

## CHAPTER 1

# The Study of Islamic Philosophy in the West in Recent Times: An Overview

The study of Islamic philosophy has had a long history not only in the Islamic world itself but also in the West. The tradition of the study of this philosophy in the West is nearly one thousand years old and can be divided into three phases, namely, the medieval period of translation, analysis, and study of Arabic texts; the second wave of translation and study in the Renaissance following the medieval effort, and finally a new attempt to study Islamic philosophy, which began in earnest in the nineteenth century and which continues to this day. There is a certain continuity in this long history and connection between these three phases, but there are also discontinuities. It is, however, essentially with the last period that we shall concern ourselves in this appraisal. Moreover, by ‘philosophy’ we understand *al-falsafah* or *al-ḥikmat al-ilāhiyyah* of the traditional Islamic sources as defined in the chapters that are to follow<sup>1</sup> and not the general meaning of ‘philosophy’ as used in modern European languages, which would extend to many other traditional Islamic disciplines such as the Quranic commentary (*tafsīr* and *taʾwīl*), principles of religion (*uṣūl al-dīn*), the principles of jurisprudence (*uṣūl al-fiqh*), Sufism, the natural sciences, and the sciences, of language.

In the common parlance of European languages, ‘philosophy’ evokes the idea of something having to do with general principles, governing reasoning laws, conceptual definitions, the origin, and end of things, and still to some extent wisdom, and one speaks not only of pure philosophy but also of the philosophy of art, religion, or science. In the classical Islamic languages, however, *al-falsafah* refers to a specific set of disciplines and to a number of distinct schools such as the *mashshāʾī* (Peripatetic) and *ishrāqī* (Illuminationist), not to just any school of thought that contains “philosophical” ideas. Moreover, in later Islamic history in the eastern lands of Islam the term *al-ḥikmat al-ilāhiyyah* became common and practically synonymous with *al-falsafah*, whereas in the western lands of Islam the older term *al-falsafah* continued to be

used to denote the activity of the “philosophers.” In both cases, however, these terms have always been used as names for specific types of intellectual activity that Muslims came to identify with philosophy or what one could also translate in the second case, “theosophy,” whereas other disciplines cultivated within Islamic civilization and possessing notable philosophical dimensions in the Western sense of ‘philosophy’ have not been categorized in the classical period of Islamic history as either *al-falsafah* or *al-ḥikmat al-ilāhiyyah*. It must be added, however, that although we have limited ourselves here to the discussion of *falsafah* in its traditional sense, it is necessary to remember its relation to various fields such as Sufism, theology (*kalām*), law, the natural and mathematical sciences, and the sciences of language. But we shall not deal here with these disciplines in themselves or with the philosophy they contain in the general Western sense of the term.

Just as in the context of Islamic civilization, philosophy, though a very distinct discipline, has been closely related to the sciences on the one hand and Sufism and *kalām* on the other, it has also had ramifications in fields dealing with the practical aspects of human life, especially political science and jurisprudence. The classical division of the “intellectual sciences” and also philosophy by many early Islamic philosophers (and following for the most part Aristotle) into the theoretical and the practical, the first comprised of metaphysics, physics, mathematics, and logic and the second of ethics, politics, and economics (in its traditional sense), reveals its relation to various fields and sciences including in some classifications even the religious sciences such as theology, Quranic commentary, and the principles of jurisprudence. Not only do these fields possess a “philosophy” of their own as philosophy is currently understood—the work of Harry A. Wolfson on the philosophy of the *kalām* being an outstanding proof<sup>2</sup>—but also *falsafah* as a separate discipline has been inextricably related to many aspects of their development. It is this second aspect that belongs to any integral treatment of the study of Islamic philosophy and that in fact calls for an interdisciplinary approach that should bear much fruit in the future.



Several schools can be distinguished in the history of the study of Islamic philosophy in the West since the nineteenth century. Here we shall mention first of all these schools up to the 1960s when important changes began to take place due to diverse factors and then turn in the second part of this discussion to the last decades of the twentieth

century. The various Western approaches to the study of Islamic philosophy include first of all the Christian scholastic tradition cultivated mostly by Catholic scholars, who in a sense continued the medieval study of Islamic philosophy within the matrix of Thomism or Neo-Thomism, especially up to Vatican II when the study of Thomism itself became somewhat diluted in many Catholic circles. Some of these scholars such as Etienne Gilson and Maurice De Wulf relied mostly on Latin translations of Islamic texts and were interested only in the role played by Islamic philosophy in Latin scholasticism, and others were well acquainted with the Arabic material and the structure of Islamic thought in general, such as Louis Massignon, A. M. Goichon, and Louis Gardet.<sup>3</sup> There was, moreover, a special school of Catholic scholars in Spain in whom a sense of "Spanish identity" and reliance upon Catholic theology were combined. This school also produced a number of scholars of repute, such as Miguel Asín Palacios, Miguel Cruz Hernández, and Gonzales Palencia, who made major contributions to the study of Islamic philosophy and related fields but were confined in their creative thought and research mostly to Spain and the Maghreb. The historians of Islamic scientific thought, Millás-Vallicrosa and Juan Vernet, were also in a sense related to this group in their Spanish orientation, although not closely identified with Catholic thought.

