we measure rest by conceiving the measure of something moving in it, it is still confirmed that there is no need for there to be actual motion in that time. [...] Since this is so, why [...] may time not be measured in it [i.e. in rest] without our conceiving of motion. For the correct definition of time, as it seems, is: the measure of the continuousness of motion or rest between two instants. Indeed it is clear that the genus most appropriate to time is measure. [...] Time is measure in both motion and rest, since our conception of the measure of their continuousness is time. Therefore, it appears that the existence of time is in the soul» (*Hasdai Crescas, Light of the Lord [Or Hashem]*, trans. by R. Weiss, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2018, p. 89). For an analysis of the specific topic of time in Crescas, see Wolfson, *Crescas' Critique of Aristotle*, cit., pp. 93-98, esp. p. 98; «Note on Crescas's Definition of Time», *Jewish Quarterly Review* 10/1 (1919) 1-17; W.Z. Harvey, «The Term Hitdabbekut in Crescas' Definition of Time», *Jewish Quarterly Review* 71/1 (1980) 44-47; as well as the more recent H. Maccoby, «Crescas's Concept of Time», in G. Jaritz – G. Moreno-Riano (eds), *Time and Eternity: The Medieval Discourse*, Brepols, Turnhout 2003, pp. 163-170. See also on the topic, T.M. Rudawsky, «The Theory of Time in Maimonides and Crescas», *Maimonidean Studies* 1 (1990) 143-162.

³⁹ Joseph Albo, *Sefer ha-'Ikkarim. Book of Principles*, ed. I. Husik, vol. 2, The Jewish Publication Society of America, Philadelphia 1946, p. 110: «That time is not prior or posterior to God is true even if by time we mean unmeasured duration conceived only in thought, existing always, both before the creation of the world and after its cessation, but without the order apparent from the

duration, time is distinct from «time measured or numbered through the motion of the sphere, they [the Rabbis] call ‘order of times’, not simply time»⁴⁰.

What is not found, however, in any discussion of time in the Jewish Middle Ages – whether it be close to Aristotle and the Arab Peripatetic tradition or not – is the double achievement of Abū’l-Barakāt. First of all, what comes to be re-established, for the case of time too, is the normal epistemological order sanctioned by Aristotle’s *Second Analytics*, for which the problem relating to the existence of something precedes, in the acquisition of knowledge, the problem relating to its definition (ascertaining the existence of something, its ‘an sit’, is anterior to the knowledge of its essence, its ‘quid sit’); an epistemological order that Aristotle himself had exploded in the first lines of Chapter 11 of Book IV of the *Physics*, when he complained – to take up what was said at the beginning – how obscure and indiscernible the existence of time was, assuming that it actually existed at all. For Abū’l-Barakāt, however, the essence of time does not count, except in second place (i.e. in order to fracture the ineluctable dependence of time on motion); what matters, first and foremost, is the fact that time, as an *a priori* truth, cannot be doubted in the evidence of its existence.

The second achievement, which leads us directly back to the heart of the matter, is that, unlike Abū’l-Barakāt, no medieval Jewish philosopher, in dealing with the subject of time, mentions the episode of the men asleep in the cave. It is difficult to understand the reason for such a widespread omission. Nevertheless, we could try to formulate at least one hypothesis in this regard. In its passage from Aristotle to Avicenna, the episode cited in the *Physics* to explicate, in non-philosophical form, the all-too-philosophical concerns linked to awakening, had indeed maintained the same, important, explanatory function, but had been grossly distorted. The Sleepers of Sardinia, in addition to losing their geographical reference (which would be restored in the *Commentary on the Physics* by Thomas Aquinas in the equally curious formulation of *Sardo, quae est civitas Asiae*)⁴¹, in

motion of the sphere, since the sphere was then neither in motion nor existent. Our Rabbis are of the opinion that time in the abstract is such a duration». On the topic, see especially W. Z. Harvey, «Albo’s Discussion of Time», *Jewish Quarterly Review* 70 (1979-1980) 210-238.

⁴⁰ Albo, *Sefer ha-’Ikkarim*, cit., p. 110.

