

Aristotle's *Categories* in the Arabic Tradition

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Entry Type

Reception

Entry Language

English

Keyword

Arabic Aristotelianism; Arabic Logic; Ontology; Graeco-Arabic Translations; Avicennism

Work

Categories

Author of Work

Aristotle

Subject

Greek and Roman Philosophy

Person

Aristotle; Greek Aristotle Commentators; Translators from Greek and Syriac into Arabic; Al-Kindī; Baghdad Peripatetics; Al-Fārābī; Avicenna; Averroes; Post-Avicennian Philosophers

Place

Athens; Alexandria; Baghdad; Al-Andalus; Arabo-Islamic World

Country

Iran; Turkey; Greece

Period

4th Century BCE; 9th Century CE; 10th Century CE; 11th Century CE; 12th Century CE; 13th Century CE; 14th Century CE; 15th Century CE; 16th Century CE; 17th Century CE; 18th Century CE

Abstract

Tracing the Arabic reception of Aristotle's *Categories* entails charting the history of a foundational philosophical work across three continents, from Spain to India, over a span of at least ten centuries (9th–19th century). This chapter offers an overview of the most significant phases of this reception. The first section examines the Arabic translations of the *Categories* and related Greek commentaries realized between the 9th and the 10th centuries, drawing on manuscript and bio-bibliographical sources. The second section delves into the development of an Arabic scholarly reflection on the *Categories* between the 9th and 11th centuries and the formation of a philosophical discourse surrounding a selection of key issues that would shape the subsequent reception of the treatise. Central among these key issues is the question of the scope of the *Categories* and its disciplinary classification. The third section presents Avicenna's (d. 1037) novel ontological interpretation of the *Categories* and the resulting repositioning of the treatise within metaphysics. The fourth section investigates the broader impact of Avicenna's reassessment of the place of the treatise in the post-Avicennian tradition (12th–14th century). Finally, the fifth section presents the 'traditionalist' interpretations of the *Categories* that emerged in response to the mainstream consensus on the ontological reading of the treatise established by the post-Avicennian tradition (12th–18th century).

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1. The Arabic *Organon*

1.1 An Evolving Corpus

The form and scope of Aristotle's logical corpus have varied significantly in Syriac- and Arabic-speaking traditions over the centuries. Between the 5th and 7th centuries, Syriac scholars based their education on a core set of four texts: Porphyry's *Isagoge* and Aristotle's *Categories*, *Peri Hermeneias*, and *Prior Analytics* (up to I.7). The composition of this 'short *Organon*' is mirrored in the contents of the logical compendium attributed to 'Abd Allāh Ibn al-Muqaffa' (d. 756/759), one of the earliest works to render part of Aristotle's logic into Arabic. The work was translated into Arabic multiple times as part of the broader translation initiative sponsored by the 'Abbāsid rulers; its original language, however, remains debated, with possibilities including Greek, Syriac, or Middle Persian (Kraus 1933; Furlani 1926; Peters 1968, 11; Troupeau 1981, 243–45; Lameer 1994, 11–12). Between the 7th and 8th centuries, this original core of texts was expanded with Syriac translations of the *Prior* and *Posterior Analytics*, *Topics*, and *Sophistics*, thus forming a six-treatise *Organon* (excluding *Rhetoric* and *Poetics*) (Endress 1987, 407–12; Hugonnard-Roche 2020, 39–40). The Late Antique circulation of this six-treatise *Organon* is

attested by the Arabic translation of the 3rd-century catalogue of Aristotle's works found in the *Letter to Gallus* attributed to Ptolemy "al-Gharīb" and recently edited by Marwan Rashed (2021, 15, n° 29–34). Under 'Abbāsīd patronage, new translations from Greek and Syriac made an 'extended' version of the *Organon* available in Arabic. This version, including *Rhetoric*, *Poetics*, and Porphyry's *Isagoge*, corresponds to the one available in the school of Alexandria between the 5th and 6th centuries and commented upon by the member of Ammonius' school. By the 10th century, this extended form of Aristotle's logical corpus had become the standard in the Arabic tradition.

Aristotle's *Categories* – known in Arabic by both the transliteration from the Greek title *Qāṭiḡhūriyās* and its translation *Kitāb al-Maḡlāt*, "Book of the Predicates" – has consistently formed a staple part of the Aristotelian logical corpus available to the Arabic tradition. Studying the reception of the *Categories* in the Arabic-speaking world involves a survey of both the Syriac and Arabic translations produced or circulating in the Baghdad Peripatetic School (9th–10th century) and the rich corpus of Late Antique reworkings, paraphrases, and commentaries that accompanied its study. This research endeavor encounters significant challenges, primarily due to the limited availability of primary sources. The Arabic translations of Aristotle's logical works survive, wholly or partially, in only four known manuscripts, which remain largely understudied:

1) Paris, BnF ar. 2346 (the 'Paris *Organon*'), dat. 12th century (henceforth: P).

The earliest and most complete manuscript of the Arabic translation of Aristotle's logical corpus is MS Paris, BnF ar. 2346 ('P'), also known as the 'Paris *Organon*'. This 12th-century manuscript preserves the entire 'extended *Organon*' in Arabic, with only a lacuna at the beginning of Porphyry's *Isagoge*. Linked to key figures of the Baghdad School (10th–11th centuries), it features the edition compiled by al-Ḥasan Ibn Suwār (d. after 1017), based on exemplars owned by the Christian-Jacobite logician and theologian Abū Zakariyyā' Yaḥyā Ibn 'Adī (d. 974) and his student 'Īsā Ibn Zur'a (d. 1008), Ibn Suwār's teacher (Georr 1948, 183–200; Elamrani-Jamal 1989b, 510–11; Hugonnard-Roche 1992, 1993, 2002). This manuscript is a crucial source for studying the reception of a large number of Late Antique Greek commentaries in the Baghdad School, many of which are quoted in its marginal glosses.

2) Berlin, Petermann I 9, dat. 1259/1260 (henceforth: B).

Among the 38 texts on philosophy, grammar and theology that it contains, MS B preserves an anonymous Arabic translation of Porphyry's *Isagoge* (ff. 53^v-68^r) and an anonymous Arabic translation of part of Aristotle's *Peri Hermeneias*, from the beginning up to 17b14 (ff. 68^v-72^v), edited in Hoffmann 1869, 55-61 (see Sachau 1899, 325 and Aydin 2016, 83-87). Although this manuscript does not contain the Arabic translation of the *Categories*, it testifies to the significance of the work in Syriac circles. It preserves two scholia on the *Categories*, one anonymous and the other ascribed to Eusebius of Alexandria (6th century), edited in Furlani 1914 and 1922, along with Sergius of Resh'aynā's (d. 536) introduction to Aristotle and an epitome of his commentary on the *Categories*, published in Aydin 2016 (on Sergius' commentary on the *Categories* and its circulation, see Arzhanov 2024).

3) Istanbul, Topkapı Sarayı Müzesi, Ahmet III 3362, dat. 13th century (henceforth: I).

This manuscript contains the Arabic translations of Porphyry's *Isagoge*, Aristotle's *Categories*, *Peri Hermeneias*, *Prior* and *Posterior Analytics*, which appear to be the same translations preserved in MS P. According to a hypothesis advanced by Henri Hugonnard-Roche (Hugonnard-Roche 1997, 397-400), this manuscript may represent an edition of the Arabic *Organon* prepared by the physician and translator Ishāq Ibn Ḥunayn (d. 910).

