

Synopses and Lists

Textual Practices in the Pre-Modern World

EDITED BY TERESA BERNHEIMER AND RONNY VOLLANDT



UNIVERSITY OF
CAMBRIDGE

Faculty of Asian and Middle
Eastern Studies



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Cover image: A fragment of a numbered and tabulated list of 22 biblical and rabbinic passages relating to the Sabbath, each referenced by means of a short lemma (T-S D1.76 from the Cambridge Genizah Collection). Courtesy of the Syndics of Cambridge University Library.

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A LIST IN THREE VERSIONS: REVISITING AL-KINDĪ'S *ON DEFINITIONS*¹

Peter Tarras

Philosophical texts come in many shapes: as treatises, epistles, and commentaries, to name but a few. But the list is not a typical or common format used by philosophers—and for a good reason.² Listing things, on the face of it, does not seem to have much in common with philosophical activity (apart from listing examples maybe, which, of course, is not specific to philosophy). Listing things may even seem to be the exact opposite of what philosophical writing is about.³ Still, there is not a small number of types of philosophical lists that come to mind if we take a look at the

¹ This study could not have been written without the generous support and advice of the following people: Peter Adamson, Hanif Amin Beidokhti, Zeno Bampi, Dag N. Hasse, Paul Hullmeine, Andreas Lammer, Liv I. Lied, Adel Sidarus, Cristina Tomé, Sarah Virgi, Ronny Vollandt, and Vevian Zaki. I would like to express my particular gratitude to Rotraud Hansberger who read and commented upon three versions of this study. I dedicate it to my children Josef and Esther, who were born in between its first draft and its final version.

² Gabriel, 'Literarische Form', does not discuss the list as a literary format of philosophy.

³ Compare Enrique Jiménez's discussion of *Listenwissenschaften* in his contribution to this volume.

Arabic tradition. Some authors have composed annotated bibliographical lists, for example of Aristotle's writings;⁴ some important works were transmitted together with or contain annotated chapter lists;⁵ some authors build their arguments on painstakingly compiled doxographical lists;⁶ there are the lists of so-called isagogic ('introductory') questions inherited from Greek late antiquity; together with these, one might also consider ques-

⁴ One important example is al-Kindī's *Epistle on the Quantity of Aristotle's Books and What Is Required for the Attainment of Philosophy* (*Risāla fī Kammiyyat kutub Aristūṭālīs wa-mā yuḥtāj ilayhi fī taḥṣīl al-falsafa*), which has a hybrid format including commentarial as well as encyclopedic elements insofar as it not only discusses the contents of Aristotle's books, but also the hierarchic order of the sciences that they cover. On this text, see Endress and Adamson, 'Abū Yūsuf al-Kindī', 158–59. On early Arabic catalogues of Aristotle's books and their Greek models, see Hein, *Definition*, 263–381.

⁵ The most prominent example is probably the list of 142 'headings of questions' (*ru'ūs al-masā'il*) following the prologue of the so-called *Theology of Aristotle*; see Adamson, *The Arabic Plotinus*, 42–48. Another well-known example is the 'enumeration of chapters' (*iḥṣā' al-abwāb*) transmitted together with Abū Naṣr al-Fārābī's *Principles of the Opinions of the Inhabitants of the Virtuous City* (*Mabādi' ārā' ah al-madīna al-fāḍila*); see Richard Walzer's commentary in al-Fārābī, *On the Perfect State*, 331–32. Both lists go beyond mere enumeration.

⁶ This feature permeates, for instance, Saadia Gaon's (d. 330/942) *Book of Beliefs and Opinions* (*Kitāb al-Amānāt wa-l-i'tiqādāt*), in which almost every chapter is prefaced with a doxography. For a discussion of one of Saadia's doxographies, see Davidson, 'Saadia's List'.

tions-and-answers texts, a format which was often used for introductory purposes as well.⁷ The best-studied example of lists in Arabic philosophy, however, is the terminological or definition list. Lists of this type are compilations of technical terms pertaining to philosophy and related fields such as mathematics or medicine. Roughly speaking, these lists offer philosophical glossaries. That is to say, glossaries riddled with all sorts of peculiarities.

The aim of this study is to take a close look at one such definition list thought to stand at the beginning of the career of this literary format in Arabic philosophy. This list is commonly attributed to the ‘philosopher of the Arabs’ (*faylasūf al-‘arab*) Abū Yūsuf Ya‘qūb b. Ishāq al-Ṣabbāḥ al-Kindī (d. after 252/866). I shall refer to it here as *On Definitions*.⁸ Al-Kindī is one of the pioneering figures of Arabic philosophy, inaugurating a tradition that not only continued late ancient philosophical thought in a

⁷ Daiber, ‘Masā’il wa-Adjwiba’.

⁸ The designation *On Definitions* is a workaround, since the text bears three different titles or designations in three different manuscripts, a fact that will be discussed in more detail in section 3. I shall not use the title *On Definitions* in order to denote a hypothetical abstract entity (or archetype), but as a sort of umbrella descriptor for three different instantiations of this presumed archetype. What is more, none of the attested titles or designations was known to al-Kindī’s bibliographers. As I argue elsewhere, the set of definitions of philosophy that we find in one of these manuscripts (referred to here as MS Istanbul), together with a few other items in the list of this witness, very likely formed the textual nucleus of what was to become *On Definitions* and what might have been a propaedeutic text in the tradition of late ancient Alexandrian introductory literature; see Tarras, ‘Textual Genesis’.

new language, but impressed its very own character upon this heritage. *On Definitions* promises to offer, through the lens of terminology, insights into the way in which al-Kindī carried out the intellectual project of enculturating Greek philosophical and scientific knowledge in the Islamic environment of the early Abbasid caliphate. It appears to have had model character for later definition collections of prominent figures such as Abū Ya‘qūb Iṣḥāq b. Sulaymān al-Isrā’īlī (or Isaac Israeli, d. between 320/932 and 344/955–56), the Ikhwān al-Ṣafā’ (or Brethren of Purity, fl. fourth/tenth century), and Abū ‘Alī ibn Sīnā (or Avicenna, d. 427/1037). In a process of adaptation, excerption, and translation, *On Definitions* also became the substrate of Hebrew and Latin texts, making it an important link in a chain of Greek–Arabic–Hebrew–Latin knowledge exchange.⁹

Here, I am interested in questions concerning the structure, purpose, and use of *On Definitions*. As I shall argue, these are closely related to the textual practices it imposed upon its readers

⁹ The Jewish philosopher Isaac Israeli composed his own *Book of definitions and descriptions* (*Kitāb al-Ḥudūd wa-l-rusūm*), which exhibits a number of textual parallels to *On Definitions* and other Kindian texts, as demonstrated by Altmann and Stern, *Isaac Israeli*, 3–78. The Arabic original has survived only fragmentarily. It was translated twice into Hebrew; see Altmann and Stern, *Isaac Israeli*, 5–7. Gerard of Cremona (d. 1187) translated the text into Latin. His translation was later revised by Dominicus Gundisalvi (d. after 1181); see Hasse and Büttner, ‘Notes’; Hasse, ‘Double Translations’. The Latin version of Israeli’s *Book of Definitions* was used, for instance, by Thomas Aquinas (d. 1274); see Guttman, *Die philosophischen Lehren*, 20.

and, thus, offer important insights into the emergence of *On Definitions* in its present shapes, in three versions witnessed by three manuscripts. In other words, the ways in which it was produced and the ways in which it was used converged more than once in its transmission history, leading to what we have before us now. It was the list format, possibly more than other formats, that invited participation in the enterprise of collecting useful definitions and terminological explanations. The three often-lamented haphazard instantiations of *On Definitions* make clear that it is the product of several stages of reworking and interpolation, defying our modern expectations concerning authorial dramaturgy. What I attempt to show is that some of the questions that are still open concerning its structure, function, and use can be addressed fruitfully once we attend to the stratified compositional process from which *On Definitions* must have emerged.

