

AL-FĀRĀBĪ, *L'UNO E L'UNITÀ*. INTRODUZIONE, TESTO ARABO, TRADUZIONE E COMMENTO DI CECILIA MARTINI BONADEO CON SARA ABRAM, LUCA FARINA, GIOVANNI MANDOLINO, MARIANNA ZARANTONELLO, PISA UNIVERSITY PRESS, PISA 2023 (SERIES GRECO, ARABO, LATINO. LE VIE DEL SAPERE. TESTI 6), VIII + 262 PP., ISBN: 9788833397238.

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ONENESS AND MULTIPLICITY

Al-Fārābī's *On One and Unity*, as Muhsin Mahdi calls it,¹ or *On the One and Oneness*, as Damien Janos does,² is a compact and short treatise, which until recently had not received as much attention as it deserves. Though already in 1960 Hāzīm T. Mushtāq had included an edition of it based on two Istanbul manuscripts as well as an English translation in his Oxford B. Lit. thesis, scholars only became aware of it in 1989 when Muhsin Mahdi, who had discovered a third Istanbul manuscript, published his edition based on these three manuscripts. There are only two detailed studies of this text or of some of its aspects: one by Damien Janos to which I have already referred, and one by Philippe Vallat,³ which includes a French translation of some paragraphs. Cecilia Martini Bonadeo and her team have now published a new edition with Italian translation and an extensive commentary, which gives a solid basis for further philosophical studies of its contents.

First, one could wonder whether this one brief text *On the One and Oneness* really needed a multiplicity of editions and, therefore, this new critical edition, particularly since Cecilia Martini Bonadeo uses the very same manuscripts that Mahdi had used. Our answer to this query is positive.

¹ *Alfarabi's On One and Unity*, ed. MUHSIN MAHDI, Editions Toubkal, Casablanca 1989.

² KHALED EL-ROUAYHEB, SABINE SCHMIDTKE (eds.), « Al-Fārābī's (d. 950) *On the One and Oneness*: Some Preliminary Remarks on Its Structure, Contents, and Theological Implications », in *The Oxford Handbook of Islamic Philosophy*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2017, p. 101–128.

³ PHILIPPE VALLAT, « Le livre de l'Un et de l'unité de Farabi: l'invention persane de la doctrine des transcendants » in PASCALE BERMON, ISABELLE MOULIN (eds.), *Commenter au Moyen Âge*, Vrin, Paris 2019 (Publications de l'Institut d'Études Médiévales de l'Institut Catholique de Paris), p. 211–241.

Mushtāq had consulted only MSS Istanbul Süleymaniye Ayasofya 3336 (A) and 4839 (C). Mahdi had improved the text in making use not only of A but also of MSS Istanbul Ayasofia 4854 (B) of which, he thought (C) was only a copy. Mahdi, therefore, considered only MSS (A) and (B) and ignored (C). However, the new editor and Marianna Zarantonello, who presents the principles for this new edition, consider that in a few instances only (C) has the correct reading. For them it may be that (B) and (C) both derive from the same model and that, besides, the scribe of (B) compared his text with another manuscript, that may have belonged to the (A) family (p. 33). This, of course, justifies providing a new edition, particularly since the text at times is rather obscure. Mahdi himself in his English introduction had stated that « the resulting text remained full of difficulties and apparent lacunae that had to be filled in if the work was to make any sense » (p. 6). He also added that he had not been able to solve all the difficulties and was inviting competent readers to make their contributions in this regard. Vallat too emphasizes the difficulties of this text and the numerous lacunae (p. 227), as does Martini (p. VIII). As for Sara Abram, who wrote the introduction to Martini's edition, she speaks of the labyrinthine organization and of the obscurity of the Arabic in several places (p. 11). Thanks to her careful work, Cecilia Martini makes a valuable contribution to the establishment of this text, as Mahdi had hoped for. In the *apparatus criticus* she painstakingly lists not only the relevant differences between the three manuscripts but also all the conjectures and corrections Mushtāq and Mahdi had introduced. Besides, a fresh look at the manuscripts and her detailed knowledge of parallel passages in the Farabian corpus, which are examined in the commentary, allow her to resolve some of these difficulties. As the indices indicate, she also makes good use of editorial points raised by both Janos and Vallat.

Luca Farina, a collaborator of Martini, provides a detailed description of the three manuscripts and their contents. Two of them, (B) and (C), constitute collections of texts by al-Fārābī or attributed to him.