4) Milan, Ambrosiano arabo & 105 sup., dat. 16th century (henceforth: A).

MS A preserves two anonymous Arabic translations of Porphyry's *Isagoge* and part of Aristotle's *Peri Hermeneias*, up to 17b14 (on the possible genealogical relations between MSS A and B, see Baffioni 2012; on the possibility that the translation of Porphyry's *Isagoge* preserved in this manuscript differs from the one preserved in MS P, see Baffioni 2011 and 2012).

The second challenge in tracing a history of the Graeco-Arabic reception of Aristotle's *Categories* is represented by the occasional inconsistencies in the data provided by bio-bibliographical accounts. Among the most important sources that provide us with detailed information about the Arabic translations of the *Organon* and the Greek commentaries are:

- *The Catalogue (Fihrist)*, the famous 10th-century bibliographical encyclopaedia compiled by the bookdealer and bibliographer Ibn al-Nadīm (d. 990) (henceforth: N).

- *The History of Learned Men* (*Ta'rikh al-ḥukamā'*), a biographical dictionary by the Egyptian historian al-Qiftī (d. 1248) (henceforth: **Q**).
 - *The History of Physicians* (*'Uyūn al-anbā' fī ṭabaqāt al-aṭibbā'*), the biographical encyclopaedia composed by the Syrian physician Ibn Abī Uṣaybi'a (d. 1270) (henceforth: **IAU**).
 - The encyclopaedia composed by the 17th-century Turkish polymath Ḥājjī Khalifa (d. 1657), with title *The Removal of Doubt from the Names of Books and the Arts* (*Kashf al-ẓunūn 'an asāmi al-kutub wa-al-funūn*) (henceforth: **Kh**).
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1.2 Aristotle's *Categories* in Translation

A combined analysis of bio-bibliographical and manuscript sources provides us with an overview of the Arabic and Syriac translations of the *Categories* circulating in 10th-century Baghdad. Table 1 below presents a summary overview of the translations produced and/or circulating in the Baghdad School; it does not account for the extant Syriac translations which have not been in use in this context (for a more comprehensive picture of the Syriac reception of the *Categories*, see Georr 1948, 1–32; Peters 1968, 7–8; Hugonnard-Roche 1987 and 1989; Ferrari 2006, 7–9; Kessel 2019, 397–401; Arzhanov 2024, 16–24).

Tab. 1: The translations of the *Categories* circulating and/or realized within the Baghdad School

Translators of the <i>Categories</i>	Language	Content	Bibliographical sources			MSS of the Arabic <i>Organon</i>			
			N	Q	Kh	P	B	I	A
Jonas the Monk (Yūnān al-Rāhib) (6th-7th century?)	Syriac	All?				+			
Jacob the Hermit (Yaʿqūb al-Zāhid) = Jacob of Edessa (d. 708)	Syriac	All				+			
Ḥunayn Ibn Ishāq (d. 873 or 877)	Syriac	All	✓	✓°	✓°	+			
Ishāq Ibn Ḥunayn (d. 910)	Arabic	All				✓		✓°	
A translation commissioned to/by Yaḥyā Ibn ʿAdī (d. 974)	Arabic?	?	✓	✓					

Legend:

✓ = Preserved or attested

° = Uncertain or erroneous attribution

+ = Quoted/referred to in the marginal notes of the manuscript

Ibn al-Nadīm, al-Qiftī and Ḥājji Khalifa (N, 248.20; Q, 35.2; Kh, vol. 6, 97.7–8) consistently attest to the existence of a translation of the *Categories* by the Nestorian translator Ḥunayn Ibn Ishāq (d. 873 or 877); al-Qiftī and Ḥājji Khalifa add that this was an Arabic translation from the Greek. However, the only Arabic translation of the *Categories* that survives in its entirety (in MSS P, ff. 157^r–178^v, and I, ff. 21^v–44^v, edited in Zenker 1846; Bouyges 1932; Badawī 1948–1952, vol. 1, 3–55; Georr 1948, 309–58) is ascribed in MS P to Ḥunayn’s son, Ishāq Ibn Ḥunayn (MS I, by contrast, does not preserve any attribution). Some marginal notes in MS P additionally point to the existence of a Syriac

translation by Ḥunayn Ibn Ishāq (e.g., f. 159^v = Georr 1948, 380); it thus seems more likely that Ḥunayn translated the text into Syriac and that his son Ishāq translated it into Arabic.

In the margins of MS P reference to two other Syriac translation is made. One is ascribed to Jacob the Hermit (Ya‘qūb al-Zāhid, f. 159^v = Georr 1948, 380), presumably the Christian bishop Jacob of Edessa (d. 708). The other one is ascribed to Jonas the Monk (Yūnān al-Rāhib, f. 159^v = Georr 1948, 380; against Georr’s reading ‘Yūbā’, see Hugonnard-Roche 1989, 508), tentatively identified by Henri Hugonnard-Roche with the author of the anonymous translation of the *Categories* edited in King 2010 and the addressee of a letter on logic by the Syriac scholar and bishop Severus Sebokht (d. 667).

Ibn al-Nadīm and al-Qifṭī also mention another translation of the work, with conflicting reports on whether it was commissioned by the Baghdad logician Abū Sulaymān al-Sijistānī (d. 985) from Yaḥyā Ibn ‘Adī (N, 248.24–25) or by Yaḥyā Ibn ‘Adī himself (Q, 35.10–12). Catalogues record the existence in Aleppo of a manuscript preserving an Arabic translation of the *Categories* attributed to Yaḥyā, but the current location of the manuscript is unfortunately unknown (Endress 1977, 25).

1.3 The Arabic Reception of Greek Commentaries

Bio-bibliographical sources and the marginal glosses in manuscript MS P provide strong evidence of the extensive reception of Ancient and Late Antique Greek commentaries in 10th-century Baghdad. These sources reference commentaries on Aristotle’s *Categories* by Theophrastus, Alexander of Aphrodisias, Porphyry, Iamblichus, Themistius, Ammonius, Simplicius, and “John the Grammarian”, i.e., John Philoponus (N, 248.20–24; Q, 35.2–10; IAU, I 69.25–26, 70.5; 105.15–16; Kh, vol. 6, 97.7–10). **Simplicius’** commentary, in particular, played a key role in the Arabic reception of the *Categories*, both as a detailed exegesis and as a source of indirect access to other Greek commentaries. Fragments of an Arabic translation of Simplicius’ and **Porphyry’s** commentaries have been identified in Ibn Suwār’s glosses in MS P (e.g., MS P, f. 158^v = Georr 1948, 372–77; MS P, f. 159^r = Georr 1948, 377–78), in a commentary on the *Categories* of dubious ascription preserved in MS

Istanbul, Süleymaniye Kütüphanesi, Ayasofya 2483 (see *infra* “The *Categories* in Baghdad”, point g), and in Avicenna’s reworking of the *Categories* (*Maqūlāt*) of the *The Book of the Cure* (*Kitāb al-Shifā’*) (Caminada 2016 and 2019, 31–33).

