Producing Islamic philosophy: The life and afterlives of Ibn Ṭufayl’s Hayy ibn Yaqqān in global history, 1882–1947

Murad Idris
University of Virginia, Charlottesville, USA

Abstract
In recent decades, the trope that classical Muslim thinkers anticipated or influenced modern European thought has provided an easy endorsement of their contemporary relevance. This article studies how Arab editors and intellectuals, from 1882 to 1947, understood the twelfth-century Andalusian philosopher Ibn Ṭufayl, and Arabo-Islamic philosophy generally. This modern generation of Arab scholars also attached significance to classical Arabic texts as precursors to modern European thought. They invited readers to retrospectively identify with Ibn Ṭufayl and his treatise, Hayy ibn Yaqqān. Comparisons of Ibn Ṭufayl to European thinkers, and re-presentations of Hayy ibn Yaqqān as the precedent or genesis of European thought, facilitated these editors’ global imaginaries, anti-colonial projects and political fantasies. This article tracks these projects and fantasies through the afterlife of Hayy ibn Yaqqān from early printings and generalist surveys to later editions and studies, as Ibn Ṭufayl’s significance became sutured into his imagined importance for Europe, and for going beyond Europe.

Keywords
Ibn Ṭufayl, Hayy ibn Yaqqān, reception history, editions, modern Arab thought, Islamic philosophy, imperialism, anti-colonialism, Easternism, Orientalism

Editing falsafa, writing empire
In recent decades, the trope that classical Muslim thinkers anticipated or influenced modern European thought has provided an easy endorsement of their relevance to the global humanities. This trope has an important but neglected precedent: late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century colonised Arab scholars also attached
significance to classical Arabic texts and to their European translations as precursors to modern European thought. One such text is the Andalusian philosopher Ibn Tufayl's (d. 1185) allegory Risālat Hayy ibn Yaqzān, which narrates the life of Hayy ibn Yaqzān (lit., ‘Living, son of Awakened’) on an island, how he attains knowledge of God and the universe, then fails to disseminate it. For these writers, Ibn Tufayl became the Arabo-Muslim herald of European modernity. Why did these scholars identify with a twelfth-century text of falsafa (Hellenised Arabic/Islamite philosophy), and why did they keep repeating the claim that it influenced European development?

This article studies how Ibn Tufayl was selectively written into the canon of Arabo-Islamic thought by Arab editors and intellectuals, from 1882 to 1947. With a handful of exceptions (Elshakry, 2014; El Shamsy, 2016; Massad, 2007; Salama, 2011), the modern Arab reinvention of an ‘Arabo-Islamic intellectual tradition’ remains understudied terrain. Such thinkers creatively misappropriated what they took as their past, constructing a classical tradition and its sources as civilizational documents. When they studied Hayy ibn Yaqzān, they navigated the terrain of European empire and reflected on their colonial and post-colonial contexts. They confronted Europeans’ access to the text since its 1671 Latin translation by Edward Pococke, and the historical and geopolitical implications of its transnational itinerary.

Hayy ibn Yaqzān’s reception history in Europe formed the backdrop of its reception by modern Arab scholars and their production of falsafa as their intellectual past. This article, then, does not narrate ‘Islamic philosophy’, neither in the relationship of the philosopher Ibn Tufayl to other falāṣifa like the formatively influential Ibn Sīnā (Avicenna; d. 1037) nor in its (real or exaggerated) impact on European thinkers, so much as to show how Arab scholars produced this very narrative for consumption by a (post-)colonial Arab audience. If Arab heritage (turāṯ), comprising civilisational documents ‘said to have been passed down from the Arabs of the past to the Arabs of the present’, is ‘in a sense a time traveller’ (Massad, 2007: 17; see also Gubara, 2012: 335), modern Arab scholars of the classics were the technicians of the time machine. They invited readers to retrospectively identify with Hayy ibn Yaqzān, to displace cultural pride and anxiety onto the text’s Andalusian matrix (Gutas, 1994; Hughes, 2003) and its reception in Europe (Hasanali, 1995: 276–356; see also Conrad, 1996: 275–284). To adapt George F Hourani’s (1956: 40) question about the allegory, ‘What is this book primarily about?’ we might ask: What has been facilitated by making this book about modern Europe, about an ‘Islamic philosophical heritage’, and about how the colonised engendered or anticipated the coloniser’s modernity? What projects and global imaginaries were served in such re-presentations of Hayy ibn Yaqzān?

I examine the social afterlives of Ibn Tufayl’s Hayy ibn Yaqzān through paratexts – that is titles, editorial notes, introductions and commentaries. I argue that the authors of these paratexts insist upon Hayy ibn Yaqzān’s centrality to an Arabo-Islamic tradition in an ambivalent, anxious fashion. According to these paratexts, Hayy ibn Yaqzān is part of a heritage worthy of recovery; however, they locate its value in transcending this identity, in its participation in or
contribution to European ideas or liberal universalism. Ibn Tufayl’s place in an Arabo-Islamic tradition was thus sutured into his imagined importance for Europe. With this ambivalence, Ibn Tufayl emerges as an object of admiration and guidance, through whom the colonised could claim ownership over their colonisers. Modern editors often directed readers to find value in the text as Europe’s predecessor, as prefiguring trends in modern European thought or as having enabled or even caused them. Ibn Tufayl was their ancestral avatar, European thinkers inferior or derivative. Comparisons of Ibn Tufayl to European thinkers facilitated two fantasies against their colonisers: a fantasy of cultural superiority and a fantasy of historical genesis. And yet, the paratexts’ perceived superiority, like their claims about Ibn Tufayl having come up with modern European ideas first, reinscribes the political dominance of the coloniser, with their modernist liberal idioms and a teleology of Eurocentric intellectual development.

However, the editors also imagine a different configuration of Arab and global power. At brief moments where the paratexts exceed their disciplinary sensibilities — recontextualising Ibn Tufayl in terms of world-historical power rather than the life of the author, or approaching Hayy ibn Yaqzăn as object of contemporary critique rather than of antiquarian interest or historical guidance — they go beyond Europe. These moments lay bare how adopting a past can enable innovation (Jenco, 2014), and how refusing the terms upon which the coloniser adopts and reads the colonised’s ‘tradition’ facilitates imagining alternative futures and anti-imperial geographies.

The next section briefly outlines discussions of Ibn Tufayl’s influence and offers a defence of paratexts as sources and sites of political theory. I then study the reinvention of falsafa through Hayy ibn Yaqzăn’s paratexts chronologically, from how three early printings and a popular historical survey situated Ibn Tufayl in relation to Ibn Šinā and Europe, to the comparisons, disciplinary conventions and problems of authorial intent and contextualisation in later editions and studies. The editors’ claims about Ibn Tufayl’s importance for falsafa are pegged, on one hand, to their increasing insistence upon his superiority, precedence or genesis of Europe, and on the other hand, to the alternative worlds they imagine, beyond Europe.

Ibn Tufayl, whose past?

Texts by a number of falsafa were read in Latin Europe since the twelfth century; it is well established that Aquinas, for example, adapted Latinised versions of Ibn Šinā’s and Ibn Rushd’s (Averroës; d. 1198) metaphysics. Hayy ibn Yaqzăn’s rich history of European translations, editions and commentaries is comparatively shorter. Its availability starting in seventeenth-century Europe is well documented and has led to ‘interesting speculation’ (Toomer, 1996: 222) about whether it ‘influenced’ John Locke’s Essay Concerning Human Understanding and European liberalism (Russell, 1994; Attar, 2007; Ben-Zaken, 2011). Some provocatively, if tenuously, assert this ‘influence’ exists ‘without a doubt’ and that Locke’s theories of toleration – and Spinoza’s – were actually formulated by Ibn Tufayl, together
with modern understandings of empiricism, human nature, the individual and
multiculturalism (Attar, 2007: 50–54). A related hypothesis holds that Daniel
Defoe’s *Robinson Crusoe* is inspired by Hayy ibn Yaqzân (see Pastor, 1930).