In order to help readers, Mahdi had introduced chapters, subdivisions, and numbered paragraphs, which he listed in Arabic in a table of contents (p. 9–18). Janos provides an English version of it, in an appendix (p. 122–127). Martini decided to remain closer to the manuscripts, which have no such chapters or divisions and, therefore, let the readers decide how to subdivide the text, except for paragraphing, but her paragraphs are not numbered and her paragraphing often does not match that of Mahdi. Janos

indicates that in MS (B) « the beginning of each section is marked out with red ink » (p. 103), but I could not determine whether Martini's paragraphing reflects these red markings. Though Martini follows closely the manuscripts' layout in the Arabic text, she kindly did not shy from providing some help for the reader. In the Arabic text she is more generous than Mahdi in providing vocalizations, shaddas, etc. In the Italian translation she gives in bold the theme of what she considers distinct sections or meanings of « one » or « multiple ». She and Sara Adams also provide a detailed table of the various meanings or types of « one » (p. 13).

As Mahdi in the margins of his edition had indicated where the folios, verso and recto, of MSS (A) and (B) began, Martini wisely adopted the same policy but this time for all three MSS (A, B, and C). This makes comparing sections of texts in both editions easy, even when the paragraphs are not parallel.

Having shown why this one little text, *On the One and Oneness*, deserved a new critical edition and that Martini and her team have ably filled this need, I then consider the translation. As up to now no full translation of the text in a main European language existed, one welcomes this Italian translation. One can only applaud its consistency in the use of technical terms. An extensive index of the main technical terms gives references to the Arabic text and the translation as well as to the explanation of these terms and their origin, as stated in the commentary. Yet, translating technical terms remains difficult. I will give an illustration, which points to one of the main interpretive problems in *On the One and Oneness*.

There is no doubt that in *On the One and Oneness* the Second Teacher goes beyond what the First teacher had done in *Metaphysics*, V. 5-6 & X.1 & 6, as well as *Physics* I. He gives meanings of « one » and « oneness » that apply beyond the categories and most of all develops at length the many meanings of « many » or « multiple » and how « multiple » or « many » originates from one. Mahdi had claimed that in *On the One and Oneness* the account of the generation of 'many' from 'one' makes no reference to the cosmological and metaphysical accounts of the origination and emanation of many things from the First One (p. 7). His remark tended to undermine influences of Neoplatonism on this text. On the other hand, Janos emphasizes its Neoplatonic background (p. 107-110) and points to some theological implications of this text (p. 110-121) while Vallat emphasizes the importance al-Fārābī gives to his understanding of Parmenides' statement that « Being is one », which relies on the commentators and

Neoplatonism. Martini's commentary mines the many sources and influences, particularly Neoplatonic. The Second Teacher, for instance, is well aware of Alexander of Aphrodisias's views, but often modifies them to follow Proclus or Plotinus.

Martini's interest in the Neoplatonic sources, at least in one case, colors her translation of a technical term. Besides, comparing three different translations of one and the same brief but metaphysically highly significant passage of the text will show the difficulties of *On the One and Oneness* as well as its importance. It will also show how multiplicity stems from oneness. The passage I have picked out is n. 17, p. 51, in Mahdi's edition, and p.50, ll.1-6 in Martini's edition. The two Arabic texts are identical except for minor differences in punctuation and more vocalization and shaddas in Martini's edition. I present in parallel columns the three translations of this passage. My underlinings indicate where three key technical notions are translated differently.

Janos' transl. p. 116-117	Vallat's transl. p. 228	Martini's transl. p. 50
« The one » is also said of that which is <u>set apart by its quiddity</u> (<i>al-munhāz bi-māhiyyatihi</i>) – whichever quiddity that may be, divisible or indivisible, conceived [by the human soul] or [existing] outside the soul. This is [the thing] <u>set apart</u> in its having a <u>share</u> (<i>qist</i>) of existence and [the thing] <u>set apart in its share</u> (<i>qist</i>) of existence. It is in the nature of « the one » said in this sens to accompany the existent, like the thing (<i>al-shay'</i>), and there is no difference between saying « all things » and saying « each one ». Likewise, it is said of all the categories, of the <u>particular thing that is designated</u> (<i>al-mushār ilayhi</i>), and of other things	De même, l'un se dit de <u>ce qui est enclos par sa quiddité</u> – qu'il s'agisse d'une quiddité divisible ou indivisible, conçue intellectuellement ou existant hors de l'âme; c'est là ce <u>qui est enclos par le quantum d'être</u> qu'il y a en vue de lui, et ce <u>qui est enclos par son quantum d'être</u> . À « l'un » entendu dans ce sens, il revient d'être coextensif à « l'existant » comme [il est coextensif] à « la chose », car il n'y a pas de différence entre dire « chaque chose » et dire « chaque une ». De même, [« un » entendu au sens de ce qui est enclos par sa quiddité] se dit de l'ensemble des catégories, de <u>ce singulier-ci</u> et des autres choses qui, si elles	L'uno si dice anche di ciò che <u>si distingue</u> per la <u>propria quiddità</u> , di qualunque quiddità si tratti, divisibile o no, concepita nell'anima o esterna ad essa. Si tratta cioè di ciò che si distingue per la <u>partecipazione</u> di esistenza <u>che gli è propria</u> , i.e. per la <u>propria partecipazione</u> di esistenza. L'uno in questa accezione accompagna l'esistente; come nel caso della cosa; infatti non c'è differenza nel dire 'ogni cosa tra tutte' o 'ciascuna'. Così si dice di tutte le categorie e di <u>questo qualcosa di determinato</u> e di altre cose fuori dalle categorie, se ne esistono.