Yahyā Ibn ‘Adī is reported to have questioned the authenticity of a portion of a commentary attributed to **Iamblichus**. However, Iamblichus’ genuine commentary was known at least through Simplicius’ quotations, as evidenced by the marginal glosses in MS P (Georr 1948, 371; cf. Peters 1968, 9) and by the quotations in the Arabic commentary preserved in MS Ayasofya 2483 (see *infra* “The *Categories* in Baghdad”, point g). Furthermore, the commentary in MS Ayasofya 2483 contains an Arabic excerpt from **Themistius**’ now-lost *Paraphrase of the Categories* (Kalbarczyk 2018, 159–167). According to Ibn al-Nadīm, this paraphrase was available in Ḥunayn Ibn Isḥāq’s Arabic translation, with title *The Book of the Categories according to Themistius’ view* (*Kitāb Qāṭighūriyās ‘alā ra’y Thāmiṣṭiyūs*) (N, 295.1).

Bio-bibliographical sources also mention commentators who are not otherwise known to have commented on the *Categories*, like **Stephanus of Alexandria** (d. 622), as well as others whose identity is uncertain. For example, the identification of “a man known as **Theon**”, to whom sources attribute commentaries in Syriac and Arabic, is highly speculative. Similarly, the exact identification of **Allīnūs/Illīnūs** is a matter of debate. Scholars have variously associated this name with Apollonius of Alexandria (Rosenthal 1972); Elias, the commentator from Olympiodorus’ school (Ahwani 1952, 64 n. 4; Gyekye 1975, xxvi n. 13); the title of a Syriac schoolbook on Greek logic (Zimmermann 1981, xcvi–xcviii); and David, another commentator from Olympiodorus’ school (Rashed 2005; for a reassessment of this identification, see Hugonnard-Roche 2009, 169–72, and Rashed 2016, 830–39). Overall, Arabic sources appear to connect this enigmatic figure to the Alexandrian school (for further discussion on his identity, see Elamrani-Jamal 1989a and Rashed 2016, 830–39).

The analysis of the Arabic commentaries produced in the Baghdad School is also liable to shed new light on the reception of commentaries not explicitly referenced in bio-bibliographical sources. Promising results in this connection have been obtained, for instance, from the analysis of Ibn al-Ṭayyib’s *Commentary on the Categories* (*Tafsīr al-maqūlāt*), which has allowed Cleophea Ferrari to detect the traces of a possible reception of Elias (David)’s

commentaries (Ferrari 2006, 92) and Marwan Rashed to reveal striking doctrinal resonances between Ibn al-Ṭayyib's commentary and the Byzantine scholia by Arethas of Caesarea (d. ca. 944) (Rashed 2016, 819–39).

2. The Rise of a Scholarly Reflection on the *Categories*: Sources and Problems

2.1 Early Arabic Interpretations of the *Categories* (9th–10th Century)

Since the rise of the Arabic-language philosophical tradition, Aristotle's *Categories* has been a focal point of scholarly activity, as evidenced by the number of commentaries and compendia mentioned by the sources. **Abū Yūsuf Ya'qūb al-Kindī** (d. 873), the putative 'father' of Arabic philosophy, is credited with a now-lost work titled *Book on Aristotle's Intention in the Categories and its Subject-Matter* (*Kitāb fī Qaṣd Aristūṭālīs fī l-Maḳūlāt iyyāhā qasḍan wa-l-mawḍū' a lahā*) and a *Treatise on the Ten Categories* (*Risāla fī l-maḳūlāt al-'ashara*) (N, 256.1–2 and 13; IAU, I 209.28–29). Al-Kindī's familiarity with the *Categories* is also evident in his extant epistle *On the Quantity of Aristotle's Books* (Guidi and Walzer 1940; Abū Rīda 1950/1953, I 363–84; Adamson and Pormann 2012, 279–96), as well as in his discussion of God's unity in *On First Philosophy* (Abū Rīda 1950/1953, I 97–162; Rashed and Jolivet 1998, 8–117; Adamson and Pormann 2012, 3–56) and in his proof of the soul's immateriality in the short treatise *That There are Incorporeal Substances* (Abū Rīda 1950/1953, I 265–69; Adamson and Pormann 2009 and 2012, 107–10). Al-Kindī's student, **Aḥmad Ibn al-Ṭayyib al-Sarakhsī** (d. 899), authored a *Compendium of the Book of the Categories* (*Mukhtaṣar Kitāb Qāṭiḡhūriyyās*), a fragment of which survives in MS Istanbul, Süleymaniye Kütüphanesi, Ayasofya 4855, ff. 71^{r-v} (N, 262.9; IAU, I 215.2). Bio-bibliographers also attribute to the Christian bishop and scholar **Ḥabīb Ibn Bahriz** (fl. early 9th century) a summary of Aristotle's *Categories* (N, 248.27; Q, 35.15). Ibn Bahriz is also known as the author of an Arabic translation of Nicomachus of Gerasa's *Introduction to Arithmetic* that was revised within al-Kindī's circle.

Among the most notable scholars who engaged with the *Categories* in this early phase is the mathematician **Thābit Ibn Qurra** (d. 901), who wrote a now lost *Compendium of the Categories* (*Ikhtisār Qaṭāghūriyās*) (Q, 120.7). Thābit's responses to key questions regarding the theory of categories are preserved through an exchange with one of his students, 'Īsā Ibn Usayyid al-'Irāqī. Five main points related to the *Categories* are addressed in this exchange: first, that 'accident' is not a genus encompassing all nine non-substantial categories; second, the sense in which accident may function as a relation; third, the number of categories—which, for Thābit, is not necessarily confined to ten—and the existence of non-categorical entities (e.g., the point); fourth, the division of quantity into seven species; and finally, the distinction between differentia specifica and species (Rashed 2009, 638–40, 661–68).

The renowned physician **Abū Bakr Muḥammad Ibn Zakariyyā al-Rāzī** (d. 925/935) also authored a *Summary of the Concepts of the Categories* (*Jumal ma'ānī Qāṭighūriyās*), now lost as well (IAU, I 315.23). Ibn Abī Uṣaybi'a ascribes a *Book of the Categories* (*Kitāb al-maqūlāt*) to the translator **Ishāq Ibn Hunayn**, which may be identified with the compendium of the work that Ibn al-Nadīm and al-Qifṭī ascribe to him (IAU, I 201.28; cf. N, 248.27; Q, 35.15). Finally, a concise exposition of Aristotle's *Categories*, along with *Peri Hermeneias*, *Prior* and *Posterior Analytics* and Porphyry's *Isagoge*, is found in the collection of philosophical epistles attributed to a group of Muslim philosophers of uncertain identity, likely active in the 9th or 10th century, known collectively as 'the **Brethren of Purity**' (*Ikhwān al-Safā*) (edited in Baffioni 2010).

At this early stage, the reflection on Aristotle's *Categories* predominantly took the form of abridgements and compendia of the work, presumably designed to offer a comprehensive overview of the Aristotelian work. However, the specific characteristics of this early production remain largely unknown due to the near-total loss of the attested writings.

