Prince of Physicians
Avicenna’s Legacy in Islamic World and the West

Programme

9.00   Opening Harm Beukers / Asghar Seyed-Gohrab

Session one:
Chair: Asghar Seyed-Gohrab
9.15   François de Blois (University of London, SOAS)
   Aristotle and Avicenna on the habitability of the Southern hemisphere

9.45   Erik Kwakkel (Leiden University)
   Up close and Personal: Michael Scot and his Latin Translation of Avicenna’s
   On animals

10.15  Olga Lizzini (Free University Amsterdam, VU)
   ‘Giver of intellect’ (wāhib al-‘aql) and ‘giver of forms’ (wāhib al-ṣawwar): a key element of
   Avicenna’s influence in the Latin Middle Ages

11.00  Tea and coffee break

Session two:
Chair: Gabrielle van den Berg
11.30  Jan Just Witkam (Leiden University)
   Avicenna’s copyists at work

12.00  Mohammad Javad Esmaeili (Iranian Institute of Philosophy, Tehran)
   Avicenna: tradition and innovation

12.30  Lunch

Session three:
Chair: Jan Schmidt
14.00  Mohammad M. Mojahedi (Leiden University)
   Avicenna and ‘the Logic of Scientific Discovery’: A Critical Rational Reading of the
   Correspondence between Avicenna and Al-Biruni

14.30  Sasan Haghighi (Leiden University)
   Avicenna a bridge between Greco-Roman civilization and modern west
15.00  Joep Lameer (Independent scholar)  
*The Avicenna that was not*

15.30  Tea and coffee break

**Session four:**
Chair: Remke Kruk
16.00  Jan Schmidt (Leiden University)  
*The Reception of Ibn Sina Among the Ottomans*
16.30  Michiel Leezenberg (University of Amsterdam)  
*Ibn Sina's science of mysticism: character and influence*
Aristotle and Avicenna on the habitability of the Southern hemisphere

In the second book of his *Meteorology* Aristotle presents his view on the habitable regions of the Earth: there are two habitable sections, one, in which we live, in the Northern hemisphere, between the Arctic Circle and the Tropic of Cancer, and the other in the Southern hemisphere, between the Antarctic circle and the Tropic of Capricorn. These two habitable regions are separated by the tropical zone, which is uninhabitable, and indeed impassable, because of the intense heat; the Northern and Southern arctic zones are likewise uninhabitable because of their intense cold. This view of Aristotle’s was accepted by scientific and philosophical writers of antiquity, but was rejected vehemently by Ibn Sinā in his *Kitābu ṣ-ṣifā‘* and later also by Ibn Rušd in his *Shorter commentary* on Aristotle’s *Meteorology*, both of whom argue that there are no habitable countries in the Southern hemisphere, because this is completely covered with water. This view found wide acceptance in Christian Europe in the Middle Ages, and is reflected famously in Dante’s *Commedia*. In my paper I discuss the arguments on which this astonishing thesis is based and what they tell us about the fundamental difference between ancient and mediaeval scientific thinking.

François de Blois was Professor of Iranian Studies at Hamburg University from 2002 to 2003. Currently he is a Research Fellow at University College London, where he is preparing a book on Arabic and Syriac sources concerning the Jewish calendar.

Erik Kwakkel (Leiden University)

Up close and Personal: Michael Scot and his Latin Translation of Avicenna’s *On animals*

This paper is devoted to Michael Scot’s Arabic-Latin translation of Avicenna’s *On animals*. This commentary to Aristotle’s *De animalibus* was translated by Scot (d. 1236) at Sicily while he was in service of emperor Frederick II. Scot’s translation is an abridged version of the commentary, known as *Abbreviatio avicenne*, and this paper is devoted to its oldest surviving manuscript, kept in the Vatican Library under shelfmark Chisianus E VIII 251.

The manuscript in question offers an opportunity to get up close and personal with the translator and his translation practices. A paleographical and codicological inspection of MS 251 reveals that the *Abbreviatio* in MS 251 was significantly improved by a collaborative of
correctors before it was placed in the emperor’s library. This paper shows that Michael Scot was likely personally overseeing this process, giving us the unusual opportunity to look over the shoulder of an individual who translated Avicenna into Latin.

This paper will analyze the correction techniques encountered in the manuscript, including the use of lacuna left in the main text so that the final reading could be determined, perhaps through consultation with experts. The paper also attempts to understand these corrections against the broader historical backdrop of Arabic-Latin translation practices. As some studies have suggested, such translations were often made in collaboration with native speakers of Arabic. This paper will assess whether the corrections in MS 251 may be seen as physical evidence of such interactions.

**Erik Kwakkel** is principal investigator in ‘Turning over a New Leaf: Manuscript Innovation in the Twelfth-Century Renaissance,’ an NWO-funded research project based at Leiden University, where he also teaches manuscript studies. His publications include monographs on Carthusian book production (2002) and physical change in Latin manuscripts (co-authored, forthcoming 2012); co-edited volumes on Medieval Dutch Bible translations (2007) and Medieval Authorship (forthcoming 2012); as well as a variety of book chapters and journal articles related to Latin and Middle Dutch manuscripts.