These theses of precedence, influence or ‘cross-cultural exchange’ have their own
precedent in the *Nahda* (the self-described ‘renaissance’ of the late nineteenth- and
early twentieth-century colonised Near East). Arab scholars in Cairo, Beirut and
Damascus, often with institutional links to their teachers and counterparts in
France, Germany and England, revisited the history of the sciences and humanities
in the Near East, translated European knowledge and studied medieval Arabic
texts, with an eye toward explaining or remedying their perceived inferiority relative
to Europe. Numerous editions of Ibn Tufayl’s text appeared during and after
this period.¹

The text’s European afterlife is thus fraught, not only because Andalusia had
been part of Muslim Spain. Reading Ibn Tufayl’s impact on liberalism would seem
to write Arabo-Islamic thought back into European history, as Europe’s constitu-
tive but disavowed past. It might highlight how Islam has figured in the formation
of early modern European identities (Matar, 1998) or as Europe’s ‘Muslim
Question’ (Norton, 2013) or liberalism’s constitutive outside (Massad, 2015). But
to locate Ibn Tufayl’s value as pre-history to modern European liberal thought, in
whether Europeans appreciated his ideas and whether his ideas can be read as
agreeing with them, pleads for his significance with Europe as zenith and standard.
Although Ibn Tufayl’s concepts and arguments, if decontextualised, can mirror
modern European ideas (e.g. of individualist autonomy), to search for or transpose
(proto-)liberal understandings of individualism and autonomy onto *Hayy ibn
Yaqzân* privileges resonance with the dominant lexicon (Jenco, 2007) and
entrenches Europe as ‘absent model’ (Euben, 2006: 57–58).

I turn to paratexts to provide a genealogy of the reinvention of Ibn Tufayl. The
study of commentaries – one kind of paratext – is common in related fields, like
Aristotle’s multilingual reception (Burnett, 1993), Greek thought in Arabic
(Gutas, 1998) or Confucian interpretation (Makeham, 2003). Although such
sources are peripheral in political theory, theorists are no strangers to them,
when studying an author’s editions and frontispieces (Baumgold, 2008;
Springborg, 1995) or transnational reception histories (Bayly, 2010; Botting and
Kronewitter, 2012).

Modern paratexts, as discursive and political artefacts, can show how historical
texts coded today as ‘non-European’ are entangled with problems of identity and
empire; texts exceed their original matrix, to inhabit other worlds and contexts.
Standing before and after the text, paratexts constellate its meanings and value, by
and for a specific audience. Like a preface, their ‘chief function [is] to ensure that
the text is read properly’ (Genette, 1997: 197): that is, they direct readers toward a
specific reading of the text. They train and discipline readers to produce the
‘proper’ reading, framing the text’s place in history and the present; their selective
emphasis, and what they exclude as ‘unlikely’ or ‘unthinkable’, can imply what it is
to read a text *improperly*. Their descriptions, telegraphic labels and presentation
can emblematisethe ideological commitments that an editor may bring to the text.
Here, paratexts offer a view into the afterlife of an Arabo-Islamic archive, its discursive and material production, how it was reconfigured and why some editors studied Ibn Tufayl.

In sum, by turning to paratexts as political artefacts, this article makes subsidiary interventions about sources. First, it troubles the way that comparative political theory is usually defined in terms of cultural/civilisational foreignness; modern Arab editors who claimed ‘Arabic’ or ‘Islamic’ thought as their tradition had to convert Hayy ibn Yaqzān into their civilisational document while navigating its disciplinary foreignness and transnational history. Second, paratexts index the changing identities and traditions to which thinkers are retroactively made to belong. Finally, against invocations of ‘cross-cultural’ analysis that take their objects of study for granted and neglect asymmetry and power, modern paratexts reflect the geopolitical concerns that guide the construction or reinventions of a ‘tradition’.

How falsafa became an ‘Arabo-Islamic tradition’ in the modern Near East is a question of the production and consumption of today’s ‘non-Western traditions’. Ibn Tufayl and his reception history disrupt these designations (Western/non-Western/Arabo-Islamic). Arab writers canonised him by acting as if he was their past, and Europe’s past. These writers agreed that Ibn Tufayl was germinal for—if not the origin of—European thought. Their remarkable claim is akin to a thesis that Jenco (2014) examines, about ‘Chinese origins of Western knowledge’. Posing native origins for putatively foreign pasts and knowledges, she argues, can make these bodies of thought constitutively transformative; they might discipline our thought, reconstitute existing practices and inspire, incense or chasten. Early twentieth-century Arabic readings of Ibn Tufayl, as a Western-Islamic past, parallel the China-origins thesis and its potential. They also show how origins theses operate differently in contexts marked by power inequalities and colonialism. The Ibn Tufayl-origins thesis reinscribed the contours of European empire and disciplined Arab readers into awe at the monumental. The paratexts’ critical political work lay elsewhere: they carved out space for bracketing Europe, for mapping alternate geographies and for counterintuitively refusing this past.

**Ibn Sīnā and/or Europe (1882—1927)**

Ibn Tufayl begins *Hayy ibn Yaqzān* in response to a request for the essence of Ibn Sīnā’s ‘Eastern’/‘Oriental’ philosophy – the reason that it was sometimes called *The Secrets of Eastern Wisdom*. Ibn Tufayl declares that he will present this philosophy, and after a critical survey of philosophical opinions about revelation and knowledge of God, he offers an allegory about Hayy ibn Yaqzān, Absāl and Salāmān, characters whose names he draws from two of Ibn Sīnā’s allegories.

Hayy ibn Yaqzān, Ibn Tufayl says (1936: 20–30), was either spontaneously generated (alluding to Adam) or was left in an ark by his mother (like Moses). The two origins converge: on an uninhabited island, a gazelle finds Hayy as an infant and raises him (26). Upon her death, he dissects her in order to remove the cause of her immobility. While probing her heart, Hayy determines that her soul
departed (38–45), initiating his contemplation of existence and God (47–118). He learns to scorn corporeality and its passions, until he becomes capable of beholding God by the age of 50. Fearing for his soul if he should die whilst not in this state, Hayy makes every effort to elongate that rapturous ecstasy (119–135). A devout esotericist named Absāl lived on a nearby island and was a friend of its leader, the devout exotericist Salāmān. One day, Absāl leaves his island in pursuit of seclusion, but is shipwrecked on the island where Hayy, who had never met another human, was living. Absāl teaches Hayy language, and Hayy imparts philosophical wisdom to Absāl. They find that Absāl’s religion is a lesser image of the pure truth that Hayy had discovered through contemplation (136–147). The two visit Absāl’s island, in order to educate its inhabitants. Once there, the people flock to Hayy, but he thinks they misuse the tools of logic; as he incessantly preaches at them, their initial awe toward Hayy turns into bitterness that they conceal on account of Hayy’s foreignness and their friendship with Absāl (147–152). Hayy becomes convinced that the majority of people are like irrational animals. He apologises for all he said, affirms the islanders’ teachings and returns with Absāl to his island; the two worship together, until they die (153–155).

