

line' topics like the length and shortness of life could move from one domain to the other without anybody consciously remarking on the fact.<sup>122</sup>

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## Al-Ġāhiz, *Falsafa*, and Hippocrates Arabicus<sup>1</sup>

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In this paper I want consider four things: al-Ġāhiz and the Graeco-Arabica; al-Ġāhiz and his use of the word *falsafa*; al-Ġāhiz and medicine. Finally I would like to speculate on why al-Ġāhiz might have been reading and thinking about Hippocratic medical texts translated into Arabic.

The burden of my argument is that in the examples from the Ġāhizian corpus which I survey *falsafa* denotes the study of the elemental natures and the physical world; that *falsafa* is synonymous with *nazar*, though I discern a key distinction in that *nazar* denotes speculation about and inquiry into the suprasensible world, often based on the insights garnered from *falsafa*; that *falsafa* and *nazar* are both activities which belong to one branch of the *kalām*, the other branch being the scrutiny of matters relating to *dīn*, principally the nature of the godhead and the prophethood of Muḥammad; that Hippocratic medical texts and nosology offered al-Ġāhiz and like-minded *kalām* masters a model for how to practice *nazar* and in the process how to keep society in a state of good health and spiritual, political and social wellbeing.

### 1. AL-ĠĀHİZ AND THE GRAECO-ARABICA

It is a well-worn commonplace that al-Ġāhiz was no admirer of the Arabic translations of Greek works in circulation in his day. In fact this observation has become one of the constants in our conceptualization of this process, an indication of the resistance directed against the Greek heritage in third century intellectual circles.

I often wonder whether many of those who rehearse this commonplace have bothered to read the passage in the *Kitāb al-Ḥayawān*, *The Book of Living*, from which the evidence comes. Either way, those responsible for the establishment of this as a truism have failed to notice some key features of the section of the book in which it occurs, especially the fact that al-Ġāhiz is not actually speaking. These pages are views which he attributes to someone else.

So what is happening? When reading al-Ġāhiz's writings, we must constantly remember to ask two basic questions: who is speaking? what is the overarching argumentative context to which these words belong? Let me note in passing that there are some high profile interpretations of third century intellectual culture informed by readings of al-Ġāhiz which reveal no awareness of these basic strategies. And lest you

1. This article takes as its starting point some of the arguments rehearsed in my recent monograph *Al-Jāhiz: In Praise of Books*, Edinburgh, 2013. I have occasionally recycled my words. I would like to record my thanks to Professor Michael Cooperson of UCLA whose query about how I had translated a medical term in one of al-Ġāhiz's essays got me thinking; and to Professors Adamson and Pormann for their very useful comments on substance and style.

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