Another school that parallels the Catholic in its long history and that issued from the same type of scholastic background is that of Jewish scholarship, which had its roots directly or indirectly in rabbinical training and medieval Jewish scholasticism, with which elements from the Western humanist schools had sometimes become mixed. This school produced outstanding scholars in the nineteenth century, such as Moritz Steinschneider and Salomo Munk, and continued to produce some of the most outstanding scholars of Islamic philosophy and of Islamic thought in general during the early part of the twentieth century, such as Ignaz Goldziher, A. J. Wensinck, Saul Horowitz, Harry Wolfson, Erwin I. J. Rosenthal, Georges Vajda, Simon van der Bergh, Shlomo Pines, Paul Kraus, and Richard Walzer. The political turmoils following the partition of Palestine, however, changed the attitude of many, but not all, scholars of this type of background toward both Islamic philosophy and traditional Jewish thought itself, making many of them less sympathetic interpreters of traditional forms of Islamic thought.

Altogether the approaches of the scholars in the two groups already mentioned have important similarities in that most of them drew in different degrees from traditional Christian and Jewish philosophy and theology, which themselves possessed certain basic common

features with Islamic thought and of course with each other. Quite different from both groups was another group of scholars who appeared on the scene in the late nineteenth century. Their background was modern European philosophy and not Christian or Jewish scholasticism, and they tried to understand the contents of Islamic philosophy in terms of different schools of thought prevalent in the West at the time they were writing. From Ernst Renan, followed by Léon Gauthier, who sought to make Ibn Rushd the father of rationalism, to Henry Corbin, who made use of the insights of phenomenology and more esoteric currents of Western thought to penetrate into the inner meaning of Islamic philosophy, there appeared a number of scholars who approached Islamic philosophy as thinkers and scholars immersed in the various schools of Western philosophy current in their day and also in modern methods of scholarship rather than as scholars of texts or men with medieval scholastic training in philosophy. In the case of Corbin, which is unique, there was, however, in addition to his immersion in German philosophy especially that of Martin Heidegger, profound knowledge of medieval Christian thought which he studied under Gilson. In the category of scholars such as Renan, who were influenced by the secularist philosophies of their day, which served as background for their study of Islamic philosophy, one cannot fail to mention also the large number of Marxist thinkers and scholars during the twentieth century in both the Soviet Union and the West who produced numerous works on Islamic philosophy within the framework of Marxist philosophy.

In contrast to these groups, there also developed from the nineteenth century onward a large school of orientalists with primarily philological rather than theological or philosophical training who studied Islamic philosophy textually and philologically without deep understanding of the philosophical and theological dimensions of their study. This group was responsible for the careful edition of many important texts but produced few meaningful interpretations. From the mid-1950s training in the social sciences supplemented that of philology and history, and a certain number of works appeared on Islamic philosophy from the point of view of current theories of the social sciences in the West. Most such works were related mostly to political philosophy rather than pure philosophy, although in Islamic thought the two cannot be completely separated from each other.

With the extension in the West after the Second World War of the awareness of the existence of several intellectual traditions in the world other than the Western, a school of scholarship based on the comparative method came into being. With the relative success that

this approach had had in the fields of Far Eastern and Indian metaphysics and philosophy, a group of scholars began to turn to the study of Islamic philosophy in a comparative context usually in relation to the West but also occasionally to other Oriental intellectual traditions. The works of Toshihiko Izutsu and Noriko Ushida (both Asians but writing in English), and Henry Corbin, Gardet, and others mark a beginning in this potentially fecund field of study.<sup>4</sup>

Finally, there came into being, again only during the second half of the twentieth century, a school that began to study Islamic philosophy as a living school of thought rather than as a matter of solely historical interest. The inner need of Western man for a new "existential" knowledge of the Oriental traditions turned a number of seekers to search within the Islamic philosophical tradition for answers to questions posed by the modern world on the intellectual level. Already earlier in the twentieth century Bernard Carra de Vaux, Max Horten, and a few other figures had been concerned to some degree with the philosophical content of Islamic philosophy. Now this concern began to increase, and such men as Corbin; Gardet; Gilbert Durand in the West; and S. H. Nasr, Toshihiko Izutsu, Mehdi Mohaghegh, and Naquib al-Attas in the East began a new type of scholarship in Islamic philosophy, which, without sacrificing in any way the scholarly aspect of such studies, turned them directly into the service of the philosophical and metaphysical quest of those contemporary men and women who were aware of the profound intellectual crisis of Western civilization and were seeking authentic philosophical knowledge elsewhere.