It should be emphasized that the interest in Aristotle's theory of categories extended beyond purely philosophical discourse. Central nodes of the theory, such as the notions of substance, accident and privation, played a determining role in interreligious controversies, such as the one between al-Kindī and Yaḥyā Ibn 'Adī over the Christian formula "one substance/essence, three hypostases" (Schöck 2012 and 2014; Adamson 2020). Early *kalām* authors also critically engaged with Aristotle's definition of substancehood and accidentality: the

Muslim theologian ʿAṣṣar Ibn ʿAmr (d. 796 or 815), who is credited with a now lost *Refutation of Aristotle regarding Substances and Accidents*, is a case on point.

2.2 The *Categories* in Baghdad (10th–11th Century)

The Arabic reception and reassessment of the *Categories* were significantly reshaped by the philosophers active within the Baghdad Peripatetic School and in related intellectual circles between the 10th and 11th centuries (Rescher 1964, 33–46). The treatises and commentaries produced by Baghdad scholars during this period identified the fundamental theoretical points that would inform subsequent debates on Aristotle’s *Categories* for centuries. The synthetic overview provided below is intended to help navigate this rich – and still partly unexplored – scholarly production.

a) Sources mention **Abū Bishr Mattā Ibn Yūnus** (d. 940), the scholar of the Baghdad School, among the commentators of the *Categories*, although no commentary by him has survived (N, 248.26; Q, 35.13; Kh, 97.11). Fragments of his lost commentary, along with excerpts of a commentary ascribed to his teacher **Abū Ishāq Ibrāhīm al-Quwayrī** (d. 915), have survived through the quotations in MS Ayasofya 2483 (see point g below and Türker 1965).

b) **Yahyā Ibn ʿAdī** (d. 974) is mentioned in the marginal glosses on the Arabic translation of the *Categories* in MS P (e.g., f. 158^v = Georr 1948, 371). He is the author of numerous treatises and notes on questions related to the *Categories*, many of which are still unedited:

- [3.31 in Endress 1977 | #52 in Khalīfāt 1988 | Wisnovsky 2012, 312] *On Clarifying that the Categories are Ten in Number, no More and no Less* (*Maqāla fī tabyīn anna l-maqūlāt ʿashara lā akthar wa-lā aqall*), unedited.
- [3.32 in Endress 1977 | #53 in Khalīfāt 1988 | Wisnovsky 2012, 313] *On Clarifying that the Fire’s Heat is not a Substance for Fire* (*Maqāla fī ibānat anna ḥarārat al-nār laysat jawharan li-l-nār*), critical edition in preparation; see Benevich 2017.

- [3.33 in Endress 1977 | #54 in Khalifāt 1988 | Wisnovsky 2012, 313–314] A polemical treatise against his brother Ibrāhīm on the proposition that the body is substance and accident (*Maqāla baynahu wa-bayna Ibrāhīm Ibn ‘Adī al-Kātib wa-munāqaḍa fī anna l-jism jawhar wa-‘araḍ*), critical edition in Menn and Wisnovsky 2017 (on a similar topic, cf. also the treatise edited in Khalifāt 1988, 165–66).
- [3.34 in Endress 1977 | #56 in Khalifāt 1988] *On that the Accident is not a Genus for the Nine Accidental Categories* (*Maqāla fī anna l-‘araḍ laysa huwa jinsan li-l-tis‘ al-maḡulāt al-‘araḍiyya*), edited in Khalifāt 1988, 144–47.
- [3.35 in Endress 1977 | #57 in Khalifāt 1988 | Wisnovsky 2012, 314–315] *On the Division of the Six Categories that Aristotle did not Subdivide into Subordinate Genera and Species* (*Maqāla fī qismat al-sitt al-maḡulāt allatī lam yaqsimhā Aristūṭālīs ilā l-ajnās wa-l-anwā‘ allatī taḥtahā*), unedited.
- [3.36 in Endress 1977 | #58 in Khalifāt 1988 | Wisnovsky 2012, 315] *On that Quantity does not Involve Contrariety* (*Maqāla fī anna l-kam laysa fihī taḍādd*), on Arist., *Cat.* 6, 5b11, unedited.
- [3.37 in Endress 1977 | #59 in Khalifāt 1988] *Explanation that Both Number and Relation have Essences that Exist in Numbers* (*Kitāb fī tabyīn anna li-l-‘adad wa-l-iḍāfa dhātayn mawjūdatayn fī l-a‘dād*), unedited.
- A number of doubts on the *Categories* (*Shakk fī Qāṭighūriyās*), edited in Khalifāt 1988, 170–75, 180–81, 182–88.
- [Endress 1977, 97–98] A correspondence between Yaḥyā and the Jewish scholar Bishr al-Yahūdī and his master Ibn Abī Sa‘īd al-Mawṣilī (edited in Khalifāt 1988, 314–28; see also Pines 1955). A number of questions and answers deal with the division of beings into substances and accidents; the number of the categories; the definition of ‘accident’; the division of the category of substance. Sources mentioned in this exchange include Porphyry; Thābit Ibn Qurra and ‘Īsā Ibn Usayyid; Abū Bishr Mattā.

c) **Abū Naṣr al-Fārābī** (d. 950) authored at least two works on Aristotle’s *Categories*: an extant brief paraphrase (Dunlop 1957 and 1959; Arabic text also Al-‘Ajam 1985, 89–131, and Dānishpażūh 1987, 41–82), and a more comprehensive and systematic commentary, which is unfortunately lost;

excerpts of this work have been identified in Yehudah Cohen's *Exposition of the Categories* (Zonta 2006) and others may be tentatively identified in the commentary referenced at point g below (for an overview of al-Fārābī's treatment of the categories in his other philosophical works, see Diebler 2005).

d) **Al-Ḥasan Ibn Suwār** authored most of the notes on the *Categories* preserved in MS P, covering the first three chapters of Aristotle's treatise (Georr 1948, 361–86, 149–81). Though incomplete, these notes offer a rare glimpse into the scholarly debates on Aristotle's work in 10th-century Baghdad.

e) **Abū l-Faraj Ibn al-Ṭayyib** (d. 1043) wrote a *Commentary on the Categories* (*Tafsīr al-maqūlāt*) (IAU, I 240.28), edited in Ferrari 2006. This lemmatic commentary on Aristotle's treatise shows remarkable structural similarities to the Late Antique Alexandrian commentaries.

f) The Khurasanian philosopher **Abū l-Ḥasan al-ʿĀmirī** (d. 992), a key figure in the philosophical tradition inaugurated by al-Kindī, also authored a work on the *Categories*. Although the complete text is not extant, excerpts are preserved in the commentary referenced at point g below (see also Türker 1965). While not directly affiliated with the Baghdad School, al-ʿĀmirī is known to have exchanged with several intellectuals from Baghdad philosophical circles, including Abū Ḥayyān al-Tawḥīdī (d. 1023).

g) **Abū Muḥammad ʿAbdallāh al-Wāhibī/al-Wahbī/al-Dhahabī** (?), *Commentary on the Meaning of Aristotle's Words in the Book of the Categories* (*Tafsīr maʿānī alfāẓ Aristūṭālīs fī Kitāb al-Maqūlāt*), preserved in MS Ayasofya 2483 (ff. 85^r–106^v). Fragments of this commentary were edited in Türker 1965; the entire text was later edited in Fülī 2008. This commentary is a unique source of information to reconstruct the reception of the *Categories* in Baghdad. It preserves quotations from Alexander of Aphrodisias, Porphyry, Iamblichus, Syrianus, Herminius, Themistius, Simplicius, al-Quwayrī, Abū Bishr Mattā, al-Fārābī, and al-ʿĀmirī. Its composition may be dated between the end of the 10th century and the beginning of the 13th century (Türker 1965, 85–86; Kalbarczyk 2018, 94–95). The identity of the author and the exact spelling of his name are a matter of speculation. Gerhard Endress identified the author with the physician and philosopher Abū Muḥammad ʿAbdallāh Ibn Muḥammad al-Azdī, known as Ibn al-Dhahabī (d. 1064) mentioned in IAU, II 49.27–30 (Endress

1987, 462 and n. 9). Manuscript evidence appears to suggest different alternative readings of this name (Türker 1965, 85), such as ‘al-Wahbī’ (Fūlī 2008) or ‘al-Wāhibī’ (Kalbarczyk 2018, 94–95).

