

NICOLA POLLONI, *THE TWELFTH-CENTURY RENEWAL OF LATIN METAPHYSICS: GUNDISSALINUS'S ONTOLOGY OF MATTER AND FORM*, INSTITUTE OF MEDIEVAL AND EARLY MODERN STUDIES – PONTIFICAL INSTITUTE OF MEDIAEVAL STUDIES, DURHAM–TORONTO 2020 (DURHAM MEDIEVAL AND RENAISSANCE MONOGRAPHS AND ESSAYS, 6), XIII+318 PP., ISBN: 9780888448651.

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In January 1175 a sheriff named Pedro donated an oven to the archbishopric of Toledo and signed the act of donation with the formula: « Bītro b. ‘Abd al-Raḥman b. Yoḥan b. Ḥārīth. Quod est dicere Petrus filius Abderahmen qui fuit filius Iohannis filii Harit » (Biblioteca Capitulare Toledo, 42–40, fol. 63v, ACT E.8.A.1.6). Pedro’s signature follows the Arabic naming convention, listing the multiple generations of the parental line and explicitly showing the Mozarabic origin of the donor of the oven, whose Romance name suggests that he was assimilating the Latin culture. This episode of daily life offers a vivid image of the social and cultural nature of the late twelfth-century Toledo. A little less than a century after the conquest of the city by Alfonso VI, in 1085, Toledo presents itself as a place in which the presence of the Arabic-speaking world is still alive. Citizens of Mozarabic origin are in fact a significant part of the city’s population and in not rare cases occupy important social and political positions. Above all, the forms of Mozarabic culture, and among these the use of the Arabic language, continue to be central in the daily life of the Toledan community. This multilingual framework deeply marks the cultural life of the city, which after its inclusion in the kingdom of Castile finds its centre of gravity in the city cathedral and in its school, which becomes one of the largest and most active translation centres from Arabic to Latin in the Europe of the time.

This is the context in which the intellectual parable of Dominicus Gundissalinus is framed, to which Nicola Polloni dedicates a monographic study that focuses on the role of this author in shaping the forms and contents of philosophy in Latin. The study is in explicit continuity with recent works dedicated to Gundissalinus, in particular with those of Alexander Fidora, and deals with the different interpretations of this figure and his cultural legacy offered by scholars such as Nikolaus Haring, Karin Fradborg, and Charles Burnett. Therefore, At the centre of Polloni’s volume there is the attempt to re-read the figure of the archdeacon of the

cathedral of Toledo through a careful examination of his production, focusing on the nature of Gundissalinus's philosophical contribution and on the forms of his philosophical argument. In following this approach, the volume first offers an accurate historical contextualization of the twelfth-century Toledo and the 'school of translators', which sees Gundissalinus working alongside figures such as Gerard of Cremona, as well as a discussion of the links with other centres of European philosophical culture, in particular Chartres. Polloni also pauses to discuss the composition and nature of the textual corpus to be traced back to the archdeacon. In this way the study presents the reader with a picture of the attribution problems concerning three works, namely the *De immortalitate animae*, the *Liber mahameleth* and the *De scientiis*, and then proceeds to an analytical study of the contents of the four works whose attribution to Gundissalinus is certain.

Considering these four texts, it emerges the image of the variety of philosophical interests that feed Gundissalinus's intellectual work, as well as his focus on certain themes that become the pillars of his understanding of reality and of the order that governs it. The *De unitate et uno*, which is traced back to a first phase of Gundissalinus's production, discuss the notion of unity and in particular it analyses the implications and consequences of the principle according to which 'whatever exists, exists because it is one' (*quidquid est, ideo est, quia unum est*). On the contrary the *De anima* offers an analysis of the soul and of the major problems concerning it, that is its nature and definition, its composition and number, its origin and immortality as well as its powers. The *De divisione philosophiae* concerns the discussion of the epistemological features of the philosophical knowledge and of its inner division according to the various disciplines which are included in it. Finally, the *De processione mundi* contains an articulated discussion of the ontological and cosmological structure of the universe.

Gundissalinus's four works thus unfold a range of questions that concern crucial physical issues, such as those relating to the nature of the soul or the order of the cosmos, as well as metaphysical questions such as the discussion about the notion of unity or that relating to ontological principles that underlie the structure of the universe. To this, the Toledan archdeacon added the attention to the epistemological datum and to a clear definition of philosophical knowledge and its parts. Gundissalinus develops his own reflection on these topics through a close comparison with an articulated and plural philosophical horizon. As Polloni's text opportunely highlights, in the argumentation of these writings we can see the legacy of the Latin tradition represented by Boethius or by the translation of the *Timaeus* made by Chalcidius. And yet, Gundissalinus appears as one of the first Latin authors to directly resort to philosophical literature from the Arabic-speaking world. Thus, the *De unitate et uno* reveals itself to be structured on the basis of a thorough and meditated reception of Ibn Gabirol's *Fons vitae*, just as the *De anima* has behind it a profound understanding of the homonymous text by

Avicenna. And all the Arabic-speaking literature, in particular that which refers to the Avicennian philosophical matrix, is an integral part of Gundissalinus's entire production and emerges above all in the discussions of a metaphysical or ontological order present in the various texts.