This development, if pursued more extensively and in depth, could help to overcome the excessive historicism of earlier works by treating Islamic metaphysical and philosophical ideas as something of innate philosophical value rather than being of only archaeological interest. Until now so much of the research in Islamic philosophy has been devoted to tracing historical influences that few have bothered to ask what a particular philosophical idea must have meant as philosophical idea to those who held it and contemplated it, whatever might have been its apparent historical origin. Somehow the significance of the saying that truth has no history has rarely been realized in the modern West in the case of Oriental philosophy in general and Islamic philosophy in particular with the result that, besides exceptions, some of which have been already cited, few European thinkers of importance in modern times have been attracted to Islamic philosophy as philosophy. Nor have other non-Western philosophical traditions fared much better. The combination of philosopher and orientalist that one finds in a scholar such as Corbin has only rarely appeared on the

scene of the Western study of Islamic philosophy, because this philosophy has been presented too often as nothing more than Greek philosophy in Arabic dress, without anything of innate philosophical value in it that could not be found in the Greek sources themselves. Only an extension of the activity of the group that considers Islamic philosophy as a living intellectual tradition worthy of study on its own basis can remedy the shortsightedness that has prevented to a large extent a true appreciation of this subject in the West.



In addition to all the groups cited so far, who were mostly part of or connected in one way or another to the Western intellectual scene, the twentieth century, especially in its middle decades, produced also numerous Muslim scholars and a few non-Muslims from the Arab world such as George Anawati and Majid Fakhry who made many contributions to Islamic philosophy. This group includes scholars trained in modern methods of research, and writing often in both Islamic and Western languages, such as Muṣṭafā 'Abd al-Rāziq, Ibrāhīm Madkour, 'Alā' al-Dīn Affifi, Fu'ād El-Ahwany, Muḥammad Abū Rīdah, 'Abd al-Raḥmān Badawī (who was particularly productive in both French and Arabic), and somewhat later Muhsin Mahdi, Fazlur Rahman, S. H. Nasr, Muhammad Arkoun, Mian Muhammad Sharif, and many others, some of whom also participated in the activities of the other groups mentioned above. There were also those who continued the traditional method of cultivating and studying Islamic philosophy. This latter group was to be found especially in Persia and included, as far as figures whose works appeared also in the West, Sayyid Muḥammad Ḥusayn Ṭabāṭabā'ī, Sayyid Jalāl al-Dīn Āshtiyānī, Murtaḍā Muṭahharī, Mīrzā Mahdī Ḥā'irī, Mehdi Mohaghegh, and a number of others whose writings are only now becoming known in Europe and America.<sup>5</sup> But a great deal more effort must be made to make the works of Muslim scholars on Islamic philosophy known to the West and to facilitate genuine cooperation between Eastern scholars and those in the West whose field of interest is Islamic philosophy.



During the last few decades of the twentieth century a number of events took place that caused a new chapter to be written in the history and methods of study of Islamic philosophy in the West. As a result of Vatican II Thomism became less emphasized in many Catho-

lic circles with the result that the earlier approach of Catholic scholars rooted in Thomism and also interested in Islamic philosophy became less common, although still a number of important scholars with such a background continue to make significant contributions to the field of Islamic philosophy as we see for example in the case of David Burrell.<sup>6</sup> Likewise, the old rabbinical training that some Jewish scholars of Islamic philosophy of the earlier period had undergone became rarer, although Jewish scholars with knowledge of Hebrew and the Jewish philosophical tradition such as Lenn Goodman and Oliver Leaman have continued to make important contributions especially to earlier Islamic philosophy.

Also during these decades, the philosophical scene on the European continent and in the Anglo-Saxon world began to part ways more sharply than before with existentialism and phenomenology becoming dominant on the Continent and analytical philosophy in Britain, Canada, and the United States, with deconstructionism appearing also on the scene late in the twentieth century but with different interpretations of it as far as philosophy is concerned in the two worlds. Moreover, a new generation of Western scholars of Islamic philosophy appeared who, if not strictly speaking philosophers, were nevertheless influenced by those diverse currents of thought, the influence upon them depending on their background and educational training. Also during this period as a result of the earlier efforts of Corbin, Izutsu, Nasr and others later Islamic philosophy became a subject of interest for a whole new generation of students in the West.

Furthermore, during these decades the number of Muslim scholars of Islamic philosophy who wrote in a European language increased dramatically. Some of these figures such as Muhsin Mahdi, Fazlur Rahman, Jawād Falaṭūrī, Ḥāʾirī Yazdī, and Nasr have taught in Western universities and trained numerous students, both Muslim and non-Muslim. Others such as Naquib al-Attas returned to the Islamic world but wrote mostly in English. Moreover, a number of Western students went to the Islamic world for a period to study philosophy and related subjects, and some such as Herman Landolt, James Morris, William Chittick, and John Cooper became well-known authorities on Islamic thought in general and Islamic philosophy in particular. In fact a great deal of activity in Islamic philosophy in the West by these and a number of older Muslim scholars, as well as by a later generation such as Hossein Ziai and Mehdi Aminrazavi is having an impact within the Islamic world itself. Today many students from the Arab world, Turkey, Iran, Pakistan, Indonesia, Malaysia, and other Muslim lands are coming to the West to study with such scholars, the case of McGill

University being particularly notable in this process. As a result, activity in Islamic philosophy in the West has become closely related to the life of Islamic philosophy in the Islamic world itself.