The paratexts of three early, Cairene printings of this treatise, from March 1882, June 1882 and 1909, are fairly sparse, but they emphasise Ibn Tufayl’s opening sentences about Ibn Sinā. Each printing was based on the one immediately prior. They share the same title, identifying the text as Ibn Tufayl’s extraction of the essence of Ibn Sinā’s philosophy; they present as matter-of-fact Ibn Tufayl’s claim that he reveals the secrets of Ibn Sinā’s ‘Eastern’ philosophy – a contentious claim at best (Gutas, 1994: 230–234; Idris, 2011). These printings’ paratexts imply that Ibn Tufayl should be read because he invokes Ibn Sinā. They blur the boundaries between the two philosophers, reading Ibn Tufayl as Ibn Sinā (as Ibn Tufayl requests).

An editorial note in the two 1882 printings informs readers of Ibn Sinā’s text by the same title: ‘Ibn Khallikān [d. 1282] mentioned in his biography of Ibn Sinā that this treatise [his *Hayy ibn Yaqzan*] is among his works, and perhaps it is in Persian, and its copyist translated it’ (1882a: 60; 1882b: 41). The March printing repeats that the text contains the ideas of Ibn Sinā; the June printing praises the treatise’s eloquence and wonders. The 1909 printing combines its predecessors’ inclinations. In a postscript, it informs (1909: 78) the reader that what they will have just read is innovative, strange, useful, critical and brilliant. Its title page guides the ‘interested’ reader to Ibn Sinā’s biography (rather than Ibn Tufayl’s) in classical sources; Ibn Sinā’s life stands in for Ibn Tufayl’s, while the modern reader of Ibn Tufayl, it suggests, is or should be interested in Ibn Sinā. The three printings situate Ibn Tufayl in a history of Arabo-Islamic knowledge-production. They single out his brilliance and associate his name with a famous thinker, in the manner Ibn Tufayl’s introduction invites. Their shared insistence on the text’s excellence encourages antiquarian admiration and esteem, not only toward *Hayy ibn Yaqzan*, but toward the tradition that these brief notes enact for the modern reader.

Unlike later editions, these printings make no reference to Europe. The medieval Arabic philosophical tradition, however, was often constructed in ambivalent
relation to Europe and modern Arabs. While readers are implored to feel wonder, it is under the shadow of Europe. In 1905, the journal *al-Muqtatatf* presented Ibn Tufayl in an offhand reference as one of the very select few ‘Arab philosophers’. As Marwa Elshakry (2014) demonstrates, this modernist journal was an organ of knowledge-production and social commentary through which Arab intellectuals navigated European sciences, Islamic knowledges and modern Arab identity. In the final forum section of the June 1905 issue, a letter from Athanāsiyūs Kalīla, a deacon in Damascus and future metropolitan, asked (1905: 491) about ‘The Philosophers of the Arabs and the Westerners [al-Ifranj]’: ‘Who among them are the most famous authors, Arabs especially, and Westerners more generally?’ The journal’s response is striking in its brevity and definitive tone. It only lists seven Arab philosophers: ‘The most famous Arab philosophers from the Mashriq are al-Kindī, al-Fārābī, Ibn Sīnā and al-Ghazālī; and from the Maghrib, they are Ibn Bājja, Ibn Tufayl and Ibn Rushd. As for the Westerners’, it asserts, ‘well, their philosophers are innumerable’. The response names 17 European thinkers, including Hamilton, Hobbes, Hume, Locke, Descartes, Mill and James, whom, it says, are only ‘among the most famous’ (491). It is silent about any disjunctures between the Arab falāsifa’s projects and those of al-Ifranj, let alone about less ‘famous’ falāsifa, what fame metonymises, who assesses it and the civilisational anxieties and aspirations staged by the comparison.

The response draws upon Orientalist premises about a stagnant Orient as opposed to a developing, dynamic Europe. The lists’ comparative lengths and distinct time periods are blatant. European and American philosophers are more than double the number of Arabs. Arab philosophy is quarantined to the medieval, while al-Ifranj stretch into the present. This is a basic Orientalist story emblematised by Ernest Renan (1823–1892): intellectual history ‘in Islam’ dies with Ibn Rushd (d. 1198). It is a story in which the important Muslim philosophers are those who were read by or influenced European philosophy, and who were then said to have paved the way for Europe. The death of philosophy in Islam, in this story, is inextricably linked to Orientalist fantasies about an ‘Islam’ hostile to reason, in which such thinkers had to fight against the tide, seek the patronage of the powerful and conceal their teachings, either to protect themselves or to protect the Muslim masses from philosophical truths that would result in disorder. Ibn Tufayl is narrated in this tradition-as-list, which was never just a list.

*Al-Muqtatatf*’s seven philosophers reappear with five more in Muhammad Lutfī Jumā’s (1886–1953) 300-page popular survey of falsafa, *The History of Islam’s Philosophers in the Mashriq and the Maghrib* (1927). Jumā was an Egyptian liberal political commentator, anti-imperial activist, lawyer, writer and translator (al-Tamāwī, 1993). Alongside his literary works (see Selim, 2013), he translated Machiavelli’s *The Prince*, excerpts about Napoleon, three Egyptian, Persian and Japanese texts as *Eastern Wisdom* (or *Oriental Wisdom*) and Plato’s *Symposium*; and he wrote books about European economic history, Italy’s invasion of Ethiopia (see Erlich, 2002) and early Islam.

*Islam’s Philosophers* devotes a chapter to each of the 12 thinkers. Its discussion of Ibn Tufayl and ‘Islam’s philosophers’ combines the two earlier impulses: the
production of an awe-inspiring canon and an Orientalist valuation of Ibn Tufayl and falsafa through Europe. In a third and otherwise curtailed moment, which I return to in the conclusion, Jum’a imaginatively opens up an alternate vision of East-centric world history, intellectual production and geopolitics that brackets Europe and moves beyond Europe-and-Islam. This moment partially resembles his political tract, Hayât al-sharq (Life of the East/Orient) (Jum’a, 1932), which calls for Eastern nations’ unity against Western imperialism (379) while foregrounding shared Eastern interests and culture (especially but not exclusively the ‘Islamic East’); the book analyses inter-Eastern relations, imperial expansion and colonisers’ tactics, including the ‘instrumental’ and ‘weaponised’ resurrection of peoples’ ancient identities and customs to divide and conquer (246).

Jum’a’s Ibn Tufayl was a metaphysician who, in the modernist language of the individual and society, probed the idea of the individual as ‘a blank slate’. He shows how ‘a person cut off and removed from the affairs of life, untainted by its effects’, and who ‘knows nothing about life and developed his mind in absolute isolation on his own’, came to understand the ‘secrets of nature’ and ‘solved the most difficult theological questions’ (Jum’a, 1927: 98). Ibn Tufayl, he explains (107), actually created Hayy ‘in his own image and in the image of the philosophers who preceded him’. Jum’a’s summary of the allegory (107–111) emphasises Hayy’s scientific discoveries, his use of tools and animals and his attainment of knowledge of God; Jum’a excises Hayy’s meeting with Absâl, his journey to the islanders and his condemnation of the masses. Its value is its contribution to science, theology and a better understanding of philosophers.