⁴¹ The passage in question, taken from Thomas Aquinas, *Commentaria in octo libros Physicorum*, cura et studio Fratrum Ordinis Praedicatorum, ex Typographia Polyglotta S.C. de Propaganda Fide, Romae 1884, 4, 16, p. 199, states: «Deinde cum dicit: at vero, neque sine motu etc., ostendit quod tempus non est sine motu: quia quando homines non mutantur secundum suam apprehensionem, aut, si mutantur, tamen latet eos, tunc non videtur eis quod pertranseat aliquod tempus.

Avicenna had taken the name assigned to them by the Koran – Companions of the Cave – with which they arrived in the Jewish world.

Here, in the Jewish world, the history of the migrations of the episode of the Sleepers, which goes far beyond the Middle Ages, and well beyond the purely philosophical sphere – as Montalbano testifies⁴² – ends, except for those who, for some obscure reason, were meanwhile venturing into that cave (and not only in fiction).

References

1. Sources

- ‘Alī al-Bayhaqī, *Tatimmat ṣiwān al-ḥikma*, ed. M. Shafī‘, University of Panjab, Lahore 1935.
- Abū’l-Barakāt al-Baġdādī, *Kitāb al-Mu’tabar*, ed. S. Yalrkaya, 3 vols., Hyderabad 1938-1939.
- Abū’l-Barakāt al-Baġdādī’s *Metaphysical Philosophy. The Kitāb al-Mu’tabar*, Routledge, New York 2017.
- Aristoteles, *Physica*, trans. *The Complete Works of Aristotle*, ed. by J. Barnes, Princeton University Press, Princeton 1984.

Sicut patet in iis qui in Sardo, quae est civitas Asiae, dicuntur fabulose dormire apud heroas, idest apud deos. Animas enim bonorum et magnorum heroas vocabant, et quasi deos colebant, ut Hercules et Bacchi et similia. Per incantationes enim aliquas, aliqui insensibiles reddebantur, quos dicebant dormire apud heroas; quia excitati, quaedam mirabilia se vidisse dicebant, et futura quaedam praenunciabant. Tales autem ad se redeuntes, non percipiebant tempus quod praeterierat dum ipsi sic absorpti erant; quia illud instans primum, in quo dormire coeperant, copulabant posteriori nunc in quo excitabantur, ac si essent unum; medium enim tempus non percipiebant. Sicut igitur, si non esset aliud et aliud nunc, sed idem et unum, non esset tempus medium; sic et quando latet diversitas duorum nunc, non videtur tempus esse medium. Si ergo tunc accidit non opinari tempus, cum non percipimus aliquam mutationem, sed homini videtur quod sit in uno indivisibili nunc; tunc autem percipimus fieri tempus, quando sentimus et determinamus, id est numeramus, motum aut mutationem; manifeste sequitur quod tempus non sit sine motu, neque sine mutatione. Ultimo ergo concludit quod tempus non sit motus, neque sit sine motu».

⁴² Paraphrasing Calasso, who, in *The Sleep of the Calligrapher*, treats the myth of the Sleepers from the perspective of the Istituto Benjamenta, in the end precipitating into Aristotelian prehistory, we could say of Montalbano: «it is just one of the many ramifications of the theme to be found, both before and after, in time» (R. Calasso, *I quarantanove gradini*, Adelphi, Milano 1991, p. 80).

- Averroes, *Aristotelis De Physico Auditu Libri Octo*, Venetiis 1552.
 — *Epitome de Fisica*, trans. J. Puig, Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas, Madrid 1987.
- Avicenna Latinus, *Liber Primus Naturalium. Tractatus Secundus de motu et de consimilibus*, éd. S. Van Riet – J. Janssens – A. Allard, Académie Royale de Belgique, Bruxelles 2006.
- Avicenna, *Kitāb al-Nağāt*, ed. M. Fakhry, Dar al-afaq al-ğadida, Beirut 1985.
 — *The Physics of The Healing. A Parallel English-Arabic Text*, trans. by J. McGinnis, Brigham Young University Press, Provo, Utah 2009.
- Fakhr al-Dīn ar-Rāzī, *al-Mabāḥiṭ al-Mašriqiyyah*, Dairatul-Mārif-il-Osmania, Hyderabad 1343/1924, vol. 1, p. 653.
- Gregorio di Tours – Fozio, *I sette dormienti. Una leggenda fra Oriente e Occidente*, edited by G. Avezzù, Medusa, Milano 2002.
- Hasdai Crescas, *Light of the Lord [Or Hashem]*, trans. by R. Weiss, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2018.
- Joseph Albo, *Sefer ha-'Ikkarim. Book of Principles*, ed. I. Husik, vol. 2, The Jewish Publication Society of America, Philadelphia 1946.
- Moses Maimonides, *The Guide of the Perplexed*, II, 13, trans. S. Pines, Chicago 1965.
- Simplicius, *On Aristotle's Physics 4.1–5, 10–14*, trans. J.O. Urmson, Cornell University Press, Ithaca–New York 1992.
- The Holy Qur'an*, Arabic Text and English Translation, trans. by M. Sher 'Alī, Islam International Publications Ltd., Islamabad-Tilford 2015,
- Thomas Aquinas, *Commentaria in octo libros Physicorum*, cura et studio Fratrum Ordinis Praedicatorum, ex Typographia Polyglotta S.C. de Propaganda Fide, Romae 1884.