In the following, I propose to subject *On Definitions* to a distant reading of sorts; that is, my primary concern will be with the way in which *On Definitions* was used and produced as a text. I shall begin with a quick survey of previous scholarship, followed by a review of the manuscript evidence in order to make some observations as to the text's codicological settings and paratextual features. I will then offer an analysis of its different structural levels. Finally, I will turn to the text's users and the traces they left and argue that, once we are forced to acknowledge properly that *On Definitions* has not reached us as one unified literary entity, we realise that its three versions must each be understood as embodying the sum of the intentions of its users and producers.

1.0. Status Quaestionis

A swift glimpse at previous scholarship may suffice to give an impression of the problems that interpreters of the text and its versions have had to face. The study of al-Kindī's thought was put on a firm textual basis for the first time in the 1950s with Muḥammad 'Abd al-Hādī Abū Rīda's two-volume edition of his philosophical writings.¹⁰ The edition is based on the unique collection of Kindiana in Istanbul, Süleymaniye Kütüphanesi, Ayasofya MS 4832 (henceforth MS Istanbul),¹¹ which transmits *On Definitions* together with 32 other Kindian works on philosophical, astronomical, meteorological, and other scientific topics.¹² In 1959, Samuel Stern published a short article drawing attention to another witness of *On Definitions*: London, British Library, Add MS 7473 (henceforth, MS London).¹³ Lamentably, the text offered not even one-third of what is found in MS Istanbul. However, it allowed Stern to draw two important conclusions:

¹⁰ Abū Rīda (ed.), *Rasā'il al-Kindī al-falsafiyya*.

¹¹ The importance of this manuscript was first highlighted by Ritter and Plessner, 'Schriften'; see also Krause, 'Stambuler Handschriften islamischer Mathematiker'. More recently, see Hullmeine, 'Ayasofya 4832'. The manuscript is available in a facsimile edition: Sezgin, *Codex Ayasofya 4832*. One huge disadvantage of this reproduction, however, is that foliation was cut out.

¹² See Hogendijk and Käs, 'Survey'; Hullmeine, 'Ayasofya 4832'.

¹³ Stern, 'Notes'.

first, the list of definitions in MS Istanbul was apparently incomplete;¹⁴ second, the list in MS London had attracted material that is evidently not by al-Kindī. In 1982, a third witness was brought to light by Felix Klein-Franke: Lisbon, Academia das Ciências, Série Vermelha MS 293 (MS Lisbon).¹⁵ In this manuscript, the text of *On Definitions* exceeds the 98 definitions of MS Istanbul by 11 items, while having roughly half of the definitions in common with it. In the last third, MS Lisbon exhibits an accumulation of redundancies; that is, it lists quite a number of curious double definitions for terms that have already been defined earlier on. Klein-Franke highlights that these definitions are interpolations.¹⁶ As demonstrated more recently by Joshua Olsson, they most likely derive from ‘Alī b. Sahl Rabban al-Ṭabarī’s (d. ca. 250/864) medical encyclopedia *Paradise of Wisdom* (*Firdaws al-ḥikma*).¹⁷

The welcome unearthing of new textual witnesses had thus brought with it some intricate questions. What was the original form of *On Definitions*? Had such an original ever existed at all?

¹⁴ Stern, ‘Notes’, 34, deduced the incompleteness of the MS Istanbul version from the absence of the “important definition” of ‘universal intellect’ (*al-‘aql al-kullī*), which is, however, a misreading. MS London clearly, but also mistakenly, reads: *الفعل الكلّي* (*al-fi‘l al-kullī* ‘universal action’). The correct reading is offered by MS Lisbon: ‘universal definition’ (*al-ḥadd al-kullī*). Despite the corrupt text of MS London, Stern’s observation remains valid.

¹⁵ Klein-Franke, ‘On Definitions’.

¹⁶ Klein-Franke, ‘On Definitions’, 194.

¹⁷ Olsson, ‘*Ḥudūd*’.

What was its intended purpose? How was this purpose affected by the text's transmitters, readers, and users? Are later changes discernible as such? Is *On Definitions* to be viewed as the intellectual property, as it were, of one or many authors?

To be sure, *On Definitions* was copied and transmitted together with other important works by al-Kindī, especially in the Kindiana collection of MS Istanbul, and two of the three manuscripts explicitly ascribe the text to al-Kindī. However, it obviously cuts a poor figure within the Kindian corpus. In the 1970s, two re-editions with French translations were published by Michel Allard and Daniel Gimaret. Allard comments that the definitions “se suivent sans que l'on puisse déclarer entre elles aucun ordre.”¹⁸ He was willing to interpret this as a sign of the text's didactic function, having served some sort of introductory purpose. Gimaret, however, rejects this interpretation, concluding that, if the text is to be ascribed to al-Kindī at all, it must represent some sort of “brouillon laissé tel quel” or “aide-mémoire.”¹⁹ In 1975, Tamar Frank dedicated a doctoral thesis to *On Definitions*, expressing similar worries: “The treatise is apparently incomplete; there is no introduction of any kind, nor even a dedication or address which might give some indication of the purpose or the audience for which it was intended.”²⁰ Peter Adamson and Peter Pormann, who more recently worked out an extremely useful commented English translation that takes into account all

¹⁸ Allard, ‘L’Épître’, 49.

¹⁹ Gimaret in al-Kindī, *Cinq épîtres*, 10.

²⁰ Frank, ‘Book of Definitions’, 11.

three manuscript witnesses and their differences, are somewhat undecided as to the text's purpose.²¹ They point out, however, that *On Definitions* "is not a discursive treatise or epistle, like al-Kindī's other works, but a list of entries which could have gone through many redactions, probably already in al-Kindī's circle."²² By contrast, in her study of Arabic philosophical definition works, Kiki Kennedy-Day does not concern herself with any of these questions and simply asserts that it was written "for interested beginners in philosophy."²³

These hermeneutical problems demonstrate that its stratified compositional process reveals *On Definitions* as an 'open' or even 'opened' text. Adopting this terminology from Israel Ta-Shma's description of Hebrew manuscripts as "open books,"²⁴ one could say that, like open books, open texts

were not meant by their authors to serve as final statements, but rather as presentations of an interim state of knowledge or opinion, somewhat like our computerised databases, which are constantly updated and which give the user a summary of the data known at the time of the latest updating.²⁵

By contrast, an 'opened text' would be one "which appears *prima facie* to be 'open', but was not meant originally to be so: it has

²¹ Adamson and Pormann, *Philosophical Works*, 297.