If early editions treated Ibn Tufayl as an intellectual dependent of Ibn Sînâ, Jum’a’s Ibn Tufayl surpassed all others. It is evident, Jum’a claims (105), that Ibn Tufayl charted an autonomous project or system (khutta qa‘ima bi-dhātihâ) independent of the thought of everyone else (mustaqilla ‘an afkâr al-jamî‘). Ibn Tufayl’s uniqueness and genius are complemented by being

the first Islamic philosopher to pour his philosophy into a story, and to make his story’s protagonist an isolated individual who creates himself and his thoughts by interacting with nature and with creatures that are lesser than him in rank – inanimates, plants, and animals – until he reaches the point of understanding and union. This fantasy story is to be considered in truth a kind of intellectual/rational beatitude [tūbā ‘aqliyya] that many European [İfranlı] writers and thinkers imitated and the footsteps of which they followed. (Jum’a, 1927: 105)

While Jum’a does not say who these European thinkers are or how they mimicked Ibn Tufayl, he turns (106) to Robinson Crusoe to demonstrate Ibn Tufayl’s originality. The latter story’s ‘child is the person most similar to Robinson Crusoe’, though apparently ‘Islamic and Andalusian’; he is to be further ‘distinguished from that solitary sailor in that he was created in isolation, did not know any human, never met another person, and had no exposure to any material or practical aspects of life’. Jum’a continues, in an allusion to Darwinism, that Ibn Tufayl first articulated the principle of ‘a struggle for survival between humans and animals’.
Islam’s Philosophers establishes the value of each thinker independently and reinforces the impression of a conversation among them. But for Jum’a, Ibn Tufayl’s importance for the present is mediated by Europe, through the history of its alleged copies, its differences from popular texts like Robinson Crusoe and its alleged anticipation of scientific principles current in the twentieth century. The book’s introduction is haunted by Europe from the start; Jum’a begins by addressing the dead Islamic philosophers, calling them forth into the present: ‘Come forward, wise gentlemen!’ He invites them out of the ‘cave of the past’ and a ‘world of silence and quiet’ to the present, to strike the Arab masses with the foreignness of their own past:

The majority of the people of this age have not had the honor of knowing who you are, and your names, titles, and ancestry shall fall on their ears like a new, foreign thing, and they shall argue over the truth of your existence and the value of your thought. They shall deny that your opinions were yours, opinions through which you brightened the dark nights of your ages, in their conceptions, transformations, education, and liberation. Some will pass by you, surprised at who these ancient philosophers are, who lived, contemplated, and explained the universe, who diagnosed events before Kant, Nietzsche, Schopenhauer, Spencer, Stuart Mill, Auguste Comte, and Renan. (Jum’a, 1927: iii)6

These thinkers prefigure European philosophers – and made them possible:

It will not occur to the minds of these surprised readers that were it not for you, O dear philosophers! from al-Kindī to Ibn Rushd, it would not have been possible for any modern European philosopher to appear in the world of existence; and that it was you who preserved that divine flame that Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle birthed in the caves of the distant past, you who added fire to the flame until you passed it on, brightly lit and ablaze, to Europe’s modern philosophers, and you were to that holy flame gracious caretakers. (Jum’a, 1927: iv)

Jum’a, like al-Muqtataf’s response to the reader, implicitly denies the existence of philosophy after Ibn Rushd ‘in Islam’. The role Jum’a attributes to the falāṣīfa, as ‘caretakers’ or ‘guardians’ of Greek philosophy until it becomes European, relegates centuries of non-European thought to the status of a transit stop. Like al-Muqtataf, he writes Arabic and Islam into the history of Europe, but as a pre-history and middleman, a temporary location whose value is measured by its contribution to Europe; here, European philosophy and history is the sole site of validation. The presumption that the ‘flame’ of philosophy can be held by one group at a time is central to this discourse. By imagining a flame that was passed on, philosophy in Europe signals the end and impossibility of philosophy elsewhere. It homogenises ‘modern European philosophers’, treating Europe as a singular whole, just as it does with Arabo-Islamic philosophy, reducing the thinkers to a single shared project completed in modern Europe.
But Jum’a troubles the Renanian thesis in three ways. First, he presents ‘al-Kindī-to-Ibn-Rushd’ as the forgotten past of his Arab readers’ present, not only of European philosophy. The philosophers cannot be ‘alien’ or ‘foreign’ per se to modern ordinary Arabs, whose surprise he imagines. Jum’a transforms the historical difference of an (alien or unknown) past into a problem of cultural alienation or the present’s amnesia about its own past. He claims these thinkers for contemporary Arab Muslims, as Islam’s philosophers.

Second, Jum’a constructs an idyllic setting out of Ibn Tufayl’s Andalusian context: the philosophers of that age – Ibn Bājja, Ibn Tufayl, Ibn Rushd and Ibn Khaldūn – were driven by a thirst for knowledge against various difficulties. The demise of the Muslim state in Andalusia was the demise of Muslim philosophy as a whole; philosophy did not reappear in any of Islam’s kingdoms until the Nahda. Thus, in Jum’a’s Islam, philosophy grew with religion; when religious faith weakened, so did the intellectual inquiry that faith had produced. ‘Islam’, he proclaims unlike all other religions, had nourished philosophy, strengthening and supporting it. Mr. Renan in some of his writings makes this remarkable observation, namely the decline of philosophy in Europe whenever religion’s power increased, and the revival [intīṣāḥ] of philosophy after that following the overturn [riḍahwur] of religious convictions in Europe. (Jum’a, 1927: xvi)

In fact, Jum’a argues (1927: xvi–xvii), it was European philosophy that did not ‘see the light of day’ until the seventeenth century and only after the battle between science and religion in Christian Europe. Jum’a marks out the parochialism of Renan and ‘secular’ European discourses on religion, in order to claim a different Islamic exceptionalism, to dismiss Renan’s thesis about the Near East and to surpass what he calls the stagnation of European philosophy after Nietzsche, Schopenhauer and Bergson. Five years later, he would further argue (1932: 369) that Renan and other Orientalists function, ‘when necessary, as tools of European imperialism’: their Orientalism is ‘a weapon for fighting the East and Islam’.

Third, Jum’a’s construction of the globe also breaks with the Renanian narrative. He offers a version of his Easternism. Islam’s Philosophers writes a bond of solidarity and resonance between the Eastern hemisphere’s two corners. He contrasts the Islamic renaissance of the ninth and tenth centuries with Europe’s ‘ignorance and barbarism [al-jahl wa-l-wahshiyya]’ during ‘The Dark Ages’ (in English), to think beyond Europe:

The renaissance of Islam, however, was not confined to those nations that had embraced this religion, but was all-encompassing of the entire East. It is as though the awakening shook the corners of this part of the globe, and so it arose from the slumber that numerous generations had experienced. It began to shake off the dust of previous generations’ indolence. The Persians, Turks, Mongols, and Indians rose up, and even the people of China and of Japan, for they rushed toward humanistic reform during the ‘Abbāsid era [750–1258 AD] or shortly thereafter. The movement of Islam was like the tremors of an earthquake, going through particular areas and moving
within bounded arenas. Historians of the Chinese humanities continue to mention the renaissance of their master poets during the ninth- and tenth-centuries AD, during the reign of their emperor the “Son of Heaven.” Tang. The Japanese busied themselves during that age as well, with reforming the Japanese language and with organizing the social arts, and artistic genius appeared among them; some of them were poets, humanists, painters, and sculptors. (Jum’a, 1927: xiii)

Jum’a concludes, ‘In this way, it did not cease to be the case that the two Easts, the Near and the Far, were influenced by the renaissance movements that appeared in either, each having an echo in the other’. He implies an alternative future based on this other past of Islamic philosophy: ‘And what was true for the ninth century AD, is also true for the renaissance of the nineteenth century in the two Easts, Near and Far’ (1927: xiii).

