

Al-Farabi's Political Philosophy in the Abbasid Era: A Historical-Contextual Analysis of the Virtuous

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Abstract: This article offers a comprehensive examination of the historical, political, religious, and intellectual factors that shaped the formation of Abu Nasr al-Farabi's philosophy, while also addressing the major issues involved in the contemporary study of his intellectual legacy. The principal aim of the study is to demonstrate that al-Farabi's worldview should not be understood merely as an abstract theoretical system, but rather as an intellectual phenomenon formed within the framework of a concrete historical reality marked by social crisis, religio-ideological conflict, and the wider movement of scholarly translation. From this perspective, the scientific milieu of Baghdad, the crisis of power during the Abbasid era, polemics among religious currents, debates in kalam and fiqh, military and political instability, and processes of cultural synthesis are analyzed as factors that directly influenced the content and structure of al-Farabi's philosophical system. In addition, the article highlights the significance of Arabic primary sources, manuscripts, biobibliographical works, and the classical *tabaqat* tradition in the study of al-Farabi's heritage. The fact that information about al-Farabi is dispersed across a wide range of sources and at times appears in mutually contradictory forms reinforces the importance of source-critical methodology in Farabi studies. In this regard, the article argues that a proper understanding of al-Farabi's philosophy requires not only an examination of his own treatises, but also a parallel consideration of the accounts of Arabic authors who wrote about him, the historical context, the terminological apparatus, and the manuscript tradition. As a result, al-Farabi's philosophy is evaluated both as a rational response to the socio-political crises of his age and as a profound intellectual project concerning the relationship between reason and revelation, philosophy and religion, power and virtue within Islamic civilization.

Keywords: farabi studies, arabic sources, political philosophy, manuscript, islamic philosophy.

INTRODUCTION

Abu Nasr al-Farabi is one of the most outstanding figures not only in the history of Islamic philosophy, but also in the broader intellectual heritage of humanity. His title as the "Second Teacher" is by no means incidental, as he not only transmitted and adapted the legacy of ancient philosophy particularly that of Aristotle and Plato into the Islamic intellectual tradition, but also critically reinterpreted it within a new civilizational context, thereby constructing an original and systematic philosophical framework.

However, it is insufficient to approach al-Farabi's philosophy merely as a body of abstract theoretical doctrines. His intellectual outlook was shaped within a specific historical context characterized by social crises, political instability, intense theological and philosophical debates, and the broader movement of translation and cultural transmission. Therefore, a proper understanding of al-Farabi's philosophy requires a comprehensive analysis that takes into account the environment in which he lived, the intellectual milieu he

engaged with, and the subsequent textual and historiographical traditions through which his legacy has been preserved.

Firstly examined the political, social, and religious factors that influenced the formation of al-Farabi's philosophy, with particular emphasis on the crisis in Baghdad, sectarian conflicts, the rise of military aristocracy, and their impact on his doctrine of the "Virtuous City." Secondly, in contrast, focused on the importance of Arabic primary sources, manuscripts, and biobibliographical literature in the study of al-Farabi's legacy, as well as on the discrepancies concerning the number of his treatises and certain aspects of his biography. Although these themes may initially appear to represent two distinct lines of inquiry, they are in fact deeply interconnected. A thorough understanding of al-Farabi's philosophical system necessitates an awareness of the historical context in which it emerged, while the reconstruction of that context depends fundamentally on reliable sources, particularly Arabic primary materials.

Previous studies on Al-Farabi generally focus on his metaphysical thought, political philosophy, or ethical concepts in isolation. However, limited scholarship specifically examines the relationship between the socio-political crisis of the Abbasid period and the formation of Al-Farabi's philosophical ideas through a historical-contextual and source-critical approach. Therefore, this study seeks to contribute to contemporary Farabi studies by positioning Al-Farabi not merely as an abstract philosopher, but as an intellectual whose ideas were shaped by concrete political instability, sectarian conflict, and intellectual transformation during the Abbasid era.