²² Adamson and Pormann, *Philosophical Works*, 299.

²³ Kennedy-Day, *Books of Definition*, 21.

²⁴ Ta-Shma, 'The "Open" Book'.

²⁵ Ta-Shma, 'The "Open" Book', 17.

actually been ‘opened up’ by its readers, not by the author.”²⁶ The manuscript witnesses of *On Definitions* clearly represent different stages of ‘updating’ and it is its ‘openness’ that raises questions concerning structure, function, and use. In approaching these questions, therefore, it is necessary to first get a better idea of the manuscripts that transmit the text.²⁷

2.0. Manuscript Tradition

All three manuscripts have in common that they are well-planned collections of texts. In general, their scope is scientific and philosophical. Both MSS Istanbul and London include mathematical, astronomical/astrological, and philosophical texts, whereas MS Lisbon more strictly focuses on philosophical literature. All three manuscripts are multiple-text manuscripts;²⁸ that is, they are, first

²⁶ Ta-Shma, ‘The “Open” Book’, 18.

²⁷ After the completion of this study, Paul Hullmeine brought to my attention another copy of the text in the manuscript Bursa, Hüseyin Çelebi Yazma Eser Kütüphanesi, MS 1194. The text of this fourth witness is again not identical to any of the three known so far and constitutes a fourth version. We are currently working on an edition of it; see Hullmeine and Tarras, ‘A New Manuscript Witness.’

²⁸ Recently a distinction between composite and multiple-text manuscripts was suggested to replace ambiguous descriptors such as *majmū‘* or its Western equivalents such as *miscellany*, *recueil*, or *Sammelhandschrift* that fail to distinguish between customised and personalised user-produced manuscripts that assemble texts in accordance with the owner’s needs, and manuscripts that are collections of texts due to the binding; see Friedrich and Schwarke, ‘Introduction’.

of all, codicological units. However, MS Istanbul was not produced in a single production process (i.e., it is not a production unit), since some of the texts, including *On Definitions*, were added later to fill blank folio pages.²⁹ All three manuscripts transmit *On Definitions* with other Kindiana; MS Istanbul in particular exhibits a conscious effort to assemble a collection of al-Kindī's works. MS London offers documentary information about the antigraph, dating to 531/1136, from which *On Definitions* was copied together with al-Kindī's *On the Rule of the Arabs and Its Duration* (*Risāla fī l-Mulk al-ʿarab wa-kamiyyatihā*). This is actually the earliest date that can be assigned to the manuscript transmission of *On Definitions* and its connection to the Kindian corpus. In the following, I will give a non-exhaustive description of these manuscripts, highlighting some of the features that are important with respect to the textual transmission of *On Definitions*.³⁰

²⁹ The manuscript still has a number of blank folios; see Hullmeine, 'Ayasofya 4832'.

³⁰ Exhaustive descriptions of MSS Istanbul and London are provided by the Bavarian Academy of Sciences and Humanities project Ptolemaeus Arabus et Latinus (<http://ptolemaeus.badw.de>); see Hullmeine, 'Ayasofya 4832'; José Bellver, 'Add. 7473'. For MS Istanbul, see also Reisman and Bertolacci, 'Thābit ibn Qurra', 725–28; Rashed and Jolivet, *Œuvres philosophiques*, x–xi. For MS Lisbon, I rely on the information given by Sidarus, 'Un recueil'; recently the manuscript was thoroughly described by Esmaeili, 'Sciences of the Ancients', 199–202. The information derived from these sources was checked against digital reproductions of all three manuscripts. I am grateful to Peter Adamson, Paul Hullmeine, Cristina Tomé, and Sarah Virgi, who made accessible to me reproductions of MSS Istanbul and Lisbon. Digital images of MS London

2.1. MS Istanbul

Content: 66 works on mathematics, astronomy, astrology, meteorology, medicine, and philosophy by various authors.

Paper; II + 232 folios (foliation in Hindu-Arabic numerals in red ink, counting from fols 1 to 150 and starting anew on fol. 153r; foliation in European-Arabic numerals in pencil); 220 × 125 mm; 29–32 lines per page; in four places (fols 57r–57v; 191v–193r; 206v–207v [*On Definitions*]; 228r–229r) varying number of lines; black and red ink; ownership notes and table of contents on fol. 1r; second table of contents on fol. 153r.

Script: Naskh (one main hand, later additions by different hands).

Date: fourth/tenth–fifth/eleventh century; later additions (eighth/fourteenth century).

MS Istanbul is a multiple-text manuscript, consisting of three parts and compiled by at least four different scribes. Hellmut Ritter dated the manuscript to the fourth/tenth–fifth/eleventh century on palaeographical grounds.³¹ One of the later additions dates to the eighth/fourteenth century. *On Definitions* is also a later addition, yet the text was copied again by a different scribe (probably the same who copied the undated text on fols 228r–229r and completed the table of contents on fol. 153r). Thus, our text was inserted some time between the fourth/tenth and eighth/fourteenth centuries, possibly later. The oldest ownership

are available online via Qatar Digital Library: https://www.qdl.qa/en/archive/81055/vdc_100023601232.0x000001 (accessed 29 June 2021).

³¹ Ritter and Plessner, ‘Schriften’, 363.

note (fol. 1r) states that the codex came into the possession of one Ibn al-Ḥammāmī Abī Zayd b. ‘Alī on 19 Rajab 568 (6 March 1173).³² One of the ownership notes states that it used to be part of Avicenna’s library, which, if true, would confirm a late fourth/tenth-century or early fifth/eleventh-century date for the initial production of the codex. A second note even claims that the main scribe was al-Shaykh al-ra’īs himself.³³ Part 2 starts with a new folio numbering (1–76 in Hindu-Arabic numerals) on fol. 153r and a table of contents, bearing the title *al-juz’ al-awwal min kutub wa-rasā’il Ya‘qūb b. Ishāq al-Kindī wa-fihi sittūn muṣannafan* ‘first part of the books and epistles of Ya‘qūb b. Ishāq al-Kindī comprising 60 works’. Of these 60 works, however, the manuscript contains only 33. The table of contents was numbered in advance from 1 to 60 in *abjad* numerals. A first hand added the first 20 titles, up to al-Kindī’s *Book of Demonstration concerning the Proximate Agent Cause for Generation and Corruption* (*Kitāb al-Ibāna ‘an al-‘illa al-fā‘ila al-qarība li-l-kawn wa-l-fasād*). Interestingly, in the manuscript, two non-Kindian works follow this text. A later hand, possibly the same that copied *On Definitions*, added 10 more titles to the table of contents, apparently overlooking *On Definitions*, which was then noted in the box numbered 52 (نـب). This procedure suggests the following scenario: a first scribe consciously planned an anthology of al-Kindī’s works, which was to include 60 works in total. This scribe managed to

³² Ritter and Plessner, ‘Schriften’, 363n1; Hullmeine, ‘Ayasofya 4832’.