Jum’a’s radically East-centric frame of world history is not entirely ungrounded in the text; the allegory itself is set on an island Ibn Tufayl imagines (1936: 20) not in the Mashriq or Maghrib, but off the coast of India. Jum’a pushes this geography further. He brackets Europe, imagining a future in which the coloniser is peripheral for intellectual movements. His Easternist contemporaries championed pan-Islamism and/or pan-Arabism, but he expands ‘the East’ to include China, Japan and the Asian continent. Jum’a’s vision carves out space for deimperial pan-Asian world histories and practices – akin to but broader than what Chen (2010) studies as ‘Asia as Method’. By imagining the East as an interconnected world and a frame already beyond Europe, Jum’a takes the geography of Orientalism’s the Orient and turns it back against Europe. Islam’s philosophers become the reservoir of a forgotten past that bypasses Europe, extends to the Far East and calls forth new renaissances without and against European empire.

His Life of the East (1932), however, displaces this vision with a different Easternism. Jum’a bemoans Japan’s indifference (373–375) and China’s cunning, hostility and opportunism (375–376) toward Muslims. He takes inspiration from European deference to Japan’s newfound power, calling for an ‘Eastern league of nations’ to unite, against European imperialism, and aim at equality with the West (379). The logics of Realpolitik and inter-governmental relations curtail the image of Easternist renaissances and cultural reverberations.

**Tardiness and/or precedence (1931–1933)**

The inter-Eastern comparisons and affiliations that Jum’a invites fall out of the other afterlives of Hayy ibn Yaqzân. Later editions and studies extend ambivalence about the text’s status for Arabic and for Europe; the basic comparisons remained, as with Jum’a’s discussion of Robinson Crusoe, to Europe. The Orientalist scholar Léon Gauthier published his first and second editions of Hayy ibn Yaqzân in 1900 and 1936, and a study in 1909. Between Gauthier’s editions, a scholarly Arab edition appeared in Damascus, and articles on Ibn Tufayl in the leading humanistic journals. The next decade saw one of the first Arabic book-length
scholarly studies devoted to Ibn Tufayl. Anxieties about European empire and knowledge-production frame these works, as we see below.

In 1931, the Beirut-based journal *al-Machriq*, run by philologist and theologian Louis Cheikho (1859–1927) out of the Université Saint-Joseph in Beirut, ran a three-part article on Ibn Tufayl. Two years later, the recently established Cairo literary review *al-Risāla* published a short commentary. The two articles mediate the allegory’s significance by reference to *Robinson Crusoe*. The first, by Ferdinand Tawtal [Taoutel] al-Yasu’ī (1887–1977), begins (1931: 42–43) with Europe: ‘Europeans [al-Ifranj] have exerted a lot of effort on the story of Hayy ibn Yaqzan, beating us in searching for that author and publishing him, translating him into their various languages, and explaining him’. *Hayy ibn Yaqzan*, he explains, is the best synopsis of Islam’s philosophers and their treatment of faith versus reason and religion versus philosophy, but Europeans, not Arabs, study it. Tawtal notes Pococke’s and Gauthier’s editions, as well as Latin, Dutch, German, English, Spanish and French translations and printings. The most recent European edition of this ‘entertaining book’ that has been ‘lauded by Europeans’, he announces, is by AS Fulton, and is part of a ‘beautiful collection’.

Fulton’s 1929 edition revises Simon Ockley’s (1708/1711) translation. In his introduction, this Keeper of Oriental Books and Manuscripts at the British Museum is openly hostile toward Arabs and Islam. Arabic philosophy, he contends (1929: 18), ‘means, of course, nothing indigenous to Arabia, but little more than Greek philosophy in an Arab dress’. Even so, ‘men of Arab blood’ neither made nor put on these garments, having ‘had very little to do with the production of these translations’ or with intellectual production in Islam – which only came down to the (impossible) task of harmonising the Qur’an and Greek philosophy by explaining away the Qur’an’s ‘lurid eschatology’, ‘anthropomorphic crudities’ and ‘hearty outbursts’ (19–20, 28). Fulton’s overwrought dismissal comes with flourish: ‘The holy water of Zemzem had too much “body” in it to please the palates of these Muslim philosophers who had drunk deep at the more sublimated springs of pagan thought’ (27–28). Tropes about Islamic hostility to philosophy explain the story: in Fulton’s creative reading (32), Ibn Tufayl and Hayy (as his autobiographical avatar) were in a precarious position, each only being saved from the Oriental masses’ ‘herd instinct for heresy hunting’ by the protection of a strong ruler and by the ‘Oriental sense of hospitality’ innate to Hayy’s islanders and Ibn Tufayl’s neighbors. Fulton’s Ibn Tufayl wrote under the threat of Oriental ignorance, Islamic persecution and ‘ruthless theology’ (7).

Tawtal recasts (1931: 43) Fulton’s dismissal of ‘Greek philosophy in Arab dress’ as a ‘detailed introduction’ to Ibn Tufayl’s life and ‘summary of the history of Arabic philosophy’. Whether he agreed with Fulton’s assessment or sought to neutralise it with generosity, European scholarship imposes itself as an always more advanced standard to be imitated.

Tawtal frames the difference between Arab silence and European interest in the text as a race, in which, given European interest, the text ought to be canonical in Arab intellectual history. His article, he hopes, might pave the way for an edition in the Near East. In the last three centuries, Europeans ‘have fallen madly in love.
with the story of Hayy ibn Yaqzân’, reading, internalising and imitating it (1931: 42). This privilege, he writes, is evident when juxtaposing Hayy to ‘similar’ works,

like the story of Robinson Crusoe; the writings of Jean-Jacques Rousseau on the origins of man in isolation from social life, and the development of intellectual life through gradual discoveries about the conditions of the universe; and Descartes’ claims about the sequence of demonstration and deducing conclusions out of premises. (Tawtal, 1931: 42–43)

One must conclude that the European authors ‘looked through Ibn Tufayl’s book, either in its Arabic form or in one of its translations, and took him as their guide’.

But Tawtal ushers Ibn Tufayl into his present through theological disagreements with his doctrines, presenting (1931: 192–195) four criticisms. Most importantly, he then offers a fifth criticism, noting Ibn Tufayl’s consistent elitism and obscurantism, especially apparent in his introduction and in passages about spiritual life. When Tawtal takes Ibn Tufayl to task because these discussions are ‘as though he withholds [alt. ‘begrudges’] the capacity for understanding it [spiritual life] from the majority of readers [ka-anna-hu yadanmu bi-fahmihi ā ‘ammat al-qurrā’], Tawtal sides against Ibn Tufayl with an engaged readership, and perhaps against Hayy with the allegory’s islanders (whom Jum’a ignores and whom Fulton describes as hospitality-wired heresy-hunters). Such moments of critique bring the past into the present not as a monumental canon to be admired or followed, but as a set of political claims and dispositions to be accepted or overcome. At this moment, Tawtal refuses the anti-egalitarian text because of its implications about the people, for the present.⁸

Like Jum’a’s vanishing alternative geography, Tawtal’s critique is curtailed. He drops his critical engagement to laud Ibn Tufayl’s importance, returning to Europe. He concludes (1931: 195) by reaffirming ‘what Europeans say’: Ibn Tufayl’s is the best summary of Arabic philosophy and is at the forefront of Arabic stories.

Declarations about the text’s significance for Europe and Robinson Crusoe appeared two years later in al-Risāla. The Tartus-based author, Ahmad al-Mahmūd, implores (1933: 16–19) readers to mention Ibn Tufayl whenever Robinson Crusoe comes up, calling it his right by ‘virtue of precedence [jadl al-asbaqiyya]. Al-Mahmūd borrows (18–19) sentences from Tawtal’s article, extracting Tawtal’s summary of his four theological criticisms (192) and duplicating his concluding sentence (195) that Europeans are right to value the text. But if Tawtal affirmed Ibn Tufayl’s influence on European philosophy and fiction as the clearest indication of his importance, al-Mahmūd presents Ibn Tufayl as more important because he accomplished equivalent literary feats before ‘Defoe and his ilk among European storytellers’. While for Tawtal Ibn Tufayl’s obscurities indicated unacceptable condescension, al-Mahmūd praises Ibn Tufayl’s accessible, easy, beautiful and attractive text, for it can only be described as important for
Islamic philosophy – a return to the monumental and an erasure of Tawtal’s egalitarian critique.