This overview of the Baghdad scholarly production on Aristotle’s *Categories* revealed a particular interest for certain key philosophical issues, such as the *sufficiencia praedicamentorum*, aimed at justifying Aristotle’s determination of exactly ten categories (on the Late Antique debate on this subject, see Hoffmann and Luna 2001, 599–789). Other areas of interest include the definitions of substance and accident, the internal subdivisions of the ten categories, and the properties of individual categories, e.g., quantity and relation (cf. Rescher 1964, 42–44). Beyond these specific concerns, Baghdad commentators also engaged with broader questions regarding the Aristotelian treatise and its place within the system of sciences. More in particular, they incorporated the Late Antique debates concerning the authenticity of the treatise and its pertinence to the logical curriculum.

2.3 The Question of the Authenticity of the Treatise

The works of Baghdad scholars reflect a clear awareness of the debates concerning the authenticity of the *Categories* within the Greek tradition and reveal a significant degree of homogeneity in their treatment of this question. Under the direct or indirect influence of Late Antique prolegomena, Baghdad scholars addressed four main arguments to defend the attribution of the treatise to Aristotle (de Rijk 1951; Rashed 2016, 819–30). The following list is based on the most complete extant exegesis from the Baghdad School, Ibn al-Ṭayyib’s commentary:

1) The first is the absence of an account of polyonymy and heteronymy in the *Categories*, which only addresses homonymy, synonymy, and paronymy (Ibn al-Ṭayyib, *Tafsīr al-maqūlāt* 28.9–15; cf. Olympiodorus, *In Cat.* 23.1–14). The response given to this objection—that heteronyms and polyonyms are implicitly referenced through their opposites—appears to be consistent across Greek and Arabic commentaries (Rashed 2016, 823, 827).

2) The second argument points to a purported incompatibility between the primacy ascribed to individual over universal substances in the *Categories* and the Aristotelian theory of substance as presented in *Metaphysics Z* (Ibn al-

Ṭayyib, *Tafsīr al-maḡūlāt* 28.16–24 and al-Ḥasan Ibn Suwār, Georr 1948, 363; cf. Olympiodorus, *In Cat.* 23.28–24.4; Simplicius, *In Cat.*, 82.1–20).

Commentators resolved this apparent incongruity by distinguishing between different senses of ‘primacy’ at play in Aristotle’s works (see Cerami 2013, 92–97; Rashed 2016, 823, 827). Interestingly, similar concerns have also been raised in modern scholarship (e.g., Dupréel 1909; Mansion 1946; for counterarguments, see de Rijk 195, 139–49; Bodéüs 2001, xciv–cii).

3) A third point of contention concerns Aristotle’s assertion that relatives are simultaneous by nature, which seems to contradict the statement in the *Categories* that the object of science is prior to science, and the sensible is prior to sensation (*Cat.* 7, 7b22–8a12). This issue is addressed in similar terms by Olympiodorus (*In Cat.* 23.20–28), al-Ḥasan Ibn Suwār (Georr 1948, 363), and Ibn al-Ṭayyib (*Tafsīr al-maḡūlāt* 28.25–29).

4) The fourth point concerns the notion of movement (Gr. *kinêsis*; Ar. *ḥaraka*) and is addressed by commentators in two different forms. According to Ibn al-Ṭayyib (*Tafsīr al-maḡūlāt* 28.30–29.4) and al-Ḥasan Ibn Suwār (Georr 1948, 363), Aristotle enumerated in *Categories* six types of movement: generation, corruption, increase, decrease, alteration, and local movement (*Cat.* 14, 15a13–14). In contrast, in the *Physics*, he recognized only three categories of movement: quantity, quality, and place (*Phys.* III 1, 200b32–34). Olympiodorus, on the other hand, raised the problem of the conflation of movement with change (*metabolê*) in the *Categories* (*In Cat.* 23.14–20). Although Olympiodorus and the Baghdad commentators diverge on this point, the Arabic discussion of this issue is likely rooted in the Greek tradition, drawing from the same source as Arethas’ scholia on the *Categories* (see Rashed 2016, 828–30, suggesting a reliance on Allinūs/Illinūs’ commentary).

2.4 The Scope of the *Categories* and the Place of the Treatise within the System of Sciences

The question of the aim and scope (Gr. *skopos*; Ar. *gharaḍ*) of each of Aristotle’s works has been a central concern for commentators from Late Antiquity onwards. Although ancient and medieval scholars largely agreed that Aristotle’s aim in the *Categories* was to introduce ten genera, the precise nature of these categories – what they are genera *of* – remained a point of contention.

The way exegetes approached this question inevitably shaped their interpretation of the Aristotelian theory of categories and influenced the disciplinary positioning of the related treatise within the broader philosophical curriculum. Notably, two key approaches in the Late Antique debate profoundly impacted the subsequent Arabic tradition (cf. Kalbarczyk 2018, 11–18; Caminada 2019, xli–xlv).

1) The first, which can be termed Alexander of Aphrodisias’ ‘three-dimensional approach,’ highlights the linguistic, ontological, and psychological dimensions of Aristotle’s *Categories*. According to Simplicius (*In Cat.*, 10.17–19), Alexander considered the ten categories as fundamental parts of *speech* that denote both simple *entities* and the *concepts* associated with them. This view stands in contrast to attempts to narrow the scope of the *Categories* solely to expressions, things, or concepts. Building on Alexander’s view, the Alexandrian commentators rejected such ‘one-dimensional’ interpretations, advocating instead for a comprehensive reading that integrates ontological, linguistic, and conceptual elements. Drawing on Aristotle’s ‘semantic triangle’ from *De Interpretatione* 16a3–8, Ammonius and Philoponus argued that the scope of the *Categories* encompasses “expressions signifying things through mediating concepts” (Ammonius, *In Cat.*, 9.17–18; Philoponus, *In Cat.*, 9.14–15). This interpretation was later discussed in the Baghdad School and upheld by some of its exponents. For instance, in the notes by al-Ḥasan Ibn Suwār, the scope of the *Categories* is defined as the simple expressions (*al-alfāz al-basīṭa*) that signify the highest genera of things (*ajnās al-umūr al-‘aliyya*) through their impressions on the human soul (*al-athār allatī fī l-nafs minhā*) (Georr 1948, 361).