2. Studies

- Benevich, F., «Perceiving Things in Themselves: Abū'l-Barakāt al-Bağdādī's Critique of Representationalism», *Arabic Science and Philosophy* 30 (2020) 229-264.
- Borges, J.L., «Averroës' Search», in J.L. Borges, *Labyrinths: Selected Stories and Other Writings*, trans. J.E. Irby, New Directions, New York 1964.
- Calasso, R., *I quarantanove gradini*, Adelphi, Milano 1991.
- Camilleri, A., *Il cane di terracotta*, Sellerio, Palermo 1996
- Coope, U., *Time for Aristotle. Physics IV.10-14*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2005.

- Dag, M., «Aristotelian Views of Time in Islamic Philosophy», *Ondokuz Mayıs Üniversitesi İlahiyat Fakültesi Dergisi* 1.1 (1986) 40-58.
- Fakhry, M., *Averroes: His Life, Work and Influence*, Oneworld, London 2001.
- Freudenthal, G. – Zonta, M., «Avicenna among Medieval Jews. The Reception of Avicenna’s Philosophical, Scientific and Medical Writings in Jewish Cultures, East and West», *Arabic Science and Philosophy* 22 (2012) 217–287.
- Freudenthal, G. – Zonta, M., «Note on “Some Notes on ‘Avicenna among Medieval Jews’ ” by Steven Harvey», *Arabic Science and Philosophy* 26 (2016) 309-311.
- Griffel, F., «Between al-Ghazali and Abu l-Barakat al-Baghdadi: The Dialectical Turn in the Philosophy of Iraq and Iran During the Sixth/Twelfth Century», in P. Adamson (ed.), *In the Age of Averroes: Arabic Philosophy in the Sixth/ Twelfth Century*, The Warburg Institute–Nino Aragno, London–Turin 2011, pp. 45-76.
- Guidi, I., *Testi Orientali Inediti sopra i Sette Dormienti di Efeso*, Reale Accademia dei Lincei, Roma 1885 (anastatic reprint Ulan Press, Belfast 2012).
- Harvey, S., «Some Notes on “Avicenna among Medieval Jews”», *Arabic Science and Philosophy* 25 (2015) 249-277.
- Harvey, W. Z., «Albo’s Discussion of Time», *Jewish Quarterly Review* 70 (1979-1980) 210-238.
- «Hasdai Crescas’s Aristotle: Transmission, Translation, Transformation», in Robert Wisnovsky et al. (eds.), *Vehicles of Transmission, Translation, and Transformation in Medieval Textual Culture*, Brepols, Turnhout 2011.
- *Physics and Metaphysics in Hasdai Crescas*, J.C. Gieben, Amsterdam 1998.
- «The Term Hitdabbeḥut in Crescas’ Definition of Time», *Jewish Quarterly Review* 71/1 (1980) 44-47.
- Janssens, J., –De Smet, D. (eds), *Avicenna and His Heritage*, Leuven University Press, Leuven 2002.
- Kaukua, J., «Self, agent, soul: Abū l-Barakāt al-Baghdādī’s critical reception of Avicennian psychology», in J. Kaukua / T. Ekenberg (eds), *Subjectivity and selfhood in medieval and early modern philosophy*, Springer, New York 2016, pp. 75-89.
- «Self-awareness without substance: from Abū’l-Barakāt al-Baghdādī to Suhrawardī», in Idem, *Self-Awareness in Islamic Philosophy: Avicenna and Beyond*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2015, pp. 104-123.
- Lammer, A., «Two Sixth/Twelfth-Century Hardliners on Creation and Divine Eternity: al-Sahrastānī and Abū’l-Barakāt al-Baghdādī on God’s Priority over