**Consolations and/or aspirations (1935–1947)**

Ibn Tufayl’s significance was mediated by claims about his relationship to European texts like *Robinson Crusoe*. These comparisons animate the first Arab-produced scholarly edition of *Hayy ibn Yaqzān*, prepared by Jamîl Salîbā (1902–1976) and Kâmil ‘Ayyâd (1901–1986) in 1935, and they also frame ‘Umar Farrûkh’s (1906–1987) monograph a decade later. When these renowned scholars quibbled over approach and authorial context, this was, as we’ll see, also a disagreement about the status, history and future of the Near East.

Salîbā was a Syrian scholar of Arabic historical and philosophical inquiry. He was trained in Paris, wrote extensively on Ibn Sinā, education, the history of Arab thought and science, and French thought and produced a two-volume Arabic-English-French-Latin *Philosophical Lexicon*. His writings reflect his concern with the Arab contribution to ‘world civilisation’ and its place in Arab self-understandings. His co-editor, ‘Ayyâd, wrote on Ibn Khaldûn, the history of philosophy, the lives of Orientalists, Japan and social and political issues. He was born in Libya, emigrated during the 1911 Italian invasion, studied in Berlin, then resided in Damascus.

Salîbā and ‘Ayyâd cast Ibn Tufayl as a singular contributor to humanity. They refuse (1935: xxv–xxvi; xvi, xxiv, xxx–xxxii) the two usual comparisons, one being to Ibn Sinā. If early printings fuse Ibn Sinā and Ibn Tufayl, Salîbā and ‘Ayyâd *distinguish* them to draw connections with other thinkers and to move Ibn Tufayl outside Ibn Sinā’s shadow. The other comparison they refuse is to *Robinson Crusoe*, because rather than being linked generically, thematically or historically, *Hayy ibn Yaqzān* is superior. ‘We must also mention’, they conclude their introduction,

> the difference between the character of Hayy ibn Yaqzān and the famous character of Robinson Crusoe, for many previous writers have pointed to the great similarity between the two characters and have wanted to find a relationship of borrowing or imitation of the latter from the former. (Ibn Tufayl, 1935: xxxii)

They enumerate (xxxii–xxxiii) the differences, translating Hayy in the language of individualist modernism and highlighting his autonomy, independence, lifelong autodidactism and higher understanding of the cosmos. While the two above-mentioned articles consider *Hayy ibn Yaqzān* important either because it ‘influenced’ or ‘preceded’ European classics, Salîbā and ‘Ayyâd conclude that Ibn Tufayl’s allegory is the most philosophically *superior* story. They assess the text’s virtues by the standards of modernist intellectual history and literary criticism – realism, precision, practicality, accessibility and organisation:

> Just as Ibn Tufayl’s story surpasses [tamtâz] de Foe’s [sic] story from a philosophical angle, it also surpasses other stories of Eastern philosophy in its proximity to truth and reality and natural description, its precise details about practical life, and never
mind its elegant style, ease of expression, and that it is well-organized (Ibn Tufayl, 1935: xxxiii).

Ibn Tufayl’s superiority signals an Arab contribution to humanity: ‘With these virtues, it is to be considered without a doubt at the forefront of Arab literary works that deserve immortality in the history of human thought’. This monumentalisation appears against the two comparisons through which Hayy ibn Yaqzân had been made visible: Ibn Sînâ and Robinson Crusoe.

When Robinson Crusoe reappears in the final chapter of Farrûkh’s (1946a) short monograph on Ibn Tufayl, Defoe is only the sixth European writer whom Farrûkh claims was influenced by Ibn Tufayl. This was one of Farrûkh’s many books on historical Arab thinkers (e.g. Ibn al-Muqaffâ’, al-Fârâbî, Ibn Sînâ, Ibn Bûjja, the Ikhwân al-Šafâ’, Ibn Hazm and Ibn Khaldûn), with others on contemporary politics, histories of Arab thought, pre-Islamic literature and Greek philosophy. Farrûkh grew up in Beirut, studied at the American University of Beirut, then in Germany; he wrote this book while in Beirut, years before moving to Damascus.

Unlike Šâlîbâ and ‘Ayyâd, who use contrasts to demonstrate originality and superiority, Farrûkh highlights similarity because he thinks it implies influence. Like Jum’a, and like Šâlîbâ and ‘Ayyâd, he establishes (40–41) Ibn Tufayl’s independence in an Arabo-Islamic tradition by distinguishing him from Ibn Sînâ and from the philosophers Ibn al-‘Arabi and Hunayn ibn Ishâq. All similarities between their texts, he writes, end with their characters’ shared names. But for Europe, Farrûkh writes (97), ‘The influence of Risâlat Hayy ibn Yaqzân appears prominently in the story of Robinson Crusoe’, and scholars agree that the former is

“a philosophical type of Robinson’s story”. Defoe had not passed away [lam yutawaffa] until the story of Hayy ibn Yaqzân was copied into Latin, English, Dutch, German, and had spread greatly. It is unthinkable [fa-lâ yûqal] that Defoe wrote a book that is similar to Hayy ibn Yaqzân to this degree without having known about it (Farrûkh, 1946a: 97).

Farrûkh adduces (94–98) other traces of Hayy ibn Yaqzân in Europe, as early as Albertus Magnus and Thomas Aquinas, to editions, translations and stories seemingly based on it. He singles out Spinoza and Rousseau as two ‘Tufaylian’ philosophers. The origin of Spinoza’s secularism, he writes (96–97), is Islamic philosophy: Spinoza is closer than Descartes to ‘Jewish-Islamic philosophy – a philosophy which is actually Islamic at its foundation. It would appear that the revolution in Spinoza’s soul was due to the influence of Ibn Tufayl in the first degree’. Some scholars speculated that Spinoza translated Ibn Tufayl into Dutch, which makes it ‘unsurprising that Spinoza would say that the Holy Book itself must be made to submit to reason, or to see him respond harshly to those who tried to make reason subordinate in rank to religious tradition’. Meanwhile, Rousseau’s Emile asserts that man is good by nature and called for a return to nature, away from the chains of society – ‘just as Ibn Tufayl did, six centuries prior’.

Farrûkh treats Ibn Tufayl as the progenitor of European philosophy. While Šâlîbâ and ‘Ayyâd’s bibliography only lists various European editions, studies
and translations, Farrūkh’s final chapter – ‘Ibn Tufayl’s Standing and His Influence in the East and West’ – gives a comprehensive narrative, beginning with Pococke (92). Here, the colonised intellectual claims antecedence and power over the colonisers’ intellectual production, as their haunting past: ‘Islamic philosophy’, he writes (91–92), ‘controlled the European mind’ for ‘a few hundred years without interruption’. Ibn Tufayl alone guided European thought, which demonstrates Islamic philosophy’s relevance for ‘human thought’.

Whether by emphasising Ibn Tufayl’s superiority or germinal status over Europe, these Arab editors and commentators elevate Ibn Tufayl by reference to Europe. Farrūkh (92) agrees with Salībā and ‘Ayyād that the treatise ‘left a huge influence on the history of human thought’, which makes Ibn Tufayl ‘one of the great philosophers of the Middle Ages’. But while the three scholars extolled the history of falsafa, their disagreement about methods and what counts as Ibn Tufayl’s context indicates a deeper disagreement about anatomies of power.

