

selections and passages rather than complete books. The kind of argument that I am making, one in which I take a commonplace word that occurs almost everywhere and show how it reveals a functioning conceptual vocabulary that helps us understand theories about language, is the kind of argument that necessitates reading books from start to finish. As a result, I have read Ibn Fūrak's *Muğarrad*, al-Ġurġānī's *Asrār* and *Dalā'il*, and ar-Rāġib's *al-I'tiqādāt*, *ad-Darī'ah*, *Muqaddimah fi t-Tafsīr*, *Tafsīl*, and *Rasā'il* in their entirety. I have read around widely in the same authors' other works, and in those of Ibn Sīnā, in whose case I have also relied on secondary scholarship to supplement my reading of the first seven chapters of his *Eisagoge*, the first two chapters of his *Categories*, and the first chapter of his *De Interpretatione*. (Work on Ibn Sīnā's *Sophistical Refutations* remains a desideratum.)

In this book, major eleventh-century authors other than the four selected appear occasionally. They include al-Qāḍī 'Abd al-Ġabbār al-Asadābādī (d. 1025; see J. R. T. M. Peters on his theories about language)⁴ and the equally well-known theologian and legal theorist Abū Bakr al-Bāqillānī (d. 1013, the subject of a recent dissertation by Rachel Friedman).⁵ Others do not appear at all, for example the important Andalusian literary theorist Ibn Rašīq (d. ca. 1064). A great theologian and legal scholar, Ibn Ḥazm (d. 1064), appears only in the biographical review of Ibn Fūrak. The absence of these latter two men could possibly be excused by their geographical distance from the conversations that are the subject matter of this book. But spending as much time in the archive as I have over the last eight years has led to the emergence of personal predilections and judgments, and this has particularly been the case in my preference for Ibn Fūrak over al-Bāqillānī. I judge the former to have published more intellectually cohesive works than the latter, to little fanfare in Anglophone and European-language scholarship. That scholarship has, however, made great strides in recent decades when it comes to language theory, and this is particularly true in an area that I only touch on in passing in this book: legal theory. (See inter alia my review of a recent important work on legal theory and literalism by Robert Gleave).⁶

Ar-Rāġib

Ar-Rāġib is the first of our four men. They are all men; the eleventh century was patriarchal, and while women wrote poetry, took part in Hadith transmission, and created identity (on which see Nadia El Cheikh),⁷ they were excluded from the production of the extant theory, whether lexicographical, theological, logical, or

4. Peters (1976).

5. Friedman (2015).

6. Key (2015). Cf. Ali (2000), Gleave (2012), Lowry (2004), Vishanoff (2011), Zysow (2013).

7. El-Cheikh (2002), (2005), (2015).

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literary-critical. Abū al-Qāsim al-Ḥusayn b. Muḥammad b. al-Mufaḍḍal ar-Rāġib al-Isfahānī was the author of a hugely influential glossary of Quranic and scholarly vocabulary, a thinker whose approach to problems of theology, ethics, politics, and poetry was invariably linguistic. He never met an academic problem that he could not reduce to a matter of signification and therefore to the lexicography he had mastered. Ar-Rāġib was the subject of my doctoral dissertation, and consequently the first eleventh-century scholar in whom I noticed the attitudes to language that are the subject matter of this book. I do not intend to repeat here the detailed intellectual biography of ar-Rāġib that I have provided elsewhere; instead I will provide a brief survey that touches on his sectarian affiliation and the confusion over his death date. Both questions are, appropriately enough, problems of translation: ar-Rāġib did not himself have any confusion about the dates of his own lifetime, nor did he exhibit any uncertainty as to his own sectarian positions and beliefs. These questions have arisen only in the biographical archive over the millennium that separates him from us.

As we will shortly see with Ibn Fūrak, the biographical archive produced lists and compendia of scholarly biographies according to theological and legal schools of thought, as well as of scholars according to birthplace and date. Ar-Rāġib appears in no such collections until a century after his death (al-Bayhaqī),⁸ and even thereafter the notices are short on biographical detail or concerned with confusion about his theological affiliations (as-Suyūfī).⁹ From the twelfth to the twentieth century, notices in both Arabic and European languages have provided a variety of incorrect death dates (ad-Dahabī, al-Ḥwānsārī, Brockelmann, etc.),¹⁰ and it is only through recent research (including my own) that we have been able to ascertain from the oldest manuscript witness to his Quranic glossary that ar-Rāġib was alive in or before 1018.¹¹ It is quite possible that ar-Rāġib's internally consistent but confessionally diverse set of doctrinal positions kept him out of biographical dictionaries that were in the process of delineating rival orthodoxies. The madrasa taxonomical process had little motivation to engage with the biography of a scholar who had combined ideas from schools of thought and creedal identities that were, in hindsight, in conflict with each other. And yet we just don't know enough about Iran in the eleventh century to be confident ascribing an iconoclastic or even catholic selection of doctrinal solutions to ar-Rāġib. In his community, he may well have been representative and uncontroversial. He

8. Al-Bayhaqī (1946, 112); Key (2011), (2012, 40–41); Meyerhof (1948, #131, 132).

9. Key (2012, 83), as-Suyūfī (1979, 2:297).

10. Brockelmann (1996a, 1:289), (1996b, 1:505), ad-Dahabī (1985, 18:120–21), al-Ḥwānsārī (1991, 216), Key (2012, 39).

11. Al-Ġawharġī (1986), Key (2012, 32f), ar-Rāġib (409/1018).

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