³³ The two notes are discussed in Rashed and Jolivet, *Œuvres philosophiques*, x; Reisman and Bertolacci, ‘Thābit ibn Qurra’, 726–27; Şeşen, ‘Manuscripts philosophiques’, 669.

collect 30 works, of which he recorded the first 20 in the table of contents. He left some folios blank before and after al-Kindī's *On First Philosophy* (*Kitāb fī l-Falsafa al-ūlā*, fols 196r–206r = 43b–53b). One later scribe disregarded the plan of his predecessor and used this space to include the two non-Kindian works, while another scribe inserted *On Definitions* after *On First Philosophy* and completed the table of contents.

Within the Kindiana collection, *On Definitions* is the twenty-fourth work. It begins with a *basmala*, a concise title and ascription: *risāla li-l-Kindī fī ḥudūd al-ashyā' wa-rusūmihā* 'epistle by al-Kindī on the definitions of things and their descriptions'. *On Definitions* comprises 98 definitions. The text ends with an explicit: *tammāt al-risāla bi-ḥamd Allāh wa-mannihī* 'the epistle ends with the praise to God and His blessing'. Abū Rīda already pointed out that the scribe's hand differs from the one that copied the preceding and the following work. According to him, the text was slipped in for economic reasons in order to make use of the empty space.³⁴ This is certainly the reason for the extremely dense appearance of the later additions. The first additional text in the volume is a *Risāla fī Ru'yat al-kawākib bi-l-layl lā bi-nahār* ('On [why] stars are seen at night and not during daytime') ascribed to Avicenna (but probably by Abū l-Barakāt al-Baghdādī).³⁵ According to the colophon of this text, the copying was completed in 755/1345–46. Even though *On Definitions* is a later addition as

³⁴ Abū Rīda, *Rasā'il*, 163; see also Ritter and Plessner, 'Schriften', 369.

³⁵ Hogendijk and Käs, 'Survey', x; Reisman and Bertolacci, 'Thābit ibn Qurra', 726n34.

well, we have no indication that it also dates to the eighth/fourteenth century. It is clear, however, that its scribe consciously chose a shorter text that could be copied on two to four folio pages.

2.2. MS London

Content: 20 works on mathematics, astronomy, astrology, meteorology, history, *adab*, and philosophy by various authors.

Paper; I^a + 85 folios + I^b (foliation in Hindu-Arabic and European-Arabic numerals; quires numbered in epact numerals); 215 × 155 mm; 27 lines per page; black and red ink; text occasionally restored; ownership statement and table of contents on fol. 1r.

Script: Naskh.

Date: Dhū al-Qa‘da 639/May 1242.

MS London is a multiple-text manuscript produced by one scribe. *On Definitions* has no title and is simply referred to as *fuṣūl* ‘sections’. Neither is it ascribed to any author. The text is preceded, however, by one of al-Kindī’s works, namely his *On the Rule of the Arabs* (fols 175v–178r). This text’s colophon is found on the same folio as the beginning of *On Definitions* (fol. 178r) and discloses that it was copied from a manuscript dated Rabī‘ al-Awwal 531/November–December 1136. From the same manuscript, the scribe also copied Apollonius of Perga’s *On Pine-like Shapes* (*Fī Ashkāl al-ṣanawbariyya*, fols 164v–172v) and Abū Ma‘shar’s *Discourse on Astrological Indications* (*al-Qawl fī Namūdhārāt*, 173r–175v). The colophons of both texts specify that the copying took place “in the western area of the city Mahdiyya” (*bi-nāhiyat al-*

maghrib bi-madīnat al-Mahdiyya), which, as José Bellver suggests, might be the coastal city of the same name in Tunisia.³⁶ The incipit of *On Definitions* reads as follows: “I have found these sections in the antigraph like this, so I copied them” (*wajjadtu hādhihi l-fuṣūl ‘alā nuskhat al-aṣl hākadhā fa-naqaltuhā*).³⁷ This means that the scribe copied this selection of texts from an anthology that already offered this arrangement. He does not bother to start the text with a *basmala* or title, which must also reflect the shape in which he found the text in his model. The explicit reads: “the sections end” (*tammāt al-fuṣūl*). Hence, the 38 definitions of this text witness formed a textual unit appended to al-Kindī’s *On the Rule of the Arabs*. Twenty-five definitions accord with definitions given in MSS Istanbul and Lisbon. A further set of 13 definitions exclusively concerns eschatological terminology, which Samuel Stern traced back to the *Epistles* of the Ikhwān al-Ṣafā’.³⁸ *On Definitions* covers only two folio pages. The incipit as well as the *mise-en-page*, however, suggest that *On Definitions* was not included as a space filler, but rather purposefully integrated as part of the compositional plan of this one-volume library. This indicates that the eschatological definitions, which Stern identified as spurious material, were not appended by the scribe of this manuscript, but already transmitted together with

³⁶ Bellver, ‘Add. 7473’.

³⁷ Stern, ‘Notes’, 31, translates: “The following paragraphs were found in the copy which I used as my model, and so I transcribed them.” In my translation, I have corrected Stern’s transcription (*wajjadtu* instead of *wujidat*, p. 31n1) as well as his understanding of *hākadhā*.

³⁸ Stern, ‘Notes’, 34–37.

the ‘common core’ of all three manuscripts in the sixth/twelfth-century antigraph.

2.3. MS Lisbon

Content: 16 works on philosophy and one work on pharmacueutics.

Paper; III^a + 85 folios + III^b (foliation in European-Arabic numerals); 175 × 125 mm; 17 lines per page; black and red ink; occasional notes in Arabic, Arabic Garshuni, and Portuguese.

Script: Naskh.

Date: Rabī‘ al-Awwal 750/May–June 1315.

MS Lisbon is the second volume of a two-volume multiple-text manuscript (Série Vermelha MSS 292 + 293). It was copied by one al-Mubārak b. Ismā‘īl b. Muḥammad al-Kutubī al-‘Abbāsī al-Baghdādī al-Mutaṭabbib during his travels between Aleppo and Alexandria in the eighth/fourteenth century (on the specific dating, see below). Adel Sidarus has pointed out that the texts assembled in this manuscript testify to “[l’]intérêt évident du compilateur pour... écrits sur la terminologie philosophico-scientifique.”³⁹ It forms the miniature library of a bookseller (*kutubī*) and physician (*mutaṭabbib*) who brought together a carefully designed collection of useful medical and philosophical writings. The manuscript was brought to the attention of scholars for the

³⁹ Sidarus, ‘Un recueil’, 185.

first time in 1982 when Klein-Franke published a diplomatic edition of *On Definitions*.⁴⁰ The text is transmitted under al-Kindī's name, but the title differs from the one given in MS Istanbul: *Risāla fī l-Asmā' al-mufrada* ('Epistle on technical terms'). As highlighted by Sidarus, *On Definitions* is not the only work on terminology in the manuscript. It also contains an excerpt from Abū Ḥayyān al-Tawḥīdī's *Exchange of Ideas* (*Muqābasāt*, fols 39v–44v) according with chapter 91 of that work, which itself offers a list of definitions that actually draws on *On Definitions*.⁴¹ Similarly, the manuscript used to include an excerpt on terminological issues from Abū l-Barakāt al-Baghdādī's *Carefully Considered Book on Philosophy* (*al-Kitāb al-Mu'tabar fī l-Ḥikma*), which is now missing.⁴² Further, it includes a number of (Pseudo-)Avicennian works that deal with terminological issues, as for instance a text entitled *On the Definition of the Soul* (*Fī Ḥadd al-nafs*, fols 62v–66r) that immediately precedes *On Definitions*, or works that have an encyclopedic scope, as for instance the *Epistle on the Entirety of the Parts of the Sciences of the Ancients* (*Risāla fī Jamī' aqsām*

⁴⁰ Klein-Franke, 'On Definitions'. Unfortunately, the editor failed to give the manuscript's shelfmark, rendering futile later attempts at comparing the (not flawless) edition against the manuscript; see Adamson and Pormann, *Philosophical Works*, 238n58; Olsson, 'Ḥudūd', 247n8, 256.