Accordingly, this article seeks to examine, within a unified analytical framework, both the factors that shaped al-Farabi's philosophical system and the contemporary source-critical challenges associated with its study. Such an approach enables, first, a reassessment of al-Farabi not as a purely abstract thinker, but as a philosopher responding to concrete historical realities; second, a clarification of the methodological significance of engaging with primary sources in the study of his intellectual legacy; and third, an identification of the key challenges and directions in contemporary Farabi scholarship.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Main Part

If we turn to the biography of Al-Farabi, it becomes evident that his profound intellectual curiosity and unwavering pursuit of knowledge led him from Central Asia to the renowned scholarly center of Baghdad. During the medieval period, Baghdad was widely recognized across the world as a major hub of scientific and intellectual activity. The celebrated institution known as the "House of Wisdom" (Bayt al-Ḥikma) functioned as a distinguished center of learning, where scholars gathered from diverse regions to translate works from Greek and Persian into Arabic across various fields of knowledge. Although there is no definitive historical evidence confirming that Al-Farabi himself worked within the House of Wisdom, it is beyond doubt that he lived and developed within this vibrant intellectual milieu. From an early age, he was raised within the framework of Islamic society and was deeply engaged in the study of Islamic sciences from his youth. His writings, including his philosophical treatises and political reflections, consistently demonstrate a reliance on the Qur'an as both a foundational source and an intellectual reference point. Islamic traditions occupied a central and formative role in Arab society, and it was precisely within this context that a dynamic relationship between religion and philosophy emerged. Al-Farabi, in his pursuit of philosophical wisdom, accorded particular importance to prophetic revelation (wahy), integrating it into his broader philosophical system. For him, revelation was not merely a

theological concept, but a fundamental component in understanding the structure of knowledge, truth, and the ideal organization of human society.

As Al-Farabi states: "For a person who seeks to master political science and other disciplines, the most beneficial task is to pay close attention to people's conditions, their circumstances, and the activities they are engaged in. One must reflect on what they have heard, witnessed, or overlooked, and carefully consider their virtues and vices, identifying what is beneficial or harmful to them." (Al-Farabi, 1911). Through this statement, Al-Farabi emphasizes a fundamental methodological principle: in order to fully comprehend the philosophy of any thinker, one must give primary attention to the historical, political, and social context in which that thinker lived. His argument suggests that philosophical thought cannot be adequately understood in abstraction from its environment; rather, it is deeply conditioned by the realities of its time.

The rationale behind this perspective lies in the fact that a philosopher's political orientation plays a decisive role in shaping and defining his intellectual outlook. In other words, philosophical positions are not static or isolated constructs; they evolve in close relation to political philosophy and the broader socio-political framework. Consequently, a thinker's philosophical views are often a reflection of, and response to, the political conditions and ideological currents of his era. The city of Baghdad served as the principal cultural and intellectual center that nourished the development of Al-Farabi. It was in this environment that he reached the peak of his intellectual and philosophical maturity, spending approximately two decades of his life there. There is little doubt that Baghdad, as a major intellectual hub of its time, played a decisive role in shaping the philosophical formation of this thinker.

Although Baghdad had once been the capital of a vast empire, by the 10th century its political significance had diminished, and it had effectively become the center of a relatively limited region within Iraq. Apart from serving as the residence of the caliph, maintaining administrative functions, and sustaining certain cultural connections, Baghdad no longer differed significantly from other cities that had attained the status of independent capitals following their separation from the Abbasid Caliphate.

It is plausible that this very political and economic decline of Baghdad contributed to Al-Farabi's conviction that a virtuous individual cannot remain in a state governed by corrupt political structures. This idea may have influenced his decision to leave in search of a more ideal and virtuous society. Likewise, his move to the court of Sayf al-Dawla can be interpreted as an attempt to realize the concept of the "virtuous ruler" (*al-ra'īs al-fāḍil*), a central element in his theory of the "Virtuous City."

METHOD

This study employs a qualitative approach using historical-contextual and source-critical methods. The historical-contextual approach is used to examine the socio-political conditions of the Abbasid era that influenced the development of Al-Farabi's philosophical thought. Meanwhile, the source-critical approach is applied to evaluate the reliability, transmission, and intellectual context of both primary and secondary sources related to Al-Farabi.