- the World», in A. al Ghouz (ed.), *Islamic Philosophy from the 12th to the 14th Century*, Bonn University Press and V&R Unipress, Göttingen 2018, pp. 233-278.
- Maccoby, H., «Crescas's Concept of Time», in G. Jaritz – G. Moreno-Riano (eds), *Time and Eternity: The Medieval Discourse*, Brepols, Turnhout 2003, pp. 163-170.
- Marcotte, R.D., «La conversion tardive d'un philosophe: Abū al-Barakāt al-Baghdādī (mort vers 545/1150) sur l'intellect et sa quiddité'», *Documenti e Studi sulla Tradizione Filosofica Medievale* 15 (2004) 201-226.
- McGinnis, J., «Ibn Sīnā on Now», *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* 78/1 (1999) 73-106; and A. Lammer, *The Elements of Avicenna's Physics: Greek Sources and Arabic Innovations*, de Gruyter, Berlin 2018.
- Mehmet, D., *The Philosophy of Abū'l-Barakāt al-Baghdādī with Specific Reference to his Concept of Time*, PhD Dissertation, Durham 1970.
- Nony, S., «Les audaces de la Physique arabe du XIIe siècle dans la synthèse d'Abū'l-Barakāt al-Baghdādī», *Mideo* 29 (2012) 27-50.
- Nony, S., *Les variations du mouvement. Abū'l-Barakāt, un physician à Bagdad*, Routledge, New York 2016.
- Pavlov, M.M., *Abu'l-Barakāt al-Baghdādī's Scientific Philosophy. The Kitāb al-Mu'tabar*, Routledge, New York 2017.
- Pines, S., «A Study of Abu'l-Barakāt's Commentary on the Ecclesiastes», *Tarbiz* 33 (1964) 198-213.
- «La conception de la conscience de soi chez Avicenne et chez Abu'l-Barakāt al-Baghdādī Poetics and Metaphysics», *Archives d'histoire doctrinale et littéraire du Moyen Âge* 21 (1954) 21–98.
- *Studies in Abu'l-Barakāt al-Baghdādī: Physics and Metaphysics*, Magnes Press, Jerusalem 1979.
- Porro, P., *Forme e modelli di durata nel pensiero medievale. L'aevum, il tempo discreto, la categoria «quando»*, Leuven University Press, Leuven 1996.
- «The Duration of Being. A Scholastic Debate (and Its Own Duration)», in A. Speer – D. Wirmmer (Hrsg.), *Das Sein der Dauer*, de Gruyter, Berlin–New York 2008, pp. 75-88.
- Roark, T., *Aristotle on Time. A Study of the Physics*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2011.
- Robinson, J.T., «Hasdai Crescas and anti-Aristotelianism», in D.H. Frank – O. Leaman (eds), *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval Jewish Philosophy*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2007, pp. 391-413.

- Rudawsky, T.M., «The Theory of Time in Maimonides and Crescas», *Maimonidean Studies* 1 (1990) 143-162.
- Shayegan, Y., *Avicenna on Time*, PhD thesis Harvard University, 1986.
- Sirat, C., *A History of Jewish Philosophy in the Middle Ages*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1990.
- Stroumsa, S., «On Jewish Intellectual Converts to Islam in the Early Middle Ages», *Pe'amin* 42 (1990) 61-75 [in Hebrew].
- Tunagöz, T., «Works on Abū'l-Barakāt al-Bağdādī: A Bibliographical Essay», *Çukurova University Journal of Faculty of Divinity* 17.1 (2017) 187-225.
- Tzvi Langermann, Y., «al-Bağhdādi, Abū'l-Barakāt», in E. Craig (ed.), *Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Routledge, London 1998, vol. 1, pp. 636-638
- Wieland, W., *Die aristotelische Physik. Untersuchungen über die Grundlegung der Naturwissenschaft und die sprachlichen Bedingungen der Prinzipienforschung bei Aristoteles*, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, Göttingen 1970.
- Wolfson, H.A., *Crescas' Critique of Aristotle. Problems of Aristotle's Physics in Jewish and Arabic Philosophy*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge 1929.
- «Note on Crescas's Definition of Time», *Jewish Quarterly Review* 10/1 (1919) 1-17.