⁴¹ Stern, 'Notes', 38–42; Adamson and Pormann, *Philosophical Works*, 299.

⁴² Sidarus, 'Un recueil', 185.

‘ulūm al-awā’il, fols 1v–6v)⁴³ that opens the volume. Another, rather extensive definition work is found at the beginning of volume 1 (Série Vermelha MS 292, fols 1v–32r), bearing the title *Treatise on the Description of Divisions and Definitions* (*Maqāla fī Dhikr l-furūq wa-l-ḥudūd*). The manuscript’s table of contents attributes this text to the East Syrian physician Ibn al-Tilmīdh (fl. sixth/twelfth century), yet Sidarus suggests the fifth/elev-enth-century physician Abū l-Ḥasan Sa‘īd b. Hibat Allāh b. al-Ḥasan (d. 495/1101) as its author who is mentioned in the colophon.⁴⁴

On the last line of fol. 66r, the text of *On Definitions* begins with the title. After the *basmala* and a short prayer, the following eight folio pages offer 109 definitions. According to the colophon (fol. 70r), the text was copied in Alexandria “on a Thursday morning in the month Rabī‘ al-Awwal” by the aforementioned al-Mubārak b. Ismā‘īl. The subsequent date, written in a documentary hand, is hard to decipher, as it is also in other colophons of the volume. Previous scholars, including one of the manuscript’s owners, suggested a range of dates. According to Sidarus, the manuscript was produced in 764–65/1363–64.⁴⁵ Hinrich Biesterfeldt read the date of the colophon of the Pseudo-Avicennian *Parts of the Sciences*, the first text in the volume, as “a Saturday evening in the month Rabī‘ al-Awwal of the year 615” (*nahār al-*

⁴³ On this work, see Esmaeili, ‘Sciences of the Ancients’; Biesterfeldt, ‘Eine arabische Klassifikation’.

⁴⁴ Sidarus, ‘Un recueil’, 185.

⁴⁵ Sidarus, ‘Un recueil’, 180.

jum‘a al-thānī [sic] rabī‘ al-awwal sana khamsat ‘ashara sitt mi’a),⁴⁶ which would correspond to 2, 9, 16, or 23 June 1218. Below the colophon of our text, a modern hand written with a fine quill has given the following translation into Portuguese: “it was written in Alexandria in [the year] 705 of the Hegira, which corresponds to [the year] 1306 of the Christian era.”⁴⁷ This reader note was left in June 1810 by the Franciscan polyglot translator João de Sousa (Yūḥannā l-Dimashqī, d. 1812), in whose possession the manuscript was at that time.⁴⁸ If de Sousa’s reading were correct, the text would have been copied on 24 September or 1, 8, or 15 October 1305 (not 1306). However, he seems to have had a hard time deciphering the dates as well and must have changed his mind while sifting through the manuscript. On the flyleaves at the beginning (III^{av}) and end of the codex (III^{bv}), he gives the date 605/1206, though the first was corrected from what seems to have been 705/1306. The correct reading, however, as recently argued by Mohammad Esmaeili, is *khamsat ‘ashara wa-sab‘*

⁴⁶ Biesterfeldt, ‘Eine arabische Klassifikation’, 265; the English translation is mine.

⁴⁷ *Foi escrito em Alexandria em 705 da Hegira = = que corresponde ao [sc. ano] de 1306 de Christo*. I am grateful to Sarah Virgi for her remarks on how to understand the note.

⁴⁸ On João de Sousa, see Figanier, *Fr. João de Sousa*; Sidarus, ‘Introduction’; Braga, ‘Os manuscritos árabes’.

mi'a, that is, 715/1315.⁴⁹ Hence, *On Definitions* was copied on 13, 20, or 27 June or 4 July 1315.

3.0. Structure

Having obtained a better understanding of the codicological settings of *On Definitions*, I shall now turn to its structure both as a physical and as an abstract entity. I will consider it on the following three levels: on a visual or representational level, on a syntactic level, and on a semantic level.

The list format provides the text's basic structure. Following the directionality of the Arabic script (right to left, top to bottom), this format generally functions according to two principles, a vertical and a horizontal one: the vertical structure is imposed upon the text by the successive listing of entries, which is itself organised graphically by the use of paratextual markers. None of our manuscripts makes use of paragraph breaks; that is, new entries do not start on a new line. The horizontal structure is provided by the definitional content and organised syntactically. If one compares the manuscripts with their modern editions and translations, it can easily be noticed that these structural principles are enhanced by adding further elements like numbering, dashes, punctuation, paragraph breaks, and so on. All these elements serve the purpose of navigating the reader through the text. When compared to its modern instantiations, the manuscript versions of *On Definitions* give a rather messy impression.

⁴⁹ Esmaeili, 'Sciences of the Ancients', 200–201. I would like to thank Vevian Zaki for discussing the date of the colophons of MS Lisbon with me.

Yet already the copyists employed certain strategies of navigation. In my concluding remarks, I will return to these scribal techniques and discuss the way in which they reflect a change in the text's use.

3.1. Visual Structure

In all three manuscripts, the text of *On Definitions* is written out en bloc without paragraph breaks. This is a very common and economic—that is, space-saving—way of representing lists in manuscripts (see the contribution by Matthew P. Monger in this volume). No other visual means of enhancing the text's structure were employed. In MS Istanbul, the copyist uses the common feature of paragraph marks (*fawāṣil*) in the shape of the letter *hā'* (an abbreviation for *intihā'* 'end') to separate the different entries from one another.⁵⁰ The copyist of MS London employed blank spaces to provide a visual structure that helps in distinguishing the respective items. The blank spaces have been left for the purpose of later insertion of textual dividers, which was never carried out. A similar approach was followed by the copyist of MS Lisbon, though occasionally he also used *hā'*-shaped dividers, assuming the form of a dotted circle.

What stands out in MS Lisbon is the red underlining used to mark the *definienda* of each item and, thus, enhance the text's vertical structure. This paratextual feature, however, was added semi-automatically, since in a number of cases the *definienda* are left without marking. In other cases, the spacing between words

⁵⁰ See Gacek, *Arabic Manuscripts*, 269–70.

was mistaken for the beginning of a new definition. Red ink is used with a similar intention also in the definition list extracted from Tawḥīdī's *Exchange of Ideas*. It was probably added by a later hand, possibly one of its later owners, and testifies to the way in which readers of *On Definitions* interacted with this text as a concrete physical entity. This interaction affected only the text's surface, as it were. But in a few instances, their interactions go beyond this mere representational level.