2) The second interpretation of the scope of the *Categories* that significantly influenced the Arabic tradition is Porphyry’s ‘semantic approach’. Porphyry emphasized the *semantic* dimension of the scope of Aristotle’s treatise, which he identified with “simple signifying expressions insofar as they signify things” (*In Cat.*, 58.5–6). This approach was arguably intended to minimize the ontological implications of Aristotle’s theory, positioning the *Categories* as an introduction to the logical curriculum (see Chiaradonna’s “[Aristotle’s Categories from Plotinus to Iamblichus](#),” here). Arabic commentators adopted Porphyry’s semantic approach both to define the scope of the *Categories* and to delineate the domain of logic from that of grammar and other linguistic disciplines. In a well-known debate recorded by Abū Ḥayyān al-Tawḥīdī, the logician Abū Bishr Mattā argued against the grammarian al-Sirāfī, asserting

that logic concerns itself with “intelligible accidents and apprehensible notions,” focusing primarily on universal mental content, while grammar deals with expressions, regardless of their signification (Margoliouth 1905, 94; cf. also Elamrani-Jamal 1983, 61–71). Building on Porphyry’s semantic approach, Mattā’s contemporaries and successors sought to reintegrate the study of expressions into logic. Two distinct trends emerged: one – predominant in the Baghdad School – shifted the focus of logical inquiry toward expressions (2a), while the other maintained the discipline’s focus on concepts (2b).

2a) Yaḥyā Ibn ‘Adī distinguished logic from grammar by emphasizing that, while grammar examines expressions in an absolute sense, logic examines expressions insofar as they signify universal entities (*al-umūr al-kullīyya*) (*Tabyīn al-faṣl* in Khalīfāt 1988, 423.16–424.3). According to Yaḥyā, Aristotle deals in the *Categories* with the simple expressions that signify the classes of existing things. This allowed Yaḥyā to fully frame the theory of categories within the disciplinary scope of logic. Similarly, Abū l-Faraj Ibn al-Ṭayyib defined the scope of the treatise as the simple expressions signifying universal entities, which are the highest genera (*Tafsīr Kitāb al-Maqūlāt*, 18.5–7). Nevertheless, a certain concern regarding the possible ontological interpretation of the scope of the *Categories* must have marked the discussions within the Baghdad School. As evidenced by Yaḥyā’s correspondence with Bishr al-Yahūdī, tensions arose from the recognition that Aristotle’s distinction between substance and accidents essentially constitutes a division of being (Khalīfāt 1988, 323.6–14). The adoption of a semantic approach enabled Yaḥyā and other Baghdad scholars to differentiate between the logical aspects of the theory and its more strictly metaphysical components. For in fact, while metaphysics investigates existing things (*al-umūr al-mawjūda bi-l-ḥaqīqa*), the theory of categories in logic concerns itself with the names that signify them (*al-asmā’ al-dālla ‘alayhā*) (*Shakk fī Qāṭighūriyās* in Khalīfāt 1988, 182.8–183.5).

2b) In his *Classification of the Sciences* (*Iḥṣā’ al-‘ulūm*), al-Fārābī reaffirmed the connection between mental contents and their linguistic expressions, a relationship that Mattā had neglected while focusing primarily on mental contents. Al-Fārābī asserted that the treatise addresses “the rules pertaining to *simple intelligibles* (*al-mufradāt min al-ma’qūlāt*) and *the expressions that signify them* (*al-alfāz al-dālla ‘alayhā*)” (*Iḥṣā’ al-‘ulūm*, 87.1–3). Al-Fārābī did not question the placement of Aristotle’s *Categories* at the beginning of the logical curriculum. According to him, the categories are simple primary

intelligibles, which fall within the scope of inquiry of logic insofar as they are signified by expressions and are accompanied in human mind by second-order meanings such as ‘universality’, ‘particularity’, and so on (Ḥurūf, 66.18–67.12). The emphasis is on the semantic relationship between intelligibles and their expressions, which positions primary intelligibles – and, by extension, the theory of categories – within the purview of logic.

Despite extensive debate, none of the above-mentioned interpretations offered a universally accepted justification for the role of the *Categories* in logic. It is against this background that Avicenna’s major reassessment of the Aristotelian theory of categories took place.

3. Avicenna’s Reassessment of Aristotle’s *Categories*

A substantial portion of the work of Avicenna (Ibn Sīnā, d. 1037), one of the towering figures in the history of Arabic philosophy, is devoted to Aristotle’s *Categories*. The themes explored in Aristotle’s treatise are extensively addressed in Avicenna’s philosophical summae, in his standalone logical writings, and in a series of treatises devoted to specific doctrinal issues. Among these are a now-lost *Treatise on the Purpose of [Aristotle’s] Categories* (GL7 in Gutas 2014², 437–38), as well as a series of treatises that explore the concepts of substantiality and accidentality, such as *On the Error of Those Who Hold that Quantity is Substance* (GL8 in Gutas 2014², 438), the *On the Error of Those Who Hold that Something Can Be Substance and Accident Simultaneously* (GL9 in Gutas 2014², 438), the *On the Substancehood of Fire* (GP5 in Gutas 2014², 446). Within this extensive body of work, the doctrine of the categories occupies a position that oscillates between logic and metaphysics. A careful analysis of the treatment of the *Categories* in Avicenna’s philosophical summae reveals a tension between its traditional placement in logic and Avicenna’s ontological interpretation. Scholars have noted a potential evolution in Avicenna’s thought, suggesting that the position of the *Categories* shifts from its traditional logical treatment in Avicenna’s earlier works to its later integration into metaphysics, as in the Persian summa *The Book of Science for ‘Alā’ al-Dawlā* (*Dāneshnāme-ye ‘Alā’ ī*) (Eichner 2013; Kalbarczyk 2018, 18–31; Street and Würsch 2023, 171–72; on the limits of a straightforward evolutive reconstruction, however, see Caminada 2019, xxiii–xxx).

A comprehensive understanding of Avicenna's approach to the Aristotelian theory of categories can be achieved through a comparative analysis of three of his major summae: his most extensive philosophical encyclopedia, *The Book of the Cure* (*Kitāb al-Shifā'*) (GS5 in Gutas 2014², 420–22); *The Book of Deliverance* (*Kitāb al-Najāt*) (GS6 in Gutas 2014², 422–24); and *The Book of Pointers and Reminders* (*Kitāb al-Ishārāt wa-l-Tanbihāt*), the summa that enjoyed the highest popularity in the post-Avicennian tradition in the Arabo-Islamic context (GS9 in Gutas 2014², 425). In *The Cure* and *The Deliverance*, the categories are addressed in both the logic and metaphysics sections. In the introductory chapter of his reworking of the *Categories* (*al-Maqūlāt*) from the logic section of *The Cure*, Avicenna argued for the exclusion of the treatment of the categories from the logical curriculum (*Shifā'*, *Maqūlāt* I.1, 5.1–7.10; translation of the relevant passages in Gutas 2014², 300–303; Kalbarczyk 2018, 41–48; Caminada 2019, 7–10). According to Avicenna, the discussion of categories in logic should be confined to asserting the existence of the ten highest genera that encompass all entities, among which one is substance and the remaining nine are accidents. The assertion of the existence of substances and accidents, however, cannot be positively demonstrated within the disciplinary boundaries of logic. Aristotle's *Categories* should thus be considered as a guide to organizing beings into genera and species. In this connection, knowledge of the categorial scheme might prove useful to the logician in formulating sound definitions and solving cases of controversial definitions. This explains Avicenna's repositioning of a chapter on the ten categories in the section on the *Posterior Analytics* in *The Deliverance*, following the discussion on definition (*Najāt*, 153–57). All the collateral questions that were extensively addressed in previous Greek and Arabic exegetical literature, related to the exact number and nature of the categories and to the ontological commitment of the theory, fall entirely beyond the purview of logical analysis (*al-Ishārāt wa-l-Tanbihāt*, 190.1–13; cf. Kalbarczyk 2018, 30–31; Black 1998, section 4).