Salībā and ‘Ayyād situate (xxvi) Hayy in a lineage of thinkers who contemplate ‘natural development’ and ‘social order’. While Farrūkh also deploys (1946a: 77–78) the language of ‘the individual and society’ (following De Boer, 1903: 182–183), as had Jum’a (1927: 98), they approach (1935: xxvii) Ibn Tufayl’s allegory as a theory of the natural development of the individual and the unadulterated/pure (al-insān al-mahād) human being ‘stripped of social influences [mujarrad ‘an ta’āthīr al-ijtimā’]’. He is a blank slate: an everyman, not a prophet-philosopher superhuman. Salāmān’s island becomes the ideal type of ‘a human association with traditions and inherited habits’, a sociological experiment for ‘the relationship of the individual to a society’. The literary and philosophical purpose of Hayy, they explain (xiii), is that he reached his level of knowledge ‘without having been taught the sciences by anyone, for he was educated in a natural way [tarabbā tarbiyatan tabīyyatan]’.

Salībā and ‘Ayyād read Ibn Tufayl through modernist liberalism. Like Fulton, they use Ibn Tufayl’s own life as an allegory for the relationship of religion and philosophy, turning Hayy ibn Yaqzān into Ibn Tufayl’s autobiography. They reassure (1935: v) the reader that because of Ibn Tufayl’s close friendship with the Almohad caliph Abū Yaqūb, he was well treated by the ruler – who ‘loved him as much as he did because he enjoyed [listening to] Ibn Tufayl’s philosophical tales in his hours of rest’, they imagine. They call both principled philosophers:

Perhaps the union of these two men is the best indication of the union between wisdom and sharīa: the king represents sharīa while Ibn Tufayl represents wisdom, and each one of the two had felt that the other completed him (Ibn Tufayl, 1935: v).

Salībā and ‘Ayyād use these very same terms to describe Hayy’s relationship to Absāl; both indicate the harmony of religion and philosophy. The direct correspondence among author, character and concept reappears in their simplification:

Hayy ibn Yaqzān’s failure in his attempt [to convert islanders] indicates the inability of the masses to comprehend the objectives of philosophy, and Hayy ibn Yaqzān’s
agreement with Absāl indicates that philosophy is in agreement with religion. As for Absāl’s disagreement with Salāmān, it is akin to the disagreement between esotericists and exotericists. (Ibn Tufayl, 1935: xvi)

The two editors erase Hayy’s (super)natural superiority, making the allegory safe and applicable to the ordinary. They erase his elite status and abnormality:

*it is unlikely* [min al-mustab‘ad] that Ibn Tufayl intended from the first half of the story to say that a single, isolated individual can attain what Hayy attained without the aid of a group; indeed, his aim was to represent human development without needing divine revelation. (Ibn Tufayl, 1935: xxxi–xxxii)

With this normalisation of Hayy, Salībā and ‘Ayyād bracket the people whom Ibn Tufayl actually constructs as *normal* and ordinary, the islanders (Idris, 2011). When they consider Hayy and Absāl’s journey to Salāmān’s island, Salībā and ‘Ayyād adapt the Renanian fantasy of Islam’s threatened philosophers veiling their critiques of religion:

As for the second half of the story, in which Ibn Tufayl describes Hayy ibn Yaqzān’s journey to the nearby island and his residence among its inhabitants, it is nothing but a means of concealed social critique [wasila li-l-naqd al-ijtimā‘i min taraf khafiyy]. Ibn Tufayl wanted by this to dissect the social conditions of his age [tashrīh ahwāl ‘asri-hi al-ijtimā‘iyya], and to expose the corruption of regimes [bayān fasād al-anzima], the decay of morals [inhiṭāt al-akhlaq], and the disappearance of religious principles [tafassukh al-aqā‘id al-diniyya]. (Ibn Tufayl, 1935: xxxii)

In their creative reading, it is perhaps Salībā and ‘Ayyād who veil their critiques. Ibn Tufayl does not refer to regime corruption, moral decay or the withdrawal of religion; he consistently casts (1936: 136–137, 149–152) the islanders as pious, honest and the best among ordinary people, ultimately limited by nature and rank. In this curtailed moment, Salībā and ‘Ayyād bring Ibn Tufayl to their Near Eastern present, transposing the problems of the modern (post-)colonial state and corrupt regimes onto his context. On the one hand, if the problems are shared with Ibn Tufayl’s age, then – with Renan – they are perennial and immutable. On the other hand, the editors harness this ‘classical’ text, out of which they level a critique, against the present.

They rely on European scholarship, Farrūkh mocks Salībā and ‘Ayyād, but poorly. ‘Although the field of philosophy is far from comedy’, he writes (1946a: 8), ‘let me amuse you with the following observation’: the two editors wrote the Orientalist Friedrich Uberweg’s name as ‘Fredrich Ulerueg’, having, Farrūkh surmises, misheard it or misread it in a footnote, so it is uncertain that they laid eyes on the books they list.10 Arab scholarship, he complains, has not progressed and its authors behave like they are from a previous century (8–9). The backdrop of this frustration is that Farrūkh (6) was unable to obtain Gauthier’s (1909) study (but consulted Gauthier’s 1936 edition). He describes (6–8) how his scholarship suffers because of the miserable
condition of Beirut’s libraries for philosophy. Given these constraints, he declares – in accord with Salībā and ‘Ayyād’s mode of inquiry, against their momentary critique – ‘Our efforts today must be confined and must come together toward analyzing the opinions of Islam’s philosophers in the first place. As for our own philosophical production, it must be deferred’.

If Salībā and ‘Ayyād only momentarily critique the present, Farrūkh concurs that one must study the past prior to making present advances, because historical knowledge recasts the present.11 When he considers (5) the ‘truthful image’ of Ibn Tufayl’s context, it is ‘an age full of political and social anarchy [fawḍa]’. Nonetheless, he continues, philosophy rose to majesty, unburdened and uninfluenced by its surroundings; neither ignorant masses nor religious opposition could stop it. Farrūkh implies that since philosophy rises above context, it is panacea for his present, with its own political and social turmoil. Europe had overcome its turmoil through falsafa – and Arabs might too.

While Salībā and ‘Ayyād recontextualise Hayy ibn Yaẓzān in terms of Ibn Tufayl’s biography, Farrūkh’s unconventionally broad context for a text foregrounds global politics. He paints (1946a: 13–27) a weak Maghrib, with small, unstable states, then discusses the Crusades, France, England, the Papal struggles, the Norman conquest of Sicily and the Byzantine Empire. Farrūkh does not say why he situates Ibn Tufayl in these contexts. Perhaps the expanded, multiple contexts mirror Ibn Tufayl’s reception in these regions while anticipating colonialism in the Near East by these powers. He indirectly invites readers to understand Ibn Tufayl in world-historical terms that shape the geopolitics of his present. Indeed, his anti-colonial treatise, Nahwā tānwūn al-‘Arabi or Toward Arab Cooperation (Farrūkh, 1946b), likewise reframes (8–10) Arab history within a perennial world-historical battle between West and East, Europe and Afro-Asia. While European colonisers revive Phoenician, Pharaonic and other ancient identities, using local movements to divide and conquer (21–22), Farrūkh appeals (10–30) to the commonalities among Arabs, from intellectual history to the imagined geological filiation of the Sahara’s dunes crawling to the coasts of Palestine, Lebanon, and Syria.