Primary sources in this study include Al-Farabi's major philosophical works, classical Arabic biographical literature, and medieval Islamic historical sources. Secondary sources consist of contemporary scholarship on Islamic political philosophy, Abbasid history, and manuscript traditions. Source selection was conducted based on relevance, historical

proximity, and scholarly credibility. Source criticism was carried out by comparing various historical narrations, examining manuscript traditions, and identifying possible ideological or political biases within classical sources. Through this method, the study seeks to construct a more critical understanding of Al-Farabi's intellectual formation and philosophical development within the socio-political realities of his era.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Political Instability, Military Aristocracy, and the Historical Foundations of the "Virtuous City"

During Al-Farabi's lifetime in Baghdad, it is possible to identify three major factors that significantly influenced his philosophical, political, and metaphysical outlook. These influences are clearly reflected in his work *"The Opinions of the Inhabitants of the Virtuous City."* First, the city was marked by intense juridical and theological disputes, particularly within the domains of fiqh and kalām (doctrinal theology). Second, Baghdad experienced a state of political anarchy, characterized by instability and fragmentation of authority. Third, the period was marked by recurring revolutions and successive uprisings, which further deepened the crisis.

In addition to these factors, the growing dominance of military power and its extensive вмешательство (interference) in the affairs and responsibilities of the caliphate significantly contributed to the weakening of the state. The increasing militarization of governance not only undermined political stability but also reshaped the structure of authority, further distancing it from its original institutional and ideological foundations.

In the 4th century AH, the city of Baghdad became a major arena of intense confrontation between Shi'ite groups and adherents of the Hanbali school. Within Baghdad, two principal Shi'ite centers played a particularly significant role: Bāb al-Tāq on the eastern bank and Bāb al-Karkh on the western bank. Notably, these locations were also of considerable importance to the Hanbali community, thereby transforming them into focal points of sectarian tension and rivalry.

Against this backdrop of religious contestation, the question arises: what was the position and role of Al-Farabi within this environment of theological dispute? Some historians of philosophy argue that Al-Farabi exhibited a degree of proximity to Shi'ite and Isma'ili circles, basing this interpretation on certain elements of his political philosophy. Others, however, maintain that his apparent affinity with Shi'ism should instead be understood as part of his broader intellectual project of synthesis—namely, his effort to harmonize diverse philosophical and religious traditions through interpretation.

This tendency toward synthesis is evident in his engagement with the works of Plato and Aristotle. Moreover, some scholars note that Al-Farabi's writings suggest a conceptual parallel in which figures such as Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle are likened to infallible leaders (ma'şūm imams), thereby elevating them to a quasi-prophetic or authoritative intellectual status (Benaabdelali, 1986).

Although philosophy is often understood as a discipline concerned with differentiation and analytical distinction, Al-Farabi reconceptualized its primary function as one of integration and unification. In his work *Kitāb al-Ḥurūf* ("The Book of Letters"), he asserts that kalām (theological discourse) becomes meaningless if it lacks practical utility or intellectual persuasiveness. Furthermore, even its potentially valuable components lose validity if the methods and approaches employed are not grounded in rationally convincing principles. He continues by explaining that the relationship between kalām and philosophy lies in the

former's role of serving the latter through religion, insofar as philosophy seeks truth through universally valid and demonstrative proofs established from the outset (Al-Farabi, 1970).

Thus, it can be observed that the widespread juridical and theological disputes that characterized Baghdad during this period were often driven by those who adhered to such approaches. These debates, conducted within the frameworks of fiqh and theology, contributed significantly to the emergence of religious and social chaos in the city. Al-Farabi's rejection of these polemical conflicts, and his deliberate distancing from them, played a crucial role in shaping his conception of an ideal political philosophy. His vision of a "perfect" or "virtuous" society was, in many ways, a response to the fragmentation and discord he witnessed, grounded instead in unity, rationality, and philosophical coherence.

The second major factor that significantly influenced the worldview and philosophical outlook of Al-Farabi was the condition of political and social chaos.

During the Abbasid period, the political environment remained unstable for nearly a century, while the influence of external groups entering the social fabric of the caliphate intensified. Importantly, this instability was not solely the result of foreign elements; internal dynamics within Arab society itself also contributed to the crisis. Efforts by Arab political elites to consolidate and strengthen caliphal authority proved insufficient and ultimately unsatisfactory in stabilizing governance.

Within this context, the growing dominance of Turkish forces within the Abbasid Caliphate became a defining feature of the period, lasting approximately a century (232–334 AH / 847–945 CE). A turning point occurred during the reign of Al-Mutawakkil, whose attempts to reinforce his authority resulted in his assassination by a faction closely associated with Turkish military forces. This event marked a clear indication of the increasing political involvement of Turkish commanders.