To sum up, Avicenna challenged the prevailing semantic interpretation of the *Categories* that had become dominant in the Baghdad School (2a in the previous section). He also contested the broader assumption underpinning this interpretation—that logic concerns signifying expressions. For Avicenna, the subject-matter of logic is concepts. Not first-order ('primary') concepts, however, as al-Fārābī maintained, but rather second-order ('secondary') concepts, such as universality, particularity, generality, and specificity (Sabra

1980; El-Rouayheb 2012). This shift in the definition of the subject of logic also implies Avicenna's tacit rejection of al-Fārābī's attempt to justify the inclusion of the theory of categories within the scope of logical inquiry (2b). Avicenna's stance marks a significant departure from traditional views on the *Categories* and represents a turning point in the history of the Arabic reception of the Aristotelian treatise.

4. Post-Avicennian Ontological Readings of the *Categories* (11th–14th Century)

By the 12th century, Avicenna's authority in the field of logic had surpassed that of Aristotle. This is evidenced by the massive reliance of handbooks and commentaries from this period on Avicenna's writings; references to Aristotle and the Greek commentators are minimal and largely secondhand. The logical tradition following in Avicenna's footsteps extended from the 12th to the 19th century across three continents, from Muslim Spain to India. This rich, complex legacy has long been marginalized in scholarly studies due to entrenched biases against its originality (e.g., Madkour 1934, 240–48; Rescher 1964, 81). Recent scholarship has begun to address this gap, offering a more balanced account of post-Avicennian logic (e.g., El-Rouayheb 2010, 2011, 2019; Street and Germann 2021). The overview offered here does not claim to be an exhaustive account of the post-Avicennian reception of the *Categories*; rather, it seeks to integrate, at least in broad terms, this immensely rich tradition into the history of the Arabic reception of Aristotle's treatise.

Avicenna's ontological interpretation of the scope of the *Categories* and the consequent exclusion of the core of the theory from the logical curriculum had a transformative impact on the post-Avicennian tradition. Already in the works of his immediate followers, the treatment of the categories had come to form a part of general metaphysics. **Bahmanyār** (d. 1066), a first-generation disciple of Avicenna, briefly addressed the categories in the logic section of his summa, *The Validated Knowledge*, but directed readers to a more comprehensive discussion located outside the logical section (*al-Taḥṣīl*, 37.18–19). A similar reclassification of the theory of categories within the domain of metaphysics is observed in the second half of the 11th century in *The Intentions of the Philosophers* (*Maqāṣid al-falāsifa*), a philosophical summa by the theologian

Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī (d. 1111), where – likely under the influence of Avicenna’s *Book of Science for ‘Alā’ al-Dawlā* – the discussion of the categories is absent from the logic section.

From the 12th century onwards, logical texts and handbooks exhibit a radical restructuring of logical matter, which is subdivided into sections addressing the formation of concepts and sections concerning the formation of propositions that can be either verified or falsified. No section specifically dedicated to the categories is found in the logical works of some of the most prominent logicians of the period, like **Afdal al-Dīn al-Khūnajī** (d. 1250) (El-Rouayheb 2019, 44–47), and in the two most popular manuals that were used as primers on logic in *madrasa* education in the subsequent centuries, namely **Athīr al-Dīn al-Abharī**’s (d. 1265?) *Introduction (Īsāghūjī)* and *The Epistle for Shams al-Dīn (al-Risāla al-Shamsiyya)* by his student **Najm al-Dīn al-Kātibī** (d. 1276) (El-Rouayheb 2019, 52–53, 58–59; Street 2024, xiii–xxi). Some scholars connected the exclusion of categories from the logical curriculum to Avicenna’s redefinition of the subject-matter of logic. Among the staunch supporters of Avicenna’s reassessment of the *Organon* is the philosopher and theologian **Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī** (d. 1210). In his commentary on Avicenna’s *Pointers and Reminders*, he endorsed the exclusion of the *Categories* from the logical curriculum arguing that logic concerns the states of things that allow the processes of reasoning rather than the nature of things themselves, whereas Aristotle’s *Categories* engages in an ontological inquiry into the “true natures of things” (*ḥaqā’iq al-umūr*) (*Sharḥ al-Ishārāt wa-l-tanbihāt*, 18.1–13; cf. Kalbarczyk 2018, 32–36). On similar grounds, the Iraqi philosopher and theologian known as **al-‘Allāma al-Ḥillī** (d. 1325) argued for the exclusion of the theory of categories from logic based on the following argument: since the theory deals with primary concepts and logic concerns secondary concepts, which depend on the former for their existence, and since a science cannot investigate what underpins the existence of its subject-matter, it follows that logic cannot comprise an examination of the categories (*Al-Jawhar al-naḍīd fī sharḥ manṭiq al-tajrīd*, 44.4–9; cf. Street and Würsch 2023, 172).

A more nuanced position regarding the eradication of the treatment of the categories from logic was held by the Persian philosopher and astronomer **Naṣīr al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī** (d. 1274). While accepting that a proper scientific examination of the theory of categories falls within the remit of metaphysics, al-Ṭūsī nonetheless stressed in his commentary on Avicenna’s *Pointers and Reminders* the use for the logician of an instruction on the categorial scheme to

form sound definitions and to understand under which category a *definiendum* falls (*Ḥall Mushkilāt al-Ishārāt*, 190–91, n. 4 in Dunyā 1983–94; cf. Kalbarczyk 2018, 36–40). This point, already raised by Avicenna, is recalled here to justify the traditional structure of the *Organon*. It is once again the use of the categories in structuring definitions that motivated the mathematician and logician **Shams al-Dīn al-Samarqandī** (d. 1303/1322?) to dedicate a chapter specifically to the categories in *The Balance of Thoughts on Logic*, despite his disclaimer at the beginning of the chapter that the theory of categories falls outside the scope of logic (*Qisṭās al-afkār fī l-mantiq*, 174–77).

