



IMPORTANT ASPECTS OF THE SOURCE-CRITICAL AND TERMINOLOGICAL INVESTIGATION OF ABŪ NAṢR AL- FĀRĀBĪ'S «KITĀB AL-ḤURŪF»

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Abstract. *This extended paper sets out systematically a profound source-critical and codicological analysis of the unique manuscript of Abū Naṣr al-Fārābī's «Kitāb al-ḥurūf», a work created at the junction of linguistics, classical logic and metaphysics; the palaeographical features of its early naskh script; and the interpretation of the ontological and logical terms contained in it within the context of the traditions of madrasa education in Transoxiana.*

Keywords: *Abū Naṣr al-Fārābī, Kitāb al-ḥurūf, Mishkāṭ collection, MS 239, naskh script, Muḥsin Maḥdī, madrasa education in Transoxiana, al-mawjūd, al-māhiyya, al-jawhar, logical operators, digital humanities.*

INTRODUCTION

The treatise «Kitāb al-ḥurūf», that is «The Book of Letters», which fulfils the role of the systematizing and methodological centre in the scholarly system of Abū Naṣr al-Fārābī, the encyclopaedic scholar of the Eastern Renaissance who is called the Second Teacher, is reckoned a fundamental source that shaped the scholarly language and the terminological architecture of the Arab-Islamic intellectual environment (al-Fārābī, 1969). In the age of contemporary interdisciplinary research the study of this work is not merely the analysis of a historical text; it is justified by the necessity of deciphering the scholarly codes of the Eastern Renaissance and of systematizing the heritage of our ancestors in conformity with international academic standards.

In the treatise the particles, conjunctions and prepositions of the Arabic language are investigated not merely as a grammatical category but as linguistic operators expressing universal philosophical and logical concepts. In its content the work consists of three large parts, in which the logical functions of the auxiliary words, the laws of the origin of languages and of naming, the relations between philosophy and the rules of society, that is to say the «milla», and likewise the system of interrogative devices employed in the creation of scholarly definitions, that is the «adawāt al-su'āl», are analysed in a complex manner (al-Fārābī, 1969).



MAIN PART

The sole primary source of the work in the world is preserved under the number MS 239 in the Mishkāt collection of the Central Library of the University of Tehran in Iran. This rare codex has reached us within the composition of a large collection uniting several philosophical and logical works of al-Fārābī. The manuscript is written in an early naskh script in which, in accordance with the old traditions of Arabic writing, the diacritical marks, that is the points below and above the letters, are almost entirely omitted (al-Fārābī, MS 239). The absence of the points may lead to a different interpretation of the words and to a distortion of the original content. In order to remove such imprecision it is necessary to have recourse to the classical syntactic norms set out in Sībawayh's «al-Kitāb» and in Ibn Jinnī's «al-Khaṣā'is».

The physical condition of the manuscript likewise demands a complex textological analysis. On the folios of the source lying between the twenty-sixth and the twenty-ninth, severe physical damage and decay have occurred under the effect of time and of damp. Since certain portions of the text upon these defective pages have been lost, it has been determined that it is necessary to employ the methods of philological and logical reconstruction, that is to say of interpolation, in order to restore the consistency of the philosophical ideas advanced by al-Fārābī (al-Fārābī, MS 239).

The academic edition carried out in the year 1969 by Professor Muhsin Mahdi at the publishing house Dār al-Mashriq in Beirut occupied an important place in bringing the work into scholarly circulation; yet the traditions of linguistics and of madrasa education in Transoxiana were left out of consideration in it (al-Fārābī, 1969; Mahdi, 1969:262). The principal scholarly deficit occurring in Muhsin Mahdi's edition is that in explaining al-Fārābī's terminology the editor confined himself to the rules of general Arabic philology alone, whereas the central concepts of the work were elaborated within the context of the distinctive logical and linguistic school and of the madrasa education that took shape in the intellectual environment of Transoxiana.

In restoring the syntactic chain and the logical consistency of the damaged folios lying between the twenty-sixth and the twenty-ninth, recourse to the grammatical and logical views of such scholars as Sa'd al-Dīn al-Taftāzānī and al-Sayyid al-Sharīf al-Jurjānī, who were widely studied in madrasa education in Transoxiana, is reckoned the sole methodological key. It is precisely the restoration, upon the basis of the local



madrassa sources, of the syntactic usage of such conditional and negative particles as «in» and «law» that affords the possibility of apprehending the content of the text correctly. The research experience accumulated by the researcher in the semantic and syntactic investigation of conditional and negative constructions in the Arabic paremiological system serves as a firm methodological transfer in deciphering the complex conditional and negative operators in al-Fārābī's text and in reconstructing the damaged folios.

In the process of the inculturation, that is the adaptation, of Aristotelian philosophy to the Arab-Islamic environment, al-Fārābī appears as the architect of a new scholarly language. Such central ontological and logical terms employed in the treatise as «al-mawjūd», that is being, «al-māhiyya», that is quiddity, and «al-jawhar», that is substance, took shape as a result of adapting Greek philosophical thought to the nature of the Arabic language (al-Fārābī, 1969; Mahdi, 1969:262). To systematize the semantic evolution of these terms upon the basis of the sources of Transoxiana presents new theoretical conclusions for the classical philology and philosophy of the East. Through a hermeneutic analysis of the methodological functions of the auxiliary words of the language in expressing ontological categories, the philological and logical views of al-Fārābī are disclosed as an integral system.

The practical value of the research in progress presents to the field the following innovative and digital solutions. A comparative and explanatory Arabic-Uzbek dictionary of al-Fārābī's linguistic and philosophical terms is being compiled and prepared for publication. Upon the basis of the methods of digital humanities, an electronic database and an electronic thesaurus of the terms of the work are being elaborated. A state copyright patent from the Department of Intellectual Property is to be obtained for the programmatic algorithm for reconstructing, by digital means, the texts in the damaged naskh script and the terminological system. New teaching modules are to be introduced into the programmes of the disciplines «Source Study and Textual Criticism» and «The History of Eastern Philosophy» in the system of higher education.

CONCLUSION

The renewed investigation of the unique manuscript of al-Fārābī's «Kitāb al-ḥurūf» upon the basis of the sources of Transoxiana and of the traditions of madrasa education serves to restore the original content of the text and to integrate it, by means of contemporary digital technologies, into the system of the global knowledge economy.



The analysis shows that the restoration of the damaged folios, the correct reading of the undotted naskh script and the interpretation of the central ontological terms are a single task, and that its solution requires the combination of the classical syntactic norms, the local madrasa commentary tradition and digital methods of reconstruction (al-Fārābī, MS 239; al-Fārābī, 1969).

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