Going deeper into the nature of the philosophy unfolded in Gundissalinus's works, Polloni specifies how the archdeacon's writings can be read as the intersection point of a sort of triple philosophical dialogue. In the first place, the Toledan philosopher proves to develop a constant confrontation with Latin authors close to him also on a chronological level. The study offers a close analysis of the careful reading of Hermann of Carinthia's *De essentiis*, which offers Gundissalinus the conceptual tools to define his own frame of reference for what concerns cosmological questions. The elaboration of essential concepts, such as the distinction of four different types of causality (creation, primary and secondary composition, generation), can be traced back to the inspiration of Hermann's writing.

On a more strictly ontological level, Polloni clarifies how it is the thought of Ibn Gabirol, in particular the content of the *Fons vitae*, which plays a crucial role in the development of one of the pillars of Gundissalinus's thinking, namely the notion of hylomorphism. A careful reading of Ibn Gabirol's work, in fact, gives him the opportunity to focus on the conceptual couples of matter / form and genus / species within the framework of a vision that tends to bring the dualism of principles back to unity. Thus, for Gundissalinus, the idea of 'unity in duality' becomes essential: in fact, it is understood as a formula that describes the actual being. In the opinion of the Toledan philosopher, therefore, the founding principle of the intimate structure of reality is the conceptual and metaphysical inseparability of the notions of being and unity in every existing reality. While distinguishing matter and form, these can never be seen as separate in things. On the contrary, every being is a 'unity of', that is a derived unity that can exist only as a union of two entities – matter and form – which nevertheless in reality are never separated from each other. On the basis of these principles, Gundissalinus is able to articulate this unity in duality in the different levels of reality: from the substantial level to the corporeal one and to that of the elements, according to a gradation that explains the different aspects of reality. The scheme, as Polloni notes, also involves the determination of the ontological function of God, who not only plays the role of absolute unity and uniqueness, but takes on the position of the Necessary Existence.

The introduction of the idea that there is a gradation in existence, that is, that reality is the result of a plurality of modalities of existence, refers to the comparison with the Avicennian philosophical tradition. This is an aspect which, as Polloni highlights, refers to the direct relationship that Gundissalinus develops with Avicenna's writings and to his translation work developed in connection with

Ibn Daud. In addition to the Latin translation of *Liber sufficientiae*, Gundissalinus is also responsible for that of the logic and metaphysics sections of al-Ghazali's *Summa theoricarum philosophiarum*, which is considered a sort of exposition of the Avicennian philosophical system. Polloni's study clarifies how Gundissalinus and Ibn Daud share a common philosophical root in the careful reception of Avicennian metaphysics. Of the latter the Toledan archdeacon acknowledges the modal ontology but in a combination with the aforementioned philosophical orientation of Ibn Gabirol. Polloni summarizes his analysis by observing: « Gundissalinus's emendation of his own ontology is a sort of theoretical update of Ibn Gabirol's ontology rather than a development of Avicenna's positions » (p. 261).

Nicola Polloni's study focuses on the fundamental elements of Gundissalinus's philosophical contribution. The choice of the scholar is to proceed by considering the textual corpus of this author in a unitary way but with the awareness of its chronological and doctrinal articulation. The historical-literary and biographical framework that opens the volume relocates the various writings both in the framework of the twelfth-century Toledo and in the different moments of Gundissalinus's life. At the same time, the analysis of the specificities of each of the four texts attributed to the archdeacon allows the reader to identify the set of problems from which the construction of the author's philosophical point of view develops. Polloni conducts this analysis with argumentative rigor and resorting to a close theoretical examination of the contents of the writings but starting from an accurate philosophical evaluation of the sources, lexicon, and textual characteristics of each text. This leads the reader into the discourse developed by Gundissalinus with the awareness of the philosophical and historical-cultural features that qualify each argumentative step of the Toledan philosopher.

It is a point of view that restores the unity of Gundissalinus's philosophical work and above all overcomes the distinction between the author of original philosophical works and the translator of Arabic philosophical texts. In fact, Polloni traces the intellectual portrait of an intellectual for whom the act of translating from Arabic into Latin is an essential step in his own literary production: it is an integral part of his work, inseparable from the act of doing philosophy. Translating Avicenna is thus philosophizing as much as composing the *De anima* or the *De processione mundi*. The Gundissalinus who inherits the philosophical tradition of the Latin language, masters Boethius and the *Timaeus*, or converses with Hermann of Carinthia, is the same who elaborates his own ontology drawing on Ibn Gabirol and Avicenna. And this reception of the Arabic-speaking philosophy that occurs through the act of transferring words, arguments and texts into Latin, is one of the rings in an intellectual chain that embodies the practice of philosophy.

Polloni's work has the merit of having offered a study that sheds light on a way of conceiving philosophy that goes beyond historiographic classifications that are sometimes used with excessive rigidity. Gundissalinus's intellectual parable and theoretical contribution represent one of the ways of doing philosophy that the twelfth-century Europe expresses: a form of philosophizing consistent with the context of the Toledo of the time and which also expresses the originality of the archdeacon. In fact, within the pages of this study, it emerges the portrait of an author who puts in dialogue the Latin tradition and the philosophy of the Arabic-speaking world and thanks to this merge is able to offer an essential contribution in the construction of the philosophical, particularly metaphysical, mind of the medieval Latin-speaking world.