Following this incident, Turkish military elites began to play an active and decisive role in political affairs, including the selection and deposition of caliphs. Their influence became so extensive that even close relatives of the caliph were not spared if they were perceived as obstacles to their political power. For instance, one notable episode illustrates this extreme level of interference: the personal physician of the caliph's son reportedly carried out an assassination attempt against him merely six months after his accession to the throne (Al-Farabi, 2002).

Following the death of Al-Muntasir, power passed to one of the sons of Al-Mu'tasim, resulting in the accession of Al-Musta'in to the throne. With his rise, the influence of Turkish military forces within the political structure of the Abbasid state increased even further.

An analysis of these developments allows us to assess the extent of Turkish power during this period. The authority of the caliph had effectively lost its real influence, while actual control was concentrated in the hands of Turkish military commanders. They held decisive power over the army, financial resources, and key elements of the administrative system. In essence, the caliphate was reduced to a symbolic institution, while governance was exercised by military elites.

Rumors regarding the possible deposition of Caliph al-Musta'in and the direct assumption of power by Turkish forces circulated even among individuals close to the caliph himself. This atmosphere of uncertainty and political maneuvering ultimately contributed to the transfer of power to Al-Mu'tazz.

A telling example of the prevailing instability can be found in an account of a gathering attended by high-ranking officials close to the caliph. During the discussion, the question was raised as to how long the caliphate could continue to exist under such fragile political

conditions. One participant, in a tone of irony, posed a rhetorical question regarding the longevity of caliphal authority, implying that its remaining duration was already known. His remark provoked laughter among those present, yet it simultaneously revealed the depth of political instability and underscored the caliph's increasing dependence on the Turkish elite.

Following the death of Al-Mu'tazz, Al-Muhtadi ascended to the caliphate and attempted to introduce reforms aimed at restoring Arab leadership within the governing system. However, these efforts were perceived as a threat by the Turkish guard, who reacted by opposing the caliph. As a result, al-Muhtadi found himself in an extremely precarious political situation; he was eventually captured and executed.

After his death, Al-Mu'tamid formally assumed the caliphate. In reality, however, effective power rested in the hands of his brother, Al-Muwaffaq. This period was marked by escalating internal tensions and fragmentation. During the reign of al-Mu'tamid, the influence of Turkish military elites reached its peak. The internal division of power was so pronounced that, at times, even women of the harem exerted influence over governance, further exacerbating political instability.

The weakening of the Abbasid Caliphate ultimately led some rulers to declare themselves independent caliphs. For example, Abd al-Rahman III proclaimed himself caliph in al-Andalus, adopting the title *Amīr al-Mu'minīn* ("Commander of the Faithful"). The decline of caliphal authority reduced the institution to little more than a symbolic entity, while real power was concentrated in the hands of military commanders and viziers.

From the perspective of Al-Farabi, this period can be understood as a profound political crisis, one that significantly influenced the formation of his concept of the "Virtuous City." Despite living through such turbulent conditions, Al-Farabi did not directly engage in political activity. His biography suggests that he preferred an ascetic lifestyle and valued solitude. Unlike his later disciple Ibn Sina, he remained largely detached from the internal processes of state affairs.

Nevertheless, although Al-Farabi did not participate in politics in a conventional sense, he maintained connections with certain political leaders. Importantly, these relationships were not political in nature but rather intellectual, reflecting his role as a philosopher whose engagement with power was mediated through ideas rather than direct governance. With the beginning of the 4th century AH, Baghdad witnessed a series of revolutions and successive uprisings that further destabilized the socio-political order. In addition to the previously mentioned religious conflicts, another form of violent confrontation emerged—namely, a deepening social conflict between landowners and merchants on the one hand, and workers and peasants on the other. For instance, in 306 AH, prisoners staged a rebellion, while members of the Hashimite group, dissatisfied with delays in their wages, appealed to 'Alī ibn 'Īsā for assistance. In response, Al-Muqtadir ordered their arrest. By 308 AH, the situation had deteriorated significantly. On a Friday, unrest reached such a level that congregants obstructed the imam from conducting the prayer, prohibited the service, destroyed pulpits, released prisoners, and set fire to bridges.