In MS London, the definition of 'imagination' (*tawahhum*) has been divided into two entries. The scribe's testimony quoted above suggests that this is how he found the text in his model. What seems to have happened, however, is that the scribe of the model realised after a while that he had copied only half of the item's text. Scribal cancellations in MSS Istanbul and Lisbon testify to the difficulties the copyists experienced when trying to locate again the definition they were copying. In MS London, this common problem of manuscript copying effectively led to a longer list of definitions, that is, a slightly different text. Inadvertently (or so it would seem), Stern later undid the copyist's correction by overlooking the second definition of 'imagination' in MS London.⁵¹

Considerations of an economic nature have affected the text's shape as well. In MS Istanbul it was copied on three blank folio pages, giving it an extremely dense impression (the last folio

⁵¹ The manuscript reads: *a< l-t>awahhum huwa quwwa nafsāniyya mudri< k>a li-l-ṣūra al-ḥissiyya* ('imagination is a psychic faculty perceiving sensible forms in the absence of their matter'). This is the second part of the definition, which is missed in Stern, 'Notes', 22.

of the text has 49 lines, while the facing page to the left starting with a new text has 32 lines). The explicit suggests that the number of definitions was not dependent upon the available space. The shortness of the version in MS London, however, could be explained that way. In the antigraph of this manuscript, *On Definitions* could actually have served as a space filler.

3.2. Syntactic Structure

We must assume that readers similarly interacted with the text on an even earlier temporal level. At that point, their interaction was to affect it as an abstract entity. This can be demonstrated if we turn to the horizontal structure of the syntax. In most cases, the definitions are nominal sentences, starting with a definite noun (marked by the definite article *al-*),⁵² the *definiendum*, which is then followed either by a personal pronoun (*huwa/hiya*) that functions as the copula, a definite or indefinite predicate noun, or a relative pronoun (*mā, alladhī, allatī*) that connects the *definiendum* to the entry's definitional content. In some cases the *definiendum* is followed by a finite verb. We may take as an example the definition of 'soul' (*nafs*):

*al-nafs tamāmat jirm ṭabī'ī dhī āla qābila li-l-ḥayāt wa-yuqāl
hiya istikmāl awwal li-jirm ṭabī'ī dhī ḥayāt bi-l-quwwa wa-*

⁵² In one case the lack of the definite article rightfully gives occasion to doubt the text's soundness; see Adamson and Pormann, *Philosophical Works*, 335n181.

yuqāl hiya jawhar ‘aqlī⁵³ mutaḥarrik min dhātihī bi-‘adad mu’allaf

The soul is the perfection of the natural body, possessing organs and being receptive of life. And it is said: it is the first perfection of the natural body, possessing life potentially. And it is said: it is an intellectual substance, self-moving by a harmonious number. (MS Istanbul)

al-naḥs tamāmat jirm ṭabī‘ī dhū āla qābil li-l-ḥayāt bi-l-quwwa

The soul is the perfection of the natural body, possessing organs and being receptive of life potentially. (MS London)

al-naḥs tamāmat jirm ṭabī‘ī dhī āla qābila li-l-ḥayāt

The soul is the perfection of the natural body, possessing organs and being receptive of life. (MS Lisbon)

What is really striking here is that the text of MS Istanbul is about three times as long as that of the other two versions. The additional text is introduced by the phrase *wa-yuqāl* (‘and it is said’), which also recurs a second time in the same entry. Both times it is followed by the copula (*hiya*) allowing to introduce two further nominally structured definitions. The seemingly harmless phrase *wa-yuqāl*, which turns up 11 times in MS Istanbul, functions as an editorial marker, that is, it marks editorial interferences where further explanatory material has been added. Other such editorial phrases are *wa-ayḍan* (‘and also’) or the expression *wa-yur-samu ayḍan bi-annahū* (‘and it is also described in that’), which occurs in MS Lisbon. On a syntactic level, these phrases indicate textual additions. Editorial markers are traces of intervention and

⁵³ MS reads: عقل; cf. Adamson and Pormann, *Philosophical Works*, 328n64.

neatly separate the textual core of a definition from later additions. There is, however, no way to tell when these additions were made. It is by no means the case that MSS London and Lisbon only transmit core definitions, though editorial markers are completely absent from MS London. For instance, the definition of ‘opinion’ (*ra’y*) in MSS Istanbul and Lisbon is a prolonged version with two instances of *wa-yuqāl*. This, in my view, indicates that the scribes, not of our present manuscripts, but possibly of their models, performed some sort of selection, which led to the simultaneous inclusion of core and prolonged definitions in the version of MS Lisbon, while MS London evinces a prevalence of concise core definitions. In this case, they effectively interacted with earlier readers who were responsible for the editorial interventions.

There are other syntactic elements that equally indicate a stratified compositional process. Some took place before the respective definitions became part of *On Definitions*. The version of MS Lisbon offers a curious set of double definitions. Each of these differentiates the definitional content by qualifying one part as defined “with respect to instruction” (*min jihat al-taʿlīm*) and a second part as defined “with respect to nature” (*min jihat al-ṭabʿ/al-ṭibāʿ*). Different views have been voiced concerning this peculiarity. According to Klein-Franke, the definitions exhibiting this feature have to be considered as interpolations.⁵⁴ Adamson

⁵⁴ He adds the unsubstantiated claim that these “were at the head of a similarly arranged but unknown list of definitions”; Klein-Franke, ‘On Definitions’, 194. Olsson, ‘*Ḥudūd*’, 255–56, misquotes Klein-Franke by adding “[i]n the same manuscript.”

and Pormann comment that in these cases “the first definition is a looser but more intuitive one intended for beginners, whereas the second is technical and more strictly accurate.”⁵⁵ This is partly confirmed by one of the definitions of ‘definition’, which also employs the editorial phrase *wa-yuqāl*: “the definition is a brief statement that indicates the essences of things. And it is said: it is a brief statement [that indicates] the nature of the existing thing” (*al-ḥadd qawl wajīz yadullu ‘alā ḥaqā’iq al-ashyā’ wa-yuqālu qawl wajīz [yadullu] ‘alā ṭabī‘at al-shay’ al-mawjūd*).⁵⁶ Essence (*ḥaqīqa*) and nature (*ṭabī‘a*) are Arabic equivalents to the Aristotelian *to ti ēn einai*, which, according to *Posterior Analytics* II.3 (90b4), the definition is supposed to indicate. Thus, the second part of the double definitions, marked by the phrase *min jihat al-ṭab‘/al-ṭibā‘*, consists of definitions that accord or at least seek to accord with the Aristotelian definition of ‘definition’. The part marked by the phrase *min jihat al-ta‘līm*, however, does not necessarily indicate a didactic purpose, but simply seems to introduce additional material. If we consider the distinction between *min jihat al-ṭab‘/al-ṭibā‘* and *min jihat al-ta‘līm* as a pair of editorial phrases, it becomes clear that it also allowed for opening up the text of the definition proper for secondary material of an explanatory or doxographic nature. In the definition of ‘soul’ in the version of MS Istanbul, for instance, the first *wa-yuqāl* introduces a

⁵⁵ Adamson and Pormann, *Philosophical Works*, 335n168.