Olga Lizzini (Free University Amsterdam, VU)

‘Giver of intellect’ (wāhib al-‘aql) and ‘giver of forms’ (wāhib al-ʿuwār): a key element of Avicenna’s influence in the Latin Middle Ages

The influence exerted by Avicenna’s philosophy in the Latin Middle Ages was very important and was generally linked to concepts related to a religious vision of the world. The position of first intelligibles, the conception of a hierarchical reality, the idea of a metaphysical cosmology and the distinction between essence and existence were, in fact, central to the Christian tradition and to the widespread esteem that Avicenna’s philosophy enjoyed in the Latin Middle Ages. Two texts, each a part of the Kitāb al-Shifāʾ and translated into Latin in Toledo in the 12th century, are the main sources of Avicenna’s influence in the Latin world: the Metaphysics (al-Ilāhiyyāt), which was translated as the Liber de philosophia prima, and the Book of the soul, the Liber de anima.
The paper will focus on the concept of the Agent intellect (*intellectus agens*), which is relevant to both texts: the separate intellect, the giver of intellect (*wāhib al-Ẓālif*), is also the giver of forms (*wāhib al-∞war*) and is a cardinal concept not only in gnosiology, but also in ontology. It involves a whole theory of causality which is, in fact, one of the principal elements of Avicenna’s influence on the Christian Middle Ages. The paper will then briefly discuss the fortuna of Avicenna’s philosophy in the Latin Middle Ages and introduce the historiographical category of ‘Latin Avicennism’.

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Since 2009 **Olga Lucia Lizzini** has been Assistant Professor for Philosophy in Islam at the Free University of Amsterdam (VU). Her area of research is metaphysics, particularly emanation, the definition of the First Principle, the doctrine of causality, and the epistemology of Arabic Neo-Platonism.


Jan Just Witkam (Leiden University)

**Avicenna’s copyists at work**

On Ibn Sīnā’s major philosophical work, the *Kitāb al-Shīfā*, hardly any text-critical work has been undertaken. Each book in the multi-volume Cairo edition, which was made by a great number of learned editors, is based on a varying number of manuscripts. The editorial principle applied by many editors seems to be sound philological taste, rather than the application of a more formal and methodical approach. Erudition and taste cannot, however, be substitutes of the evidence in manuscripts. With the example of the two relatively late manuscripts of the *Kitāb al-Shīfā* in the Leiden library (Or. 4, estimated from the 7th-8th/13th-14th century; Or. 84, dated 881/1476) it is shown how complex the textual material actually is.
Jan Just Witkam (Leiden, 1945) is emeritus-professor of Paleography and Codicology of the Islamic World in Leiden University. Between 1974 and 2005 he was curator of Oriental collections in Leiden University Library. He is editor-in-chief of the *Journal of Islamic Manuscripts*, published by Brill’s of Leiden. He is a fellow in the Leiden Institute of Area Studies (LIAS).

Mohammad Javad Esmaeili (Iranian Institute of Philosophy, Tehran)

Avicenna: tradition and innovation

In his multiple works, Avicenna employs three different methods of thought and communication: 1. demonstration, 2. the experiment, and 3. allegorical reasoning. In the *Healing*, the *Salvation* and his other philosophical writings, Avicenna gives an in-depth account of what is mostly Aristotelian philosophy. Here, demonstration determines the character of the discussions. Demonstrations provide certain knowledge and proceed from principles that are certain and better known than the conclusions derived from these.

In his medical writings, especially in his *Canon on Medicine*, Avicenna gives a critical account of the works of previous physicians, among them Galen and Zakariyyāʾ Rāzī. In this work he does however not merely lean on the knowledge of his predecessors; indeed, among the skills required of a physician, we find him also refer to the ability to do “research” on the basis of experimentation. And it is reported in ancient sources that Avicenna actively used this method to find new treatments for then incurable afflictions. In addition, some of Avicenna’s other works employ the allegory, such as *Hayy Ibn Yaqẓān* and *Salmān and Absāl*. In these writings, Avicenna reveals his mystical side, perhaps because some truths are better served by the parable than they could ever be served by demonstration.

In my talk, I should like to reflect on Avicenna’s judicious use of different tools of thought and communication, and point at his undiminished relevance for contemporary education.

Mohammad J. Esmaeili received his PhD from the Iranian Institute of Philosophy in Tehran in 2010. His dissertation was entitled "Aristotle, Philoponus, Avicenna, and Buridan on Dynamics". As a member of the Institute he now teaches in various academic centers in Iran. Over the last few years, he participated in several international conferences in the UK, the Netherlands, Italy and Japan. In Iran too, he is a regular speaker at academic gatherings. Since February 2011, he is also director of the Library of Iranian Institute of Philosophy. His research focuses on Aristotelian philosophy and science and their impact on the Islamic world, roughly until the end of the seventeenth century AD. Apart from the articles that he
published so far on this subject, he also edited a number of books on Islamic philosophy. These days he is working on "the history of natural philosophy in Islamic world".

