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Foreword to C. Th. Dimaras Annual Lecture, 2019

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C. TH. DIMARAS ANNUAL LECTURE, 2019

DIMITRI GUTAS

Alternative Facts, Alternative Sciences:
The Development of the Concept
in Medieval Islam and
Its Historical Consequences

SECTION OF NEOHELLENIC RESEARCH
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FOREWORD

Dimitri Gutas is Professor Emeritus of Near Eastern Languages and Civilizations at Yale University, specialising in the languages and the intellectual history they carry in Hellenic civilisation and its successor, Islamic civilisation. His work is based on Greek and Arabic philology, through which he has studied the social and historical contexts of the transmission of knowledge from antiquity to the Middle Ages in the West (of India) and traced the development of the history of philosophy in the Islamic world.

His work on the philology of the transmission of the Greek sciences into Arabic has led to major contributions in lexicography and critical text editions. In lexicography, Prof. Gutas has started and is currently publishing, in international collaboration with Gerhard Endress and Rüdiger Arnzen of Bochum, Germany, and, increasingly, younger colleagues, the acclaimed *A Greek and Arabic Lexicon (GALex): Materials for a Dictionary of the Medieval Arabic Translations from Greek into Arabic* (Brill: Leiden, 1992–), a major contribution to the lexicography of both medieval Arabic and medieval Greek. In editorial work, Prof. Gutas has collaborated for many years with American and European scholars in the collection and publication of the fragments of Theophrastus, a student of Aristotle. In this area he has contributed to the volumes of commentaries on the collected fragments of Theophrastus, and has also published a critical edition, translation and commentary of both the Greek text and the medieval Arabic translation of Theophrastus' *On First Principles* (known as his *Metaphysics*) (Brill: Leiden, 2010). In the same vein he has also published, in collaboration with Leonardo Tarán (Columbia University emeritus professor) the *editio maior* of Aristotle's *Poetics* (Brill: Leiden, 2012). These two publications constitute the first truly critical editions of classical texts that are based on all the manuscript evidence, which includes the lost Greek manuscripts used by the Syriac, Arabic and Latin translators, and have opened new avenues in classical studies, which Prof. Gutas happily sees are now being followed by a younger generation of scholars.

His research on the history of the transmission of knowledge from antiquity to the Islamic world has led to the groundbreaking work that studied the social, political and ideological context of the historical moment that initiated a cultural renaissance both in the medieval Islamic world and, as a consequence, in Europe a few centuries later. His now classic book on the reception of Greek philosophy in medieval Islam, *Greek Thought, Arabic Culture: The Graeco-Arabic*

Translation Movement in Baghdad and Early Abbasid Society (2nd–4th/8th–10th Centuries) (London: Routledge, 1998), has been translated into eight languages: Arabic, French, Greek, Italian, Japanese, Korean, Persian and Turkish. The Greek translation won the 2002 Special Honorary Award for the Study of Civilization, awarded by the Greek Society of Letters. As a contribution to the social history of science, Prof. Gutas is currently engaged in a book-length study on translations from and into Greek, Syriac, Persian, Arabic, Hebrew and Latin from the Hellenistic period to the Renaissance, on which subject and for the same purpose he is also editing a collection of documents on the testimonies of the translators themselves on what motivated their work.

His pioneering research in the transmission of Greek philosophy into Arabic and the subsequent history of philosophy in the Islamic world began with the publication of articles and books such as *Greek Wisdom Literature in Arabic Translation: A Study of the Graeco-Arabic Gnomologia* (New Haven: American Oriental Society, 1975), continued with *Greek Philosophers in the Arabic Tradition* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2000), and culminated with the foundational monograph on Ibn Sīnā (known as Avicenna in the medieval Latin world), *Avicenna and the Aristotelian Tradition: Introduction to Reading Avicenna's Philosophical Works* (Brill: Leiden, 1988; 2nd rev. and enlarged ed., 2014), which opened the field wide and provided new orientations for the study of the subject both in and out of the Islamic world. The book won the World Award for Book of the Year in Iranian Studies (2015), awarded by the Ministry of Culture of the Islamic Republic of Iran. Prof. Gutas' recent publications in this area also include articles on the progression of philosophy and its fate both in Islam and in the Eastern Roman Empire (Byzantium) with the development of the intellectual field characterised as “paraphilosophy”, or simulated philosophy and clandestine theologising.

In 2011 the book *Islamic Philosophy, Science, Culture, and Religion: Studies in Honor of Dimitri Gutas* was published by Brill with articles by friends, colleagues and students. Prof. Gutas is an honorary member of Bilim Akademisi (Science Academy) of Turkey and a corresponding member of the Academy of Athens.

In the 2019 C. Th. Dimaras lecture that follows, Prof. Gutas addresses the emergence of alternative mythological facts as reality, and eventually as alternative sciences, in medieval Islam, and the discursive tactics that were used to maintain their dominance over society. He notes that it was possible and politically feasible for the Muslim scientists under the early Abbasids to engage in scientific research; the mythological narrative of Islam at that point was not brought into play at the level of confrontation with scientific reality – if anything, its foremost doctrinal position, the oneness of Allah, was seen to be

demonstrated rationally in the two welcomed disciplines of metaphysics and physics. Prof. Gutas lucidly explains how things progressively and under altered historical circumstances changed to the effect that philosophical and scientific ideas as synthesised by Avicenna were later anathematised as heretical. In other words, the mythological narrative of the Quran was imposed as alternative facts to scientific facts. This constituted the major ideological conflict in Islamic societies in the East after Avicenna, and the ensuing intellectual history is largely a record of the ways in which this conflict played itself out.

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