⁵⁶ Edition from Klein-Franke, ‘On Definitions’, 215, lines 12–13; translation slightly modified from Adamson and Pormann, *Philosophical Works*, 311.

clarification of the essentially Aristotelian definition, while the second *wa-yuqāl* introduces a Platonic definition.⁵⁷

3.3. Semantic Structure

The list format of *On Definitions* also implies a peculiar semantic structure with clear consequences for the way in which *On Definitions* ought to be read. Adamson and Pormann already highlighted that certain argumentative features suggest that “*On Definitions* should be read as a philosophical treatise, not merely as a neutral guide to terminology.”⁵⁸ This, however, is contradicted by the many blatantly non-argumentative features of our definition list. In my view, this heterogeneity is best described applying the concept of ‘discreteness’ or ‘discontinuity’. I borrow this terminology from Markus Asper’s discussion of Greek scientific list texts, including collections of philosophical definitions.⁵⁹ Asper defines ‘discrete texts’ as a discontinuous string of terms or sentences, meaning that a discrete text is made up of unconnected parts (compare the designation *fuṣūl* ‘sections’ in MS London) whose relation is not explicitly specified.⁶⁰

⁵⁷ In a similar way, Andreas Lammer has argued with respect to the double definition of ‘nature’ that it supplements the Aristotelian understanding of nature as a principle of motion and rest with the Philoponian understanding of nature as a power (*quwwa*) inherent in bodies. See Lammer, ‘Defining Nature’; Lammer, *Avicenna’s Physics*, 257–59.

⁵⁸ Adamson and Pormann, *Philosophical Works*, 298.

⁵⁹ Asper, *Griechische Wissenschaftstexte*, 57–61; see also 64–71. I am grateful to Dag Hasse for drawing my attention to this book.

⁶⁰ Asper, *Griechische Wissenschaftstexte*, 57.

It should be noted that the respective elements of discrete texts can nevertheless form continuous sub-elements. MS Istanbul includes a number of rather extreme examples of this, which are not actually definitions of any kind, but disquisitions on a given philosophical concept or issue, like the long entries ‘human virtues’ (*al-faḍā’il al-insāniyya*) and ‘philosophy’ (*falsafa*). In contrast to continuous texts (like philosophical treatises), discrete texts are not meant to be read, but to be consulted. The version of MS Istanbul especially constitutes a hybrid between discrete and continuous texts, which is certainly one reason why it is so difficult to pin down its actual purpose. Typically, discrete texts are consulted for certain units of information, while continuous texts have to be understood as a coherent whole. Asper points out that discrete texts, such as lists, can only function as tools of knowledge transmission if their readers are already familiar with the systematic context, that is, they have to have implicit systematic knowledge in order to make the right use of the text.⁶¹ For this reason, it has been rightly argued that *On Definitions* cannot be a mere reference list for beginners.

What complicates matters further is that certain sets of definitions are certainly connected, thus implying again a continuous rather than a discontinuous reading. The following sets of definitions form semantic clusters in one, two, or all versions of *On Definitions*:

⁶¹ Asper, *Griechische Wissenschaftstexte*, 58–59.

First cause (*al-ʿilla al-ūlā*), intellect (*al-ʿaql*), nature (*al-ṭabīʿa*),
soul (*al-nafs*), body (*al-jirm*), origination (*al-ibtidāʿ*), mat-
ter (*al-hayūlā*), form (*al-ṣūra*), element (*al-ʿunṣur*);

Act (*al-fīʿl*), action (*al-ʿamal*);

Quantity (*al-kamiyya*), quality (*al-kayfiyya*), relative (*al-muḍāf*),
motion (*al-ḥaraka*), time (*al-zamān*), place (*al-makān*);

Imagination (*al-tawahhum*), sense (*al-ḥāss*), sensation (*al-ḥiss*),
sensitive faculty (*al-quwwa al-ḥissiyya*), sensible (*al-
maḥsūs*);

Deliberation (*al-rawiyya*), opinion (*al-raʾy*);

Will (*al-irāda*), love (*al-maḥabba*);

Necessary (*al-wājib*), possible (*al-mumkin*), impossible (*al-
mumtaniʿ*);

Truth (*al-ṣidq*), falsehood (*al-kidhb*);

Eternal (*al-azalī*), natural causes (*al-ʿilal al-ṭabīʿiyya*), celestial
sphere (*al-falak*);

All (*al-kull*), entirety (*al-jamīʿ*), part (*al-juzʾ*), some (*al-baʿḍ*);

Opinion (*al-ẓann*), determination (*al-ʿaẓm*), certainty (*al-ya-
qīn*);

Multiplication (*al-ḍarb*), division (*al-qisma*);

Medicine (*al-ṭibb*), heat (*al-ḥarāra*), cold (*al-burūda*), dryness
(*al-yubs*), moisture (*al-ruṭūba*);

Curve (*al-inṭhināʾ*), breaking (*al-kasr*), compression (*al-ḍaghd*),
attraction (*al-injdhāb*);

Difference (*al-khilāf*), otherness (*al-ghayriyya*);

Occurring (*al-ḥaṭar*), impulse (*al-sāniḥ*), occurrence (*al-khāṭir*);

Love (*al-maḥabba*), passion (*al-ʿishq*), desire (*al-shahwa*);

Anger (*al-ghaḍab*), hatred (*al-ḥiqd*), rancour (*al-dhahl*), laughter (*al-dāḥik*), contentment (*al-riḍā*);

Humanity (*al-insāniyya*), angelity (*al-mal'akiyya*), bestiality (*al-bahīmiyya*);

This world (*al-dunyā*), the other world (*al-ākhirā*), death (*al-mawt*), place of return (*al-ma'ād*), resurrection (*al-qiyāma*), awakening (*al-ba'th*), hell (*al-jahannam*), congregation (of the dead) (*al-ḥashr*), *ṣirāt*,⁶² reckoning (*al-ḥisāb*), reward (*al-thawāb*), punishment (*al-'iqāb*), heaven (*al-janna*);

Generation (*al-kawn*), corruption (*al-fasād*);

Indication (*al-dalīl*), enquiry (*al-istidlāl*), term (*al-ism*), *fawt* (?),⁶³ judgement (*al-qaḍīya*), speech (*al-qawl*);

Individual (*al-shakhṣ*), species (*al-naw'*), property (*al-khāṣṣa*);

Definition of land animal (*ḥadd al-māshī*), definition of biped (*ḥadd dhī l-rijlayn*);

Definition of matter (*ḥadd al-hayūlā*), definition of nature (*ḥadd al-ṭabī'a*), definition of fire (*ḥadd al-nār*);

World (*al-'ālam*), all (*al-kull*).

It is not hard to see how the grouping of these sets came about. Generally, they form thematic units. Some of these are groups of

⁶² This is the name of the bridge that in Islamic eschatological imagination has to be crossed to enter paradise.

