Language between God and the Poets

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My treatment of maʿnā and haqīqah is consistent throughout: whenever I say, “mental content” in English, the Arabic word is maʿnā, and whenever I say, “accurate,” “accuracy,” or “accurately” in English, the Arabic word is haqīqah. This applies in all contexts. In order to make arguments about translation, I sometimes (as here) use the Arabic words themselves in transliteration.

The full Arabic text for a direct quotation is always given in a footnote. All direct translations are mine and are marked by the presence of quotation marks. Paraphrases are also furnished with the Arabic text in a footnote, a practice that makes the relationship between my periphrastic explanations and the original words of the scholars themselves available for interrogation by readers who know Arabic. For readers who do not know Arabic, the boundaries between paraphrase, interpretation, and explanation will be somewhat blurry. This is an acceptable and inevitable part of any translation process. The inclusion of the original Arabic texts in the footnotes has also allowed me to be more idiomatic in translation, and to more frequently use paraphrase, than might otherwise have been the case. This is particularly true in the translations of poetry, where I have struggled toward a goal of aesthetic impact in English, often at the cost of accuracy, by manipulating the lineation and enjambment.

In all the footnotes, I have provided the page number and line number of Arabic and Persian texts. I have added critical vowelining to the Arabic footnotes and removed any editorial punctuation. Interpolations in square brackets within the Arabic footnote text are my own, unless attributed in parentheses to the editor of the text in question.
There is a general English index, an Arabic index for the text in the footnotes, and a pair of short Arabic indexes for the quotations of poetry.

The transliteration or romanization system used is known colloquially as “ZDMG” and officially as DIN 31635 from the Deutsches Institut für Normung. While this system is heavy on the non-English diacritical marks, it has the advantage of replacing one Arabic letter with one English letter in all cases. Readers who do not know Arabic and are interested in pronouncing these foreign words may like to know that ḫ stands for a guttural kh, š for sh, and that both ʿ and ’ are variants on the glottal stop. The remainder of the diacritical marks are only really important for those who study Arabic and its dialects.

Dates are given in the Gregorian solar calendar, and I have a discussion of this choice in the section of chapter 1, “Contexts,” titled “The Eleventh Century.”