Like Salībā and ‘Ayyād, he diagnoses the present through Ibn Tufayl’s place in history, as a forgotten past that had created Europe; both studies read Ibn Tufayl’s context through their own, either transposing the present to critique it or demonstrating its geographic and historical entanglements with European power, then as now. But Salībā’s March 1947 review of Farrūkh’s book refuses its recontextualisation in favour of disciplinary conventions that divorce past from present, Europe from Islam.12 Salībā reciprocates (156–158) Farrūkh’s negative tone: the ‘primary deficiency is Farrūkh’s hastiness in making unqualified proclamations, and his non-adherence to the historical method’. He proclaims with scandalised disciplinary authority, ‘intellectual historians are satisfied... with the immediate causes and events that impacted the man’s philosophy. But talking about events that have no relationship to him, they would consider irrelevant to the topic’. Farrūkh’s discussions of ‘England, France, the Normans in Sicily, the Byzantine Empire’, and others contribute nothing, he argues, to understanding Ibn Tufayl. This disagreement about context was not merely methodological (authorial intent vs. global/world
history). It was about why one studies the past, whose past it is, and its relationships to the present and an imagined future: either philosophy in spite of and against global empires and political disorder, or critiques of (perennial) corruption.

**Thinking past the text**

Jum’a, Tawtal, Salībā, ‘Ayyād and Farrūkh navigated how Europeans studied or borrowed from Ibn Tufayl. Progress, they imagined, required citing European empire, reciting a text celebrated by European translators, scholars and storytellers. They imagined a past that might surpass Orientalists and lead to future knowledge, power and unity. The histories in these paratexts, and the histories Hayy ibn Yaqzān was made to narrate, are about the Arabo-Islamic philosopher who made Europe possible, through whom the Near East might surpass the coloniser it imagines it engendered. To extend Jenco’s (2014) insights about the China-origins thesis to a different political context, falsafa was posed as the past of Arabs and Europeans, or an Arabo-Islamic past that Europe had appropriated, but disavowed. But what some Arab scholars found ‘unthinkable’ and ‘unlikely’ – that Ibn Tufayl was not the ‘source’ of various European texts and modernity (Farrūkh), that Hayy ibn Yaqzān was not of practical use for or about the everyman (Salībā/‘Ayyād) – are, of course, both thinkable and likely. These denials turned to a past, as their own, to find comfort and inspiration. In their narrative, European empires that would dominate the Near East imitated Ibn Tufayl’s text. The colonised intellectuals read Ibn Tufayl to catch up with what they thought he, their past, had made possible for others, as their past as well. This was a monumental narrative for replicating greatness, dissatisfied with its weakness.

Arab scholars refashioned this ‘Arabo-Islamic’ tradition as their own past. When they adopted falsafa as their own past, their unequal power relative to Europe underwrote their study. Indeed, the adoption of a past as one’s own is not outside power. When Orientalists took Ibn Tufayl as their past or ascribed him to stagnant Arabo-Islamic tradition, it was partly an expression of power. When Arab scholars of Ibn Tufayl imagined continuity between their past and their colonisers’ past, they found promise beyond their subjection. When coloniser and colonised imagined sharing a past in Ibn Tufayl, this may have unsettled and transformed both, but the asymmetry in power remained and reinscribed the contents and contours of Orientalist and liberal fantasies.

On the other hand, each paratext pushes beyond Europe and beyond disciplined awe: Jum’a’s geography turns East, Tawtal’s criticism of Ibn Tufayl demands equality, Salībā and ‘Ayyād’s regard present-day corrupt states, colonies and metropoles and Farrūkh’s recontextualisation re-reads knowledge through world-historical power politics. These moments, although curtailed, bring the allegory into the authors’ presents, against these presents. As interpretive techniques rather than principles, these moments are not exhausted by these scholars’ ideological and disciplinary programs. They invite political theorists to approach these sources and histories for critiques of the present and its normative ideals, for their reimaginings of its formations and entanglements, with and beyond Europe.
At these curtailed moments, the past is a problem of power in the present – and a source of anti-disciplinary inspiration.

Acknowledgements
For comments, challenges and suggestions, I am grateful to TH Barrett, Fahad Bishara, Willy Deringer, John Dunn, Angela Giordani, Wael Hallaq, Nick Harris, Humeira Iqtidar, Uday Mehta, Dan-el Padilla Peralta, Jennifer Rubenstein, Elias Saba, Sanjay Seth, Suman Seth, Rebecca Woods, participants at the ‘New Histories of Political Thought’ conference held at the London School of Economics and the journal’s anonymous reviewers. I am especially indebted to Leigh Jenco for helpful comments on multiple drafts. I am also grateful to the Society of Fellows in the Humanities at Columbia University for helping me acquire rare editions of this text.

Declaration of conflicting interests
The author declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Funding
The author received no financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Notes
1. For a bibliography of editions and studies, see Conrad (1996: 271–275).
2. I do not mean that Ibn Tufayl should not be studied (he should be) or that theorists working on non-European thought have an added burden of contextualism (they do not). Such texts can be approached textually (e.g. Idris, 2011). I am aware that demands for context are often weaponised against theorists who study non-European thought. Indeed, what I mean is that why we read certain texts and on what terms is a political question about the presence of the past. Modern Arab editors of falsafa, like theorists today, attempted to make these historical texts ‘relevant’ to their past and colonial present; their writings are nodes and sites of political theory, not only sources for intellectual history.
3. See Humeira Iqtidar in this special issue.
4. I adapt the language of monumental, antiquarian and critical history from Nietzsche (1980).
5. These additional thinkers are Ibn Khaldūn, the Ikhwān al-Ṣafā’, Ibn al-Haytham, Ibn al-‘Arabī and Ibn Miskawayh.
6. The preface to Jumā (1927) is paginated with abjad numerals (where Arabic letters represent numbers) in sequential value. To avoid confusion, I’ve translated abjad into the corresponding roman numerals. This is also the case for the pagination of the editors’ front matter and introduction to Ibn Tufayl (1935), the first printing of Ṣalībā and ‘Ayyād’s scholarly edition.
7. The ’Abbāsid dynasty established a Muslim caliphate. It is often understood as a ‘golden age’ of literature, science and the arts, with an emphasis on the eighth to tenth centuries.
8. This should be distinguished from previous Anglophone editions, which disagreed with Ibn Tufayl because of his text’s ostensibly Arab or Muslim identity or agreed in spite of its ‘Mahometanism’ (Ashwell, 1686: xviii–xii; Keith, 1674: i–iv; Ockley, 1708: viii–ix, 168–188).
9. Salībī and ‘Ayyād used a Damascus manuscript as their edition’s new authority. I consulted the first (1935), second (1939), and fifth printings (1962). Later printings included typographical and bibliographic corrections and updates. They list (1935: xxxvii) Jumā (1927) as one of two Arabic sources, but not in later printings (1939: 12; 1962: 6).
11. But Farrūkh nonetheless reads (6) Ibn Tufayl’s absence from classical Arabic histories as grave ‘mistakes’.
12. Salībī complains (156–158) that Farrūkh had not taken account of Gauthier and Asín Palacios (which Farrūkh says), and his general claims are ‘not too different’ from well-established historical facts.

References


al-Mahm„d A (1933) Hayy ibn Yaqz„n. al-Ris„la 16: 16–9.


**References:**


Ibn Tufayl (1882a) Ris„lat Hayy ibn Yaqz„n f„l-asr„r al-hikma al-mashriqiyya. Cairo: Matba‘at Idar„t al-Watan.

Ibn Tufayl (1882b) Ris„lat Hayy ibn Yaqz„n f„l-asr„r al-hikma al-mashriqiyya. Cairo: Matba‘at W„d„ al-N„l.


al-Mahm„d A (1933) Hayy ibn Yaqz„n. al-Ris„la 16: 16–9.


