

Celebrating Ibn Rushd's Eight-Hundredth Anniversary

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In the context of the world-wide celebrations of the eight-hundredth anniversary of Abu al-Walid Ibn Rushd, known to Western scholars as Averroes (1126–1198), the Tunisian Cultural Foundation (Bayt al-Hikmah) held an International Averroes Symposium, sponsored jointly with UNESCO, in Carthage, Tunis, on February 16 to February 22, 1998. The symposium was hosted by Abd al-Wahab Buhdiba, Director of Bayt al-Hikmah, and was inaugurated by the President of Tunisia, Zayn al-Abidin Ali, who declared 1998 Ibn Rushd's year. This symposium was attended by a large number of scholars from France, England, Spain, the United States, Iraq, Lebanon, Syria, Morocco, Libya, and Tunisia.

It was my good fortune to open the symposium with a lecture titled "Averroes, Aquinas and the Rise of Latin Scholasticism in Western Europe," in which I tried to highlight the decisive role Ibn Rushd's Commentaries on Aristotle played in the rediscovery of Aristotle in Western Europe, the resurgence of interest in Greek-Arabic philosophy, and the consequent rise of Latin Scholasticism. Through translations by such eminent scholars as Michael the Scot and Herman the German during the first decades of the thirteenth century, Ibn Rushd's work triggered a genuine intellectual revolution in learned circles. Before long, Latin philosophers and theologians had split into two rival groups, the pro-Averroists, with Siger of Bradbant (d. 1281) at their head, and the anti-Averroists, with St. Thomas Aquinas (d. 1274) at their head. The principal issues around which the controversy turned were the unity of the intellect, the eternity of the world, the immortality of the soul and the denial of divine providence. The confrontation between the two rival groups became so acute that in 1270, the Bishop of Paris, Etienne

Tempier, issued a condemnation of 15 propositions of which 13 were of specific Averroist inspiration. In 1277, a much longer list of 219 propositions were condemned and the books of Averroes were burnt at the doorsteps of the Sorbonne in Paris.

A number of scholars at the symposium, including Ehsan Naragi of the Culture Sector of UNESCO in Paris and Abd al-Wahid Dhonun Taha dwelt on the impact of Averroes on European thought and the mixed reception of Averroism in European universities such as Paris, Bologna, and Padua where Averroist studies were at the center of the philosophical and theological curriculum well into the fifteenth century. Some scholars dwelt on the role Toledo, Spain, played in the twelfth century in the dissemination of Arab-Islamic culture, thanks to the translation of Arabic philosophical, scientific, and medical works from Arabic sponsored by the Bishop of Toledo, Don Raymundo, a great patron of Arabic learning in Western Europe at that time. The greatest translator of the period was Gerard of Cremona (d. 1187) to whom no fewer than 70 medical, scientific, and philosophical translations from Arabic are attributed. In his paper, Ahmad Shahlan of the University of Rabat, Morocco, concentrated on the Hebrew translations of Ibn Rushd's works and assessed their accuracy. Shahlan highlighted the role of Hebrew scholars as a link between the Arab-Muslim and Latin-Christian worlds during the earliest period and gave a long list of the Hebrew translations of Ibn Rushd's works, which were followed in due course by the translation of the whole Averroist corpus of Aristotelian commentaries into Latin. He then proceeded to show in a very detailed manner the measure of accuracy of the Hebrew translations, which often suffered from misreading or misunderstanding the original Arabic texts.

A major theme of the Carthage symposium was Ibn Rushd's contribution to the perennial problem of the relation of philosophy and religion, which was the focus of two lectures by Abu Abd al-Rahman Ibn Aqil al-Zahiri and Salem Hamish, who expounded on Ibn Rushd's attempt to reconcile philosophy (*al-hikmah*) and religion (*al-Shari'ah*) in two famous treatises, *The Decisive Treatise* (*Fasl al-Maqal*) and *The Exposition of the Methods of Proof* (*Al-Kashf 'an Manahij al-Adillah*).

The other aspects of Ibn Rushd's contribution to Arab-Islamic learning in the fields of jurisprudence (*fiqh*) and medicine were discussed by a number of scholars. Ammar Jum'a al-Talbi spoke on the subject of jurisprudence and its fundamental principles according to Ibn Rushd. Mahdi Mohaqqiqi of Tehran and Nash'at al-Hamarah of Damascus, discussed Ibn Rushd's medical treatises and Ibn Rushd in the history of ophthalmology, respectively.

The whole Carthage symposium was held under the general rubric of "The Modernity of Ibn Rushd (*Hadathat Ibn Rushd*).” Accordingly, two panels were devoted to the relevance of Ibn Rushd to modern and con-

temporary thought. Thus, in her paper Zaynab al-Khudayri of Cairo University discussed Ibn Rushd in medieval and contemporary Arabic thought, a theme also pursued by Ahmad Atiyah and Gerhard Endress, who concentrated on current critical editions of the works of Ibn Rushd.

In his closing lecture, "What is Living and What is Dead in the Philosophy of Ibn Rushd." Oliver Leaman of Liverpool John Moores University, England, argued that Ibn Rushd's theory of meaning or the use of language is an instance of the fact that "his thought is in touch with the main controversies of philosophy across the ages," but his rationalism, like the Enlightenment project which is under fire today, is marred by his aversion to mysticism as another valid avenue to truth. Unlike most of his philosophical predecessors, starting with Ibn Sina and culminating in Ibn Tufayl, who were willing to allow for some kind of accommodation of philosophy and mysticism, Ibn Rushd appears to have had nothing but contempt for the nondiscursive processes of mystical experience. In his political philosophy, Leaman argued, Ibn Rushd tended to be an elitist, like Plato whose *Republic* he paraphrased. According to Leaman, that was understandable in light of his concept of the pre-eminence of the class of philosophers as compared to that of the theologians and the masses at large, since only that first class is competent to understand or lay down the rules governing the just or perfect state.

This year there are forthcoming conferences in Rabat, Morocco, as well as in the philosopher's homeland, Spain, where conferences are scheduled in Seville from October 15 to October 17, in Malaga from November 26 to November 28, and finally in Cordoba, Ibn Rushd's hometown, from December 9 to December 11.