The last decades of the twentieth century were also witness to the gradual penetration into and interaction with Western philosophy of the living Islamic philosophical tradition. This is evident most of all in France as a result of the influence of Corbin as can be seen in the works of such younger French philosophers as Christian Jambet. But there has also now come into being a gradual interaction between Islamic philosophy and analytical philosophy<sup>7</sup> and semiotics as we see in the works of Ian Netton and Oliver Leaman. All of these currents led at the end of the twentieth century to the establishment of a whole center in Britain devoted to not only the dissemination of Islamic philosophy, especially in its later forms, but also to its interaction with Western philosophy, particularly the analytical school. This center publishes the journal *Transcendent Philosophy*, under the direction of a young Islamic philosopher Gholam Ali Safavi, among whose writers are to be found many of the younger scholars, both Muslim and Western, interested in Islamic philosophy as philosophy and also in serious comparative studies.

The field of the study of Islamic philosophy in the West has become as a result a much more extensive one than it was in the early decades of the twentieth century. It is enough to consult the voluminous bibliography of Hans Daiber, already cited, to see the very large number of works appearing every year in European languages on this subject, works written by both Western and Muslim scholars, and to realize how scholarly activity in the field has expanded in nearly every major European country as well as in the United States and Canada. And yet the chasm between the scholarly study of Islamic philosophy as intellectual history and from a Western point of view and as living philosophy remains as does the understanding of the Islamic philosophical tradition as viewed by those within that tradition and as seen by most Western scholars who still for the most part seek to apply categories drawn from ever-changing philosophical fashions of the West to a philosophical tradition cultivated in the land of prophecy and concerned with truths that stand above and beyond the transient fashions of the day.

This chasm can in fact be seen between all forms of traditional philosophy, which are so many expressions of the *philosophia perennis*,<sup>8</sup> and various currents of modern philosophy. The traditional exponents of the *philosophia perennis* in the twentieth century, especially René Guénon, Ananda K. Coomaraswamy, and Frithjof Schuon<sup>9</sup> were all



adamant in pointing out the profound distinctions between traditional and modern philosophies.<sup>10</sup> Their criticisms of modern thought and exposition of traditional metaphysics and cosmology, which lie at the heart of the *philosophia perennis*, have led many of the scholars of the younger generation to the serious study of Islamic philosophy, but the works of traditional authors have not been able to eradicate completely the mental distortions and incorrect presumptions about the nature of the intellect and knowledge that still prevent many Western scholars of Islamic philosophy to grasp its real nature and its significance as a philosophy that remains aware of the realities of prophecy.



Despite conceptual perspectives held by many Western scholars that are not acceptable by those who belong to the Islamic intellectual tradition and who live within its framework, Western scholars of Islamic philosophy have made some notable contributions to this field of study. For over a century they have cataloged many libraries in East and West and have discovered thereby numerous manuscripts of Islamic philosophy of the greatest importance. Today nearly all the major libraries in the West are fairly well cataloged, there being only a few exceptions such as parts of the Vatican Library. In any case one does not expect it to be likely that any major discoveries in the field of Islamic philosophical manuscripts will be made in these libraries, although the possibility of course always exists. The situation is not, however, the same in the Islamic world itself where almost every year new manuscripts of significance come to light even in Iran and Turkey whose holdings are better cataloged than most other Islamic countries. There is most likely much to be discovered in the way of philosophical manuscripts when libraries of India, Pakistan, Syria, Yemen, Mali and many other lands not to speak of private collections all over the Islamic world are better cataloged.<sup>11</sup> Western scholars have already done much in developing scholarly methods for the cataloging of manuscripts, methods that have been used not only by themselves but also to an ever greater degree by Muslim specialists in manuscripts such as Fuʿād Sezgin and Muḥammad Tāqī Dānishpazhūh. Although it is often overlooked by students of philosophy, this type of scholarly activity is of the utmost importance for making the basic texts of Islamic philosophy available to the scholarly community for study.

A closely related domain is the correction and preparation of critical editions of manuscripts. In the traditional Islamic world the major texts of Islamic philosophy that were usually taught to students,

such as the *Shifāʾ* (Healing) of Ibn Sīnā or *Sharḥ al-hidāyah* (Commentary upon the Guidance) of Mullā Sadrā and Athīr al-Dīn Abharī, were corrected by the teachers as they went along, and the existing oral tradition was always involved as the written text was taught. With the coming of printing into the Islamic world, some texts were lithographed and later even printed in modern form by scholars trained traditionally in Islamic philosophy but in many other cases faulty texts began to appear in printed form and still do so.