- if they exist – outside the categories.	existent, transcendent les catégories.	
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Let us begin with the first notion, ‘*qisṭ*’ in Arabic, which means justice but also share or portion and which the *Qur’an* uses twice (4:135 & 7:29). On one hand, Mahdi, as we indicated earlier, had claimed that *On the One and Oneness* « makes no reference to the cosmological account or emanation of many things from the First One, an account that dominates the first parts of his *Virtuous City* and *Political Regime* » (p. 7). Yet, ‘*qisṭ*’ plays an important role in three ‘theological’ and cosmological passages of the *Virtuous City* (I,1,19, 74.2-4; I,2,2, 94,17–96.2 & III, 9, 1, 144.15–146.1 in Walzer’s edition)⁴ and in the *Political Regime* (53, p.63, twice in n. 54, p. 63–64, Najjar’s ed.),⁵ as well as in *Selected Aphorisms* (n. 37, p. 53-54 & n. 53, p. 62, Najjar’s ed.).⁶ On the other hand, Martini translates this notion as « partecipazione di », which immediately brings Platonism and Neoplatonism to a philosopher’s mind.

Both Janos and Vallat translate in a more literal and neutral manner as respectively « a share » and « a quantum » i.e. a determined quantity. None of the three translations is wrong, but word choice may give a specific coloration and bring different connotations to mind.⁷

The second term ‘*al-munḥāz*’ (that which is distinguished or set apart), used three times in this brief text, is closely linked to ‘*qisṭ*’ at least in the Second Teacher’s mind. In two cases al-Fārābī indicates that what sets apart or distinguishes is ‘*qisṭ*’, the allotted share. Janos translates it as « set apart »; Vallat uses « ce qui est enclos par... », i.e., « that which is enclosed by... ». These two formulations emphasise separateness, either directly in relation to others or indirectly in walling in on itself. Martini’s translation speaks of « that which distinguishes itself from something else », a milder formulation as two things may be distinguished from one another without being really separated.

The third expression, ‘*al-mushār ilayhi*’, is the usual Arabic translation for Aristotle’s *tode ti*, as Vallat rightly indicates in n. 4, p. 228. Janos uses a periphrasis to translate it: « the particular thing that is designated »; Vallat

⁴ AL-FĀRĀBĪ, *On the Perfect State*, ed. and transl. RICHARD WALZER, Clarendon Press, Oxford 1985.

⁵ *Al-Fārābī’s Political Regime*, ed. FAUZI M. NAJJAR, Imprimerie Catholique, Beirut 1964.

⁶ *Al-Fārābī’s Fuṣūl Muntaza’ah (Selected Aphorisms)*, ed. FAUZI M. NAJJAR, Dar el-Mashreq, Beirut 1971.

⁷ As this word stems from a juridical context and is used by al-Fārābī in various texts, « allotted » or « fair share » might be a better translation. Walzer on p. 359 had used « allotted part of existence ».

simply uses « ce singulier-ci » i.e., this singular, but, as we just said, explains it in a footnote, and Martini employs a rather vague formulation « qualcosa di determinato », i.e., « some determinate thing », which for a reader may not immediately recall the famous *tode ti*.

Interestingly, all three translators think this passage is very important and key to understanding some aspects of the Second Teacher's metaphysics, even if they raise further questions, such as: what exactly is the relationship between, being, thing, and oneness? They certainly invite us to a more detailed and precise examination of al-Fārābī's metaphysics and cosmology, as well as to a careful study of their terminology.