Mohammad M. Mojahedi (Leiden University)

Avicenna and ‘the Logic of Scientific Discovery’: A Critical Rational Reading of the Correspondence between Avicenna and Al-Biruni

Critical rationalism is one of the influential theories in modern epistemology that explains the process through which human knowledge develops and makes progress. It introduces inter alia two main principles as regards the logic of scientific discovery: One, against all forms of inductionism, which take induction as a primary source of knowledge; the other, the centrality of error for the progress of human knowledge. The former principle ushers in anti-justificationism, whereas the latter gives a central status to criticism (as opposed to all forms of justification) in scientific inquiries. Through a ‘critical rational’ reading of a series of correspondence between Avicenna and Al-Biruni, this paper will explore how these two giants of scientific inquiries of the late 10th and early 11th centuries AD had touched on some epistemological debates, upon which critical rationals dwelled in the 20th century against positivism and all varieties of naïve rationalism and realism. The correspondence is originally in Arabic and known as al-'as'ilah wa al-'ajwibah (literally meaning ‘Questions and Answers’). In this series of correspondence, there are thoughtful mentions to the problems central to the debates that modern epistemology contributed to, e.g. the relationships among philosophy, religion and science, and the concept and epistemological status of induction, deduction, observation, evidence, scientific experiments, proof and falsification. Studying this set of correspondence are of utmost relevance to understanding how two fundamentally different theories of knowledge developed side-by-side within the mainstream of early Muslim scholarship, which conveyed and enriched the rival traditions of knowledge from the ancient period to the modern time. This set of rare and unrivalled scientific correspondence is significant also because it can be taken as one of the early stages of the emergence of scientific journals or co-authored pieces, where scholars with entirely different points of view develop their ideas and expose their achievements to the criticism of their peers as part of scientific progress.

Mohammad Mehdi Mojadehi holds a PhD in Political theory and MAAs in Political Sciences and Islamic Studies from ISU, Tehran, and Human Rights from UCL. In 2003, he received a one-year post-doctoral scholarship for research at the Wissenschaftkolleg zu Berlin where he studied political hermeneutics of religious texts. He has published widely, co-authoring and contributing to books and authoring articles in the areas of Islamic Culture and Philosophy, human rights, political theology and mysticism. He has been a visiting researcher at the
Sasan Haghighi (Leiden University)

**Avicenna a bridge between Greco-Roman civilization and modern west**

I will study three different views about Avicenna, an exaggerated one by Muslim scholars by an ironic way of writing, George Sarton view, an important figure of history of science, and the third would be a critical view against contemporary western history of science.

Joep Lameer (Independent scholar)

**The Avicenna that was not**

Among the educated, the name “Avicenna” usually evokes the image of a man of great learning who lived in Persia some thousand years ago. Some people even know that he was an eminent philosopher and physician, whose works had a lasting impact on the world history of learning. Avicenna’s lifetime, learning, and influence concern facts that can be proven. There are however other views about Avicenna that are less well-founded. Some of these pertain to Avicenna as a thinker, others to Avicenna as a private person. Again, some of these opinions have been with us for many centuries, while others are relatively new. Since opining about Avicenna is creating images of him that can affect the way he is perceived by others, I think we have an obligation to put our finger on false or questionable opinions whenever we come across them. In my lecture I intend to expose some of these opinions. The result will not be an increase in our knowledge of Avicenna, but rather a decrease in our ignorance about him. But is that not equally important?

**Joep Lameer** (1953) is a specialist of medieval Islamic philosophy. Author of *Al-Farabi & Aristotelian Syllogistics* (1994) and *Conception and Belief in Sadr al-Din Shirazi* (2006), his current research focuses on post-Avicennan philosophy in the eastern part of the Islamic world.

Jan Schmidt (Leiden University)

**The Reception of Ibn Sina Among the Ottomans**
Michiel Leezenberg (University of Amsterdam, UvA)

Ibn Sīna's science of mysticism: character and influence

In Christian Europe, Ibn Sīna’s enduring fame primarily rests on his reputation as a medical scholar; in the Islamic East, by contrast, he has become, and remained famous especially as a scholar of mysticism. In this contribution, I will, first, discuss how Ibn Sīna saw the stages of mystical insight as part of his general account of knowledge, focusing on the final parts of the Kitāb al-‘ishārât wa’l-tanbîhât and on the Risâla fi’l-‘ishq. Thus, he created a ‘science of mysticism’ that is hardly recognizable as a science for adherents of a Western, secularized and rationalist conception of scientific knowledge. Second, I will discuss the character of the enduring influence of Ibn Sīna’s mystical ideas, both in the philosophical tradition and in the non-philosophical Persianate literary tradition, oral as well as literate.