From the late nineteenth century onward, a number of Western scholars began to edit Arabic and Persian philosophical texts critically as such major series as the Bibliothèque Iranienne of the Institut Franco-Iranien directed by Henry Corbin bears witness.<sup>12</sup> Long collaboration with Western scholars of manuscripts taught several generations of Muslim scholars how to edit texts critically, something that became ever more necessary as the oral tradition became less available. Today the editing of Islamic philosophical texts often appears as a thankless task, and fewer and fewer Western scholars are willing to devote much time to it. This task is now being accomplished mostly by Arab, Persian, Turkish, and other Muslim scholars, but it cannot be forgotten that in this area of providing critical editions of texts the work of Western scholars has been of great importance. Yet, alas, even today there is not one major Islamic philosopher all of whose works have been edited critically on the basis of all the known manuscripts. Needless to say, this is a shortcoming that has to be overcome soon. Meanwhile, the critical and dependable printed editions of works of Islamic philosophy that do exist owe much, either directly or indirectly, to Western scholars of this field.

The knowledge of Islamic philosophy in the West would not of course be possible outside the small circles of scholars of Islamic languages without translations of basic texts into European languages. This task has been carried out by a number of Western scholars for over a century, and they have been joined in this task during the past half century by a number of Muslim scholars with mastery of one or more European languages. Yet there is a remarkable dearth of trustworthy translations available to the Western reader when one compares the case of Islamic philosophical texts with that of Hindu or Buddhist texts. As far as translation into English is concerned, the number is limited and still does not include the totality of such basic Islamic philosophical texts as the *Shifāʾ* and *al-Ishārāt waʾl-tanbīhāt* (The Book of Directives and Remarks) of Ibn Sīnā, the *Sharḥ al-ishārāt* of Naṣīr al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī, and *al-Asfār al-arbaʿah* (The Four Journeys) of Mullā Ṣadrā. Still there are notable translations by Western scholars of which the *Tahāfut al-tahāfut* (The Incoherence of the Incoherence) by

van den Bergh is in many ways exemplary. Other noteworthy translations into English include the *Metaphysics* of al-Kindī by Alfred Ivry; several texts of Ismāʿīlī philosophy by Vladimir Ivanow and Paul Walker; several works of al-Fārābī by Richard Walzer and Fritz W. Zimmerman; *The Spiritual Physick* and *The Philosophical Life* of al-Rāzī by Arthur J. Arberry; the *Al-Amad 'ala'l-abad* (On the Soul and Its Fate) of Abu'l-Ḥasan al-ʿĀmirī by Everett K. Rowson; *The Life of Ibn Sīnā* by William E. Gohlmann and selections of Ibn Sīnā's philosophical theology by Arthur J. Arberry; a long epistle of the Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ by Lenn Goodman; *Ḥayy ibn Yaqzān* (Living Son of the Awake) of Ibn Ṭufayl also translated by Lenn Goodman; *The Mystical Treatises* of Suhrawardī by Wheeler Thackston; *Averroes' Commentary on Plato's "Republic"* by Erwin Rosenthal; Ibn Rushd's *Metaphysics* by Charles Genequand; and a number of his logical works and commentaries on Aristotle by S. Kurland, Harry Blumberg, Herbert Davidson, and Charles Butterworth who has also translated his *Faṣl al-maqāl* (The Decisive Treatise); a selective translation of the works of Afḍal al-Dīn Kashānī by William Chittick; the *Muqaddimah* (Prolegomena) of Ibn Khaldūn by Franz Rosenthal; *al-Ḥikmat al-'arshīyah* (Wisdom of the Throne) of Mullā Ṣadrā by James Morris; *Iksīr al-'arīfīn* (The Elixir of the Gnostics) also of Mullā Ṣadrā by Chittick; and *Hujjat Allāh al-bālighah* (The Conclusive Argument from God) of Shāh Walī Allāh of Delhi by Marcia Hermansen. There are of course many other worthy translations, and this list does not mean to be in any way complete but only illustrative.<sup>13</sup> Furthermore, there are also many important translations in other European languages especially in French,<sup>14</sup> German, Spanish, Italian, and Russian. There are also translations of numerous works of philosophical theology and doctrinal Sufism, which bear directly on Islamic philosophy, but which we have not cited here.