The impact of Avicenna’s ontological reading of the *Categories* is also recognizable in the works of authors who openly took anti-Avicennian stances. Notable examples in the 12th century are the Baghdad philosopher of Jewish descent **Abū l-Barakāt al-Baghdādī** (d. 1165), who saw the categories as an object of metaphysics (Martini Bonadeo 2013, 282–83), and **Shihāb al-Dīn Yaḥyā Suhrawardī** (d. 1191), the founder of the philosophical and mystical tradition called ‘Illuminationism’. He identified two distinct endeavors in Aristotle’s *Categories*, one – properly logical and overlapping with Porphyry’s *Isagoge* – concerning predication, the other – metaphysical – concerning the classification of the highest beings (see Beidokhti, forthcoming). Suhrawardī is particularly known for his reductionist reorganization of the categories into five: substance, quantity, quality, motion, and relation – a classification reminiscent of Plotinus’ five genera of the corporeal world (see Chiaradonna’s “[Aristotle’s Categories from Plotinus to Iamblichus](#)” in this volume). He argued that the remaining categories of accidents in Aristotle’s scheme are dependent on these five for their conceptualization (e.g., when, where, position, and having are understood through relation, while acting and being-acted-upon fall under motion). Consequently, these are not ‘highest’ genera, as they are subsumed under the other categories (Beidokhti 2018). Suhrawardī’s reductionist approach builds on the fourfold classification proposed by the Avicennian scholar ‘**Umar Ibn Sahlān al-Sāwī** (d. after 1141), to which he added motion. These deviations from the traditional categorial scheme within the post-Avicennian tradition may reflect, at least in part, the concerns Avicenna himself expressed in *The Cure* regarding the completeness and exactitude of the traditional classification of the categories (Thom 2015).

Avicenna’s ontological interpretation of the *Categories* had a far-reaching impact, extending beyond the boundaries of scholarly philosophical discourse. It is likely no coincidence that **Ibn ‘Arabī** (d. 1240), a prominent figure in the

Sufi mystical tradition, invoked the lexicon and conceptual framework of the categories within the context of his cosmology and metaphysics (Gril 2005).

5. ‘Traditionalist’ Readings of the *Categories*

5.1 Averroes and the Andalusian Tradition

In response to the widespread dissemination of Avicennian philosophy, the Arabic tradition witnessed several revivals of a more orthodox Aristotelianism. More conservative Aristotelians strived to achieve an interpretation of Aristotle’s works that remained truer to the author’s original intentions and ideally untainted by Avicennian reinterpretations. This approach is particularly evident in their understandings of Aristotle’s *Categories* and their general tendency to defend the inclusion of the treatise within the logical curriculum.

Resistance to the Avicennian reassessment of the *Categories* in favor of a more faithful Aristotelian interpretation notably gained prominence in 12th- and 13th-century Muslim Spain (Al-Andalus). Among the most important philosophers in this context was **Ibn Bājja** (d. 1139), known to the Latin Scholastics as *Avempace*. In his *Notes on al-Fārābī’s Book of the Categories* (*Ta’ālīq ‘alā Kitāb al-Maḳūlāt li-l-Fārābī*), he defined the categories as universal simple concepts (i.e., the highest genera), which are based on sensible things, insofar as they are signified by linguistic expressions (*Ta’ālīq*, 80.1–9). Following in al-Fārābī’s footsteps, Ibn Bājja argued that the study of the categories falls within the scope of logic with respect to certain accidents that occur to these universal concepts in the human soul—that is, second-order concepts like universality, particularity, and essentiality – and insofar as they are signified by expressions (*Ta’ālīq*, 104.24–105.2).

The Cordovan polymath and jurist **Averroes** (Ibn Rushd, d. 1198), the champion of Andalusian Aristotelianism, adopted a stance more closely aligned with the mainstream interpretation prevalent in the Baghdad School. In his *Middle Commentary on Aristotle’s Categories* (*Talkhīṣ Kitāb al-Maḳūlāt*), the only surviving commentary he devoted specifically to this treatise, it is evident from the outset that, like Ibn Bājja, Averroes did not challenge the idea that the

discussion of the categories should precede the other logical treatises. He briefly addressed the issue of the scope of the *Categories*, stating that *Categories* 1–2 aims to present the conditions specific to existing beings insofar as they are signified by linguistic expressions and to define substance and accident as they are analyzed in logic (*Talkhīṣ Kitāb al-Maḡūlāt* 5.3–6; see Cerami 2013, 104–11). Unlike Ibn Bājja, Averroes identified the categories with existing beings signified by expressions, rather than concepts; this suggests that Averroes might have based the distinction between the logical and metaphysical investigation of the categories on the fact that, in logic, these beings are considered under a specific respect, namely insofar as they are signified by expressions.

Ibn Ṭumlūs (d. 1223), Averroes’ student and successor as a physician at the Almohad court, shared his master’s justification for treating the categories within the realm of logic. However, in the introduction to his *Compendium on Logic* (*al-Mukhtaṣar fī l-manṭiq*), Ibn Ṭumlūs provided a definition of the scope of the Aristotelian treatise that is a verbatim quotation from al-Fārābī’s *Classification of the Sciences*: “the rules pertaining to the simple intelligibles and the expressions that signify them” (Ibn Ṭumlūs, *al-Mukhtaṣar fī l-manṭiq*, 98.15–16 = al-Fārābī, *Iḥṣā’ al-‘ulūm*, 87.1–3). Like Ibn Bājja, Ibn Ṭumlūs’s interpretation of the *Categories* appears to be heavily influenced by al-Fārābī.

5.2 Ottoman-Turkish and Christian Arabic Aristotelianisms

Between the 17th and the 18th centuries, interpretations of the *Categories* that diverged from mainstream Avicennism were prompted by a new engagement with sources from the Latin tradition. This is the case, for instance, with As’ad al-Yānyawī (Yanyalı Esad Efendi, d. 1730), a prominent scholar involved in the translation enterprise promoted in Istanbul by the Grand Vizier Nevşehirli Damad İbrahim Paşa, Ahmed III’s son-in-law. His main logical work, *The Most Luminous Commentary* (*al-Sharḥ al-anwar*), is a revised translation of the *Most Clear Exposition of Universal Logic* (*Expositio lucidissima universae logices*, published in 1651 and 1669) by Ioannes Cottunius, a Greek-born professor of philosophy at Padua (El-Rouayheb 2019, 217–21; Morel 2021–2022). This work offers an interesting argument for the inclusion of the *Categories* in logic. After defining the subject matter of logic as “the mental

entity and the secondary intelligible” (*al-mawjūd al-dhihnī wa-l-ma‘qūl al-thānī*) in a manner reminiscent of Avicenna’s, al-Yānyawī/Cottunius argued that the subject-matter of the *Categories* is a subset of the subject-matter of the discipline, as Aristotle’s treatise addresses “the complex of intellectual entities that lead to the operations of the intellect” (MS Istanbul, Süleymaniye Kütüphanesi, Ayasofya 2568, ff. 48^v–49^r).

Another notable departure from the post-Avicennian consensus on the place of the *Categories* is found in the logical works of Christian scholars trained in both Arabic and Latin Scholastic traditions at the Maronite Colleges in Rome and Aleppo, and in Catholic schools in the Levant. In the philosophical writings of the Maronites **Buṭrus al-Tūlāwī** (d. 1745) and **Yūsuf Sham‘ūn al-Sim‘ānī** (Giuseppe Simone Assemani, d. 1768), and the Greek Catholic **Yuwākīm al-Muṭrān** (d. 1766), Aristotle’s treatise is fully integrated within the logical curriculum (El-Rouayheb 2019, 259–85).

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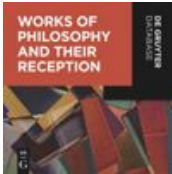
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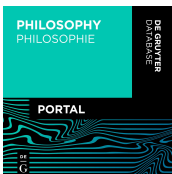
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