Better knowledge of the text and of its sources, as well as of parallel passages in other Farabian works will ensure a more accurate understanding of what the Second Teacher is doing in this text. In her extensive comments Martini provides invaluable help for such an understanding of *On the One and Oneness*. Her comments correspond to the divisions of the text she inserted in the Italian translation. She indicates the many Greek sources, particularly Neoplatonic and Hellenistic, with detailed information about their direct and indirect Arabic translations or transmissions. She also points to parallels and differences in al-Kindī, who preceded al-Fārābī, and in Yaḥyā ibn 'Adī, the Second Teacher's main disciple, Ibn Bājjah (Avempace), and Ibn Rushd (Averroes), who came after him. The comments also show an extensive and impressive knowledge of whatever modern scholars have said. Furthermore, she also quotes parallel passages in other Farabian texts. She certainly shows that al-Fārābī, when he wrote *On the One and Oneness*, had a wide-ranging knowledge, be it direct or indirect, of Greek texts. Knowledge of the sources is much more than an exercise in erudition. What al-Fārābī does with them and how he interprets them helps us to determine what his own views are and what his purpose in writing this text may be, as *On the One and Oneness* begins abruptly, plunging into a dry, compact and terse presentation of the issues without explaining why the text was written. In pointing to parallel passages in other Farabian works, Martini also makes us more aware of how important some remarks and themes are, since they recur in various works.

One of the interpretative issues of which Martini is well aware is the link between *On the One and Oneness* and *The Book of Letters* or *Book of Particles*. Mahdi already had observed their closeness on the meanings of 'being', 'one' and 'many'. Since the two texts are also similar in terminology and structure, he had wondered whether the former could not be a part of the

latter, which too begins abruptly. Other scholars acknowledge this closeness without necessarily thinking that one is part of the other or that *On the One and Oneness* may have originally be conceived as part of the *Book of Letters*, but had grown too big and so the Second Teacher decided to make of it an independent treatise. Janos, for instance, addresses this issue on p. 103-105, and even provides a table with some textual parallels between the two texts. He points to terms and expressions that appear repeatedly in both, giving as examples two of the three terms or expressions we focused on when we commented on the differences in translation of a small key passage, i.e., 'al-mushār ilayhi' or « the particular thing designated » and 'al-munḥāz' « what is set apart ». Yet, he thinks that Mahdi's hypothesis at this point « finds no support in the manuscript evidence or in the primary sources in Arabic » (p. 105). Sara Abram, who wrote the introduction to the edition under Martini's direction, rejects Mahdi's hypothesis but affirms their closeness in contents and as illustrations of the Farabian way to do philosophy and metaphysics (p. 4-5).

Interestingly, in one and the same year we get Martini's new edition with translation and comments of *On the One and Oneness* and soon will get Charles Butterworth's new edition of the *Book of Letters* based on Mahdi's notes, as Mahdi had discovered two more Manuscripts of this important text. Butterworth's edition also provides an English translation (as far as I know, the first full translation) and an introduction (it is now in proofs at the Zaytuna College). The two new editions, the translations, and comments will certainly shed much more light on each of these texts, as well as on their relationships.

Putting aside the Neoplatonic influences and adaptations, which need to be explored more carefully and of which we have already spoken, one may wonder what al-Fārābī contributes on his own. Abram rightly points out to the importance of the notion of « set apart » (*munhaz*) as a meaning of 'one'. To be 'one' by a certain limit, or a certain place, or most of all by a certain quiddity has serious metaphysical and cosmological implications. This goes in particular for the notion of « set apart by a certain quiddity », which applies to material and immaterial realities, inside or outside the categories (p. 8). Janos calls this sense of the one, « the one-in-quiddity » and thinks that it « appears to be a Farabian innovation », essential to the Second Teacher's theology (p. 117).

Abram also shows how al-Fārābī, in what concerns the relationship between the 'one' and 'multiple' or 'many', both takes his departure from

Aristotle's *Metaphysics*, V, 6 and X, 3, but also goes far beyond it. First, he further develops the range of meanings of 'multiple'. Second, he argues that, though every 'multiple' is opposed to a 'one', not every 'one' is opposed to a 'multiple'.

Martini and her team have worked together closely. This seems the ideal way to establish a critical edition, translation, commentary, and detailed index for a text as compact and dense as this one. Besides, the young collaborators learned much about the various scholarly and technical aspects involved in such an enterprise.

This new edition, much enriched by a full translation, detailed commentary and indices, will certainly entice other scholars to ponder this difficult text, which is far more than a simple listing of various meanings. It has profound implications for understanding many other texts of al-Fārābī, but it is so dense that it will take time before it is fully appreciated. We can only congratulate and thank Martini and her team for having had the courage to face such a difficult task and having done it so well.