As already mentioned, this effort to make works of Islamic philosophy available in English has been joined by a number of Islamic scholars as well as a number of Christian Arabs during the past few decades. As far as the English language is concerned, one can mention Muhsin Mahdi, a major authority as editor, commentator, and translator of al-Fārābī, George Hourani, Michael Marmura, Majid Fakhry, Selim Kamal, M. S. Khan, Fawzī al-Najjār, Shams Inati, Hossein Ziai (sometimes in collaboration with John Walbridge), and Parviz Morewedge, just to cite some of the better known names. And again there are a number of scholars of Islamic background who have made important translations into French and German.<sup>15</sup>

As a result of all these efforts, some primary sources of Islamic philosophy are now available in European languages but not to the extent that one could understand Islamic philosophy in depth without

the knowledge of Arabic and in the case of many philosophers, Persian, and for Ottoman philosophical thought also Turkish. Much remains to be done in this domain, but this effort is hampered by many factors, including the lack of critical editions of many important primary texts, a shortage of philosophical dictionaries,<sup>16</sup> and most of all a lack of the necessary scholars to carry out the difficult task of making competent translations. This latter factor is further aggravated by the fact that in many Western universities translation of a philosophical text, which is often a daunting task, is not even considered in the scholarly works of a young scholar when he or she is being considered for academic promotion.

What is needed for Islamic philosophy is something like the Loeb Library for Greek and Latin texts where the text in the original appears on one side of the page and the English translation on the opposite page. Fortunately during the last few years Brigham Young University has embarked upon such a series in which already a few important titles have appeared.<sup>17</sup> Some other publishers in America are also beginning to produce works of this kind.<sup>18</sup> In any case in order to have the main corpus of Islamic philosophy available to be studied in the West by those interested in philosophy, much more careful translation has to be carried out. Furthermore, the vocabulary chosen for the translation of technical philosophical terms must reflect the character of Islamic philosophy engaged with the realities manifested in the land of prophecy rather than the rationalistic or skeptical bent of mind of many of those who embark upon the arduous task of translation. Otherwise the Italian adage *traduttore traditore*, that is, a translator is a betrayer, becomes the reality as we in fact see in a number of translations in many fields of Islamic studies, including philosophy.

The history of philosophy in the modern sense began in the West in the nineteenth century following certain philosophical developments, especially in Germany. Much earlier, classical Muslim scholars had written works that dealt with the lives and writings of Islamic thinkers, including philosophers. These works included not only the *al-Milal wa'l-niḥal* literature, meaning literally religious creeds and schools of philosophy or thought, by such figures as al-Bāghdādī, Ibn Ḥazm, and al-Shahrastānī, but also well-known treatises dealing with philosophers, scientists, and theologians and bearing other titles such as the works of Ibn al-Nadīm, Ibn Abī Uṣaybi'ah, Ibn al-Qiftī, Ibn Khallakān, and Ḥājji Khalīfah. There are also classical works devoted more specifically to philosophers, including pre-Islamic ones, works such as those of Muḥammad Shams al-Dīn Shahrastūrī,<sup>19</sup> Quṭb al-Dīn Ashkiwarī, and Muḥammad Tunakābunī. These treatises usually reflect

knowledge of not only earlier Islamic works including anthologies of sayings of Greek and Muslim philosophers by such figures as Ibn Fātik and Abū Sulaymān al-Sijistānī, but also directly or indirectly of Greek works such as those of Theophrastus, Diogenes Laertius, and Galen dealing with Greek philosophers.

It is of great interest in the context of the present book to note that in most of these traditional histories of Islamic philosophy, the idea that philosophy was related at the beginning to prophecy has been confirmed and emphasized, and it has been asserted that *ḥikmah* began with the prophet Idrīs identified with Hermes.<sup>20</sup> But the works on Islamic philosophy that began to be written in the West from the nineteenth century onward were based on very different premises and methods. They were for the most part rooted in positivistic historicism and disregarded the traditional Islamic understanding of the history of philosophy nearly completely. From the middle of the nineteenth century European scholars began to write histories of Islamic philosophy, usually called "Arabic" philosophy following the medieval usage of this term.<sup>21</sup> Starting with the pioneering works of Augustus Schmölders and Salomo Munk, a number of well-known works on the history of Islamic philosophy appeared in various European languages by such figures as Bernard Carra de Vaux, Miguel Cruz Hernández, De Lacy O'Leary, Gustave Dugat, Léon Gauthier, and Goffredo Quadri.<sup>22</sup> The most influential among these works in the Islamic world itself was Tjitze De Boer's *Geschichte der Philosophie im Islam*,<sup>23</sup> which in its English version remained a standard text in Pakistani and many Indian universities until the 1970s and in some places until more recently.

These works, often of a scholarly nature, nevertheless looked upon Islamic philosophy from the point of view of the modern European perspective on its own philosophical heritage. All of them disregarded more or less later Islamic philosophy from the thirteenth century onward as if it had never existed. Most of them saw what they knew of Islamic philosophy even of the earlier period, that is, the main figures of *mashshāʿī* or Islamic Peripatetic philosophy, as being of little more value than a bridge between late medieval European philosophy and the Greek past. They disregarded for the most part the relation between Islamic philosophy and the Quranic revelation and ignored the view of Islamic philosophy itself about its origins and its relation to prophecy.