The following year, in 309 AH (during the month of Rabī' al-Awwal), large-scale fires broke out in multiple areas, including the Gate of al-Shām, the Nasr market, and the Karkh district, as well as between the newly constructed bridge and the Harran Gate. These events resulted in widespread chaos and destruction, as recorded by Ibn al-Jawzi. As these uprisings became more frequent and sustained, a new type of social force emerged within the city—one that lacked formal organization or centralized leadership and was characterized not by conventional military strength, but by continuous, decentralized unrest. These groups, lacking

structured authority, increasingly positioned themselves in opposition to the ruling power. In response to these growing challenges, Al-Mu'tasim turned to Turkish forces in an effort to establish a specialized and loyal military corps. As a result, Turkish elements began to penetrate the very core of the Abbasid state apparatus, and over time their numbers and influence expanded significantly. By the 4th century AH, Turkish military elites had become fully integrated into positions of power, acquiring the authority to appoint and depose rulers, as well as to engage in political conspiracies.

During the reign of Ar-Radi (322–329 AH), the Abbasid caliphate in Baghdad reached a stage of profound decline. The governmental structure fragmented into multiple emirates, effectively dissolving centralized authority. As a result, the caliphate in Baghdad remained in name only, with little substantive power remaining.

From these developments, it becomes clear that Al-Farabi lived through one of the most turbulent and crisis-ridden periods in the history of the Islamic caliphate. It is precisely within this context that his philosophical project acquires deeper significance. In response to fragmentation, conflict, and instability, Al-Farabi aspired to conceptualize a “perfect” or “virtuous” society in which diverse groups and communities within the Islamic ummah could be united under a coherent and harmonious social and political order.

During the reign of Al-Mu'tasim, a new element—the Turks—was introduced into Muslim society. As noted above, over time this group underwent a significant transformation, evolving from a social stratum into a dominant political force.

By the period following the death of Al-Farabi, Abbasid society witnessed the emergence of religious groups that increasingly functioned as carriers of political ideologies. This development was closely linked to the rise of rival claimants who declared themselves independent caliphs. The Kharijites and various heterodox movements openly opposed established authority and traditional governance structures. Meanwhile, the Mu'tazilites sought to expand their influence through a rationalist approach to theology.

The resulting intellectual and doctrinal disputes among competing religious schools contributed not only to the formation of Sunni theological traditions but also to the broader development of Islamic philosophy. These debates created an environment in which theological reflection and philosophical inquiry became deeply intertwined.

The Ismailis, in contrast, chose not to engage in direct confrontation with the Abbasid Caliphate. Instead, they strengthened their ideological and political influence through systematic propagation (da'wa) among the population. They established centers in distant regions, thereby expanding their network beyond the immediate reach of Abbasid authority. One of the most significant centers of Ismaili activity was located in Salamiyya, in the region of al-Shām (Greater Syria).

A key figure in the spread of Ismailism was Maymun al-Qaddah, who actively promoted Ismaili doctrine while presenting himself outwardly as an ordinary merchant or tradesman. However, the foundational architect of Ismaili ideology is generally considered to be Abdullah ibn Maymun, who selected Ahvaz (in southwestern Iran) as a strategic center for disseminating his teachings.

To evade Abbasid repression, the Ismailis conducted their activities with a high degree of secrecy. After the death of Abdullah ibn Maymun, his mission was continued by his followers, among whom Hamdan Qarmat played a particularly influential role in further expanding the movement's ideological and organizational reach.

In 269 AH, Abdullah al-Mahdi established the Fatimid state, which soon became one of the principal centers of Shi'ite authority. During this period, the Abbasid

Caliphate experienced profound ideological conflicts. In particular, disputes between the traditional *Ahl al-Sunna wa al-Jama'ā* and reformist theological currents gave rise to a variety of religious movements and intellectual trends.

One of the most significant and contentious issues concerned the question of the createdness of the Qur'an. The theologians of kalām especially the Mu'tazilites argued that the Qur'an was created, whereas traditionalist scholars firmly rejected this position, maintaining its uncreated and eternal nature. This debate reached its peak during the reign of Al-Mu'tasim, who is known to have supported the Mu'tazilite doctrine. Consequently, those who opposed the notion of the created Qur'an were subjected to persecution. A notable example is Ahmad ibn Hanbal, who was imprisoned for refusing to accept this doctrine.

In the second phase of the Abbasid Caliphate, the intellectual influence of ancient Greek philosophers began to exert a significant impact on