⁶³ MS Lisbon reads: فوت. Ed. Klein-Franke reads: فوت (*fawt*, 'escape'). Adamson and Pormann, *Philosophical Works*, 335n181, note that the *definiendum* lacks the definite article and, thus, does not accord with the common syntactic structure of the definitions. They suggest to emend the word to *ṣawt* ('sound') and assume a lacuna at the beginning of the definition.

related medical or mathematical terms. One of the most outstanding groups is the set of 13 eschatological terms (this world, the other world, etc.) found exclusively in MS London. As demonstrated by Stern, this set derives from the Ikhwān al-Ṣafā's forty-first epistle.⁶⁴ According to him, its inclusion in *On Definitions* happened "by some accident" and rests upon "the sole authority of a copyist who set down these excerpts at second or third hand."⁶⁵ It is true that this set of definitions, like the ones that were taken from al-Ṭabarī in the version of MS Lisbon, does not help in understanding al-Kindī's supposed aim in composing *On Definitions*, but it is instructive as to the way in which this text, or rather its versions, must have emerged in the first place. The list format must have invited its readers to participate in the enterprise of collecting useful definitions or terminological explanations. On the other hand, the presence of such sets does not preclude the possibility of others originally going back to al-Kindī. A case in point is the first set, especially the sequence 'first cause', 'intellect', 'nature', 'soul', which mirrors the Plotinian emanationist scheme. As pointed out by Adamson, this sequence appears in the prologue of the *Theology of Aristotle*, very likely authored by al-Kindī himself, as well as in his *Sayings of Socrates*

⁶⁴ Edition and English translation in Baffioni and Poonawala, *Epistles* 39–41.

⁶⁵ Stern, 'Notes', 37.

(*Alfāz Suqrāt*).⁶⁶ It cannot be accidental that this set of definitions stands at the beginning of all three versions of *On Definitions*.

Another feature some of these sets exhibit, undermining again the text's discreteness, is internal cross-referencing. Some definitions work with terms defined elsewhere. If one follows these cross-references, the respective definitions become visible as snippets of theory-building. Adamson has demonstrated this with respect to the set 'occurring', 'impulse', and 'occurrence'.⁶⁷ Another striking example is the set 'sense', 'sensation', 'sensitive faculty', and 'sensible'. These sets function as a sort of mini-lists within the lists of the three versions. They also presuppose a closed theoretical frame, which means that they work somewhat like the 'philosophical lexicon' of Aristotle's *Metaphysics* V: they offer coherent (or at least interrelated) philosophical analyses of concepts, rather than lexicographical explanations of the meanings of the terms defined.⁶⁸ This brings us to the important question of the function of *On Definitions*.

4.0. *On Definitions* and Its Users

We have seen that *On Definitions* is a text closely associated with the Kindian corpus. Some scholars have doubted its authenticity, but most are content to assume that it was produced by al-Kindi

⁶⁶ Adamson, 'al-Kindi', 75n87; see also Klein-Franke, 'On Definitions', 199; Adamson and Pormann, *Philosophical Works*, 298; Frank, 'Book of Definitions', 21.

⁶⁷ Adamson, 'al-Kindi', 66–75; esp. 67–68.

⁶⁸ See Barnes, 'Platonic Lexicon', 296; see also Asper, *Griechische Wissenschaftstexte*, 64–71.

or his circle on the basis of original compositions and available translations, with the qualification that some of its versions have incorporated later material that does not belong to this initial production process. Still, the purpose and structure of *On Definitions* has so far remained elusive. Its three versions prompt questions concerning the extent to which the supposed original text was manipulated by later transmitters. Looking back at the previous discussion, what can our findings tell us about *On Definitions* and the textual practices from which its three versions emerged?

Our survey of the manuscript evidence has shown that all three versions were copied as textual units; that is, the shape of the text in our manuscript witnesses does not owe itself to the selection of the respective scribe, though this cannot be excluded for the manuscripts from which they themselves copied. *On Definitions* was transmitted together with other Kindian texts at the latest in the sixth/twelfth century and explicitly ascribed to al-Kindī in two versions. It was integrated into collections of scientific and philosophical works. Since al-Kindī was a prolific writer on matters of astronomy/astrology, we find *On Definitions* in two collections that display a strong interest in these disciplines. Hence, the manuscript evidence gives us some clues as to the interests of the premodern readers of *On Definitions*: they were largely concerned with mathematics (including astronomy/astrology) and philosophy; some may have come across the text while trying to collect al-Kindī's writings; others were interested more generally in texts on scientific and philosophical terminology.

The scribes of the three manuscripts employed very common methods to enhance the text's visual structure, either by means of paragraph marks or blank spaces. This was certainly necessary in order to more easily navigate the text. Paragraph marks would have allowed the readers to find at least the beginnings of the respective entries. One of the users of MS Lisbon used red underlining, facilitating even more a reading practice that must have consisted in looking up certain units of information. This suggests that the text was in fact used as some sort of reference work—that is, that it was used as a discrete or discontinuous text, to use Asper's terminology. On the other hand, *On Definitions* is not a comfortably usable reference work, since it can be hard to find the term that is being sought and some terms have more than one definition in disparate places. Further, some subunits within the lists must be read as continuous text, calling for a different reading practice.

The fact that *On Definitions* indicates different approaches to reading certainly has to do with the stratified nature of its textual genesis. We have seen that there are clear signs of editorial intervention. Earlier transmitters of the text seem to have understood it not so much as a reference work, but as a sort of notebook, a list that takes stock of philosophically interesting items, which could be supplemented as needed. *On Definitions* functioned as a premodern database, which went through different updates in the course of its transmission. Both the editorial phrases and textual additions of prolonged definitions as well as the definitions that came from other identifiable sources testify

to this use of *On Definitions*. With these additions and modifications, it was not only the shape of the text of *On Definitions* that evolved over time. Its meaning as a text evolved as well, especially as far as it depended on the use made of it.

For comparable lists of definitions, like those mentioned at the beginning of this study, authors penned introductions, which could serve as a sort of user manual. Such introductory texts could specify the purpose and use of the list and provide a closed theoretical frame for it. This task was neither achieved nor apparently aimed at for *On Definitions*. The question of what al-Kindī intended with this text cannot be answered, since we do not have an introduction by al-Kindī. It is also wrongly put, since al-Kindī was after all not the sole author of the text. What our material mainly tells us is what the text's users intended to do with it. Theoretical unity is sometimes presupposed by lists, but as something hinted at, made explicit outside the text of the lists themselves (compare Martin Wallraff's deliberations on three-dimensionality in this volume). In other words, certain definitions and sets of definitions do not develop a theoretical framework, but make use of one that could be found, for instance, in the texts from which they were excerpted. The three versions of *On Definitions* were shaped by different agents involved in the compositional process from which they emerged as three distinct historical artefacts. This does not preclude that al-Kindī was involved in this process at some early point as well, but we have no reason to hypothesise that *On Definitions* had a fixed function that could be related to al-Kindī. This also means that *On Definitions* cannot have been an exclusively, nor even predominantly, didactic text.

It is a text that had to serve more than one need in the course of its history. A modern need for ascription—in our case to al-Kindī, the famed first ‘philosopher of the Arabs’—tends to overshadow this characteristically premodern feature.