During the first six or seven decades of the twentieth century, many Muslims who had become aware of Western approaches to the history of philosophy also wrote histories of Islamic philosophy but based mostly on the current Western models. Some dealt more with

the issue of the relation of Islamic philosophy to *kalām* and the Quranic revelation itself than their Western counterparts. Those writing in Arabic also provided much information on the original Arabic philosophical texts not found in the Western histories of Islamic philosophy. During the period in question most of the Muslim authors in this field were Arabs such as Muṣṭafā ‘Abd al-Rāziq, ‘Uthmān Amīn, Ibrāhīm Madhkūr, Ḥusām al-Ālūsī, ‘Alī Sāmī al-Najjār, and the very prolific ‘Abd al-Rahmān Badawī, who wrote in both French and Arabic. Among this group ‘Abd al-Ḥalīm Maḥmūd was exceptional in his grasp of the relation of *falsafah* to the inner teachings of Islam. Some of the notable scholars writing on the history of Islamic philosophy were also Christian rather than Muslim Arabs. This latter category included among others Georges Anawati, Ḥannā al-Fākhūrī, and Khalīl al-Jurr. The works in Arabic on the history of Islamic philosophy often contain many insights and analyses not found in the works of European scholars, but the model of most of these works remained to a large extent the histories written by Western scholars. This is especially true in their conception of Islamic philosophy as terminating with Ibn Rushd, to which Ibn Khaldūn came to be added as a kind of postscript. These works in fact disregarded, like their Western counterparts, the whole later tradition of Islamic philosophy, to which much of the present book is devoted, and therefore did not emphasize at all the living nature of the Islamic philosophical tradition.

During this period histories of Islamic philosophy were also written by Turkish, Indo-Pakistani, and to a lesser extent Persian scholars. One needs only to recall Zia Ülken from Turkey and Saeed Shaikh from Pakistan, whose works became fairly popular. Although these works did not suffer from any attachment to Arab nationalistic ideology, their treatments nevertheless ignored much of later Islamic philosophy and were to a large extent based on European models. The only figure of this period who sought to deal with later Islamic philosophy, although in a truncated version, was Muḥammad Iqbāl in his *The Development of Metaphysics in Persia*, which contains important insights, although it is also very incomplete and contains certain basic errors. It is interesting to note that in Persia, where Islamic philosophy was more active as a living tradition than anywhere else, less attention was paid to the history of Islamic philosophy as cultivated in the West than in the Arab world, the reason being precisely *because* the tradition that always emphasized that truth stands ultimately above time and that philosophy cannot be reduced to its history was still so strong. It has been only during the past three decades that Persian scholars such as ‘Alī Aṣghar Ḥalabī and Ghulām Ḥusayn Ibrāhīm Dīnānī have written

extensive works on the history of Islamic philosophy and where translations of works on this subject from European languages and Arabic have also attracted a number of figures who belong to the authentic Islamic intellectual tradition to the modern treatment of the history of Islamic philosophy.

A major turning point occurred in the writing of the history of Islamic philosophy in the 1960s. First of all Henry Corbin, who was the first Western scholar to have discovered the whole continent of later Islamic philosophy and who opposed strongly the historicism that issued from nineteenth-century European philosophy, asked myself and Osman Yahya, a Syrian expert on doctrinal and philosophical Sufism, to collaborate with him to write a history of Islamic philosophy for the popular encyclopedic collection *Pléiades*. The result of this cooperation was the *Histoire de la philosophie islamique*,<sup>24</sup> which was soon translated into many European and Islamic languages and became very popular. Although this work was only the first volume of our project and ended with the life of Ibn Rushd, it treated Islamic philosophy and its history in a completely different way from other works in European languages and took fully into consideration the rapport between philosophical speculation and revelation in Islam. Neither Yahya nor I had time to complete this project; so Corbin completed it in a somewhat more summary fashion, and it is this completed version that has been translated into English as *The History of Islamic Philosophy*.<sup>25</sup>

Two years before the appearance of our *Histoire de la philosophie islamique*, I delivered a set of three lectures at Harvard University, in which, while dealing with Ibn Sīnā, Suhrawardī, and Ibn ‘Arabī, I sought to combine the Islamic view that philosophical truth has ultimately no history and that in Islamic history what was important was intellectual perspectives and not individuals with careful historical scholarship making use of both Western and Islamic sources. My lectures were in reality a response from within the Islamic philosophical tradition to the historiography of Islamic philosophy developed in the West. The book resulting from these lectures was entitled *Three Muslim Sages*.<sup>26</sup> Translated into Arabic, Persian, Turkish, Urdu, Bengali, and many other languages, it remains to this day a text studied in many Islamic as well as Western universities and represents an interaction between the living Islamic intellectual tradition and Western scholarship on the subject of the history of Islamic philosophy.

Meanwhile, the government of Pakistan had created a center under the direction of Mian Muḥammad Sharīf to compile a major history of Islamic philosophy in which scholars from East and West would collaborate. The original plan for the book followed mostly the

Western histories of Islamic philosophy with chapters added on culture, the arts, and more recent developments in the Islamic world. Around 1960, I began to cooperate with M. M. Sharīf on this project and convinced him to add chapters on later Islamic philosophy, which he accepted with the proviso that I would write them, which I did. Nevertheless, the work, which became standard reference for several decades<sup>27</sup> and was translated into a number of languages, is a rather composite work and does not as yet represent a satisfactory integration between the traditional Islamic understanding of Islamic philosophy and Western historiography of the subject.

Since those defining years of the 1960s, a number of histories have appeared by Western scholars with greater awareness of the integral Islamic philosophical tradition. Such works include *Historia del pensamiento en el mundo islámico* of Miguel Cruz Hernández<sup>28</sup> and Ian Netton's *Allāh Transcendent*.<sup>29</sup> But the most popular work in English written by a single author during this period on the subject has been Majid Fakhry's *History of Islamic Philosophy*,<sup>30</sup> which in its original version followed the earlier European and Arabic works that limited Islamic philosophy to only certain schools and the earlier period of Islamic thought. But subsequent editions have continued to embrace to an ever greater degree the later Islamic philosophical tradition, although the section on recent schools of Islamic philosophy in Persia and India is still rather scanty.

Finally, in the 1990s Routledge requested that Oliver Leaman and I edit a major two-volume work on the history of Islamic philosophy, which would also include a section on Jewish philosophy as part of their general series on the history of philosophy. The plan of this work was based on both a historical and a morphological treatment of the subject and taking full account of the relation of Islamic philosophy to the Islamic revelation, as well as the whole of the Islamic intellectual tradition. Again we invited scholars from both the West and the Islamic world, and, as in nearly all works in which a large number of scholars of different backgrounds participate, the result was that there are differences and sometimes discordant views expressed. But this work, entitled *History of Islamic Philosophy*, which first appeared in 1996, is now perhaps the most extensive work available on the subject, a work in which Western and Islamic scholarship are combined with the aim of creating a bridge between the two.

There are very few fields in which Western scholarship has been as influential upon philosophical activity in the Islamic world as that of the history of Islamic philosophy. Works written on this subject in



the West continue to influence Muslims themselves and their view of their own intellectual tradition. At stake for Muslims is the meaning of philosophy and its relation to prophecy. A full history of Islamic philosophy, which would include all periods of Islamic history and all the different schools of thought with an Islamic philosophical dimension and full awareness of the nexus between philosophy and prophecy, must await more monographic studies of figures and periods not yet fully known. But during the past few decades at least a framework for the study of the history of Islamic philosophy has been created that is deeply rooted in the nature of Islam and its intellectual tradition. Western scholarship on this subject originally opposed the Islamic view almost completely and for the most part looked upon philosophy as a secularized mental activity. However, later at least some voices in the West began to look at the subject differently often more in accordance with the Islamic view of things. In any case the Western challenge to the Muslims' self-understanding of their own intellectual tradition has been very significant in the Muslim response of the past few decades, a response that is bound to grow in both depth and breadth in the future.

Western scholars have also of course carried out many analyses of various figures and texts of Islamic thought often in total disagreement with the Muslims' own understanding of the figure or subject at hand. A blatant example of this is the study by Renan, the French rationalistic and agnostic philosopher, of Ibn Rushd, a study that has had far-reaching influence. Nor have such studies, which claim to know an Ibn Sīnā or a Suhrawardī better than those who belong to the living Islamic philosophical tradition including oral teachings that go back to these masters, ceased to appear in the West. But in this domain also such analyses are rarely followed blindly by Western educated Muslims as they were in days of old. Usually they are catalysts for philosophical deliberation, especially among younger Muslim philosophers and scholars of philosophy who are well versed in a European language. In any case Western scholarship on Islamic philosophy continues to have an influence upon the Islamic world itself in the domain of philosophical analysis as in the other fields mentioned above. Moreover, this interaction, which is in reality a form of comparative philosophy, cannot but bear positive fruit if on the Islamic side the authentic and traditional Islamic view of philosophy is not abandoned and forgotten as was the case with an earlier generation of Western-educated Muslims.

In the chapters that follow we shall be discussing both philosophical questions and the ideas of particular Islamic philosophers

and schools of philosophy seen from the point of view of the Islamic philosophical tradition itself. Yet our language and mode of presentation will incorporate Western scholarship and address the Western as well as the Muslim audience. We hope to remain faithful to philosophy cultivated in the land of prophecy while presenting features of this philosophy in such a manner that they can speak even to those beyond the borders of this "land," even to those who think that they do not need to heed the voice of prophecy or do not even hear it, but who are nevertheless drawn to the teachings of the *ḥikmah* or wisdom contained in the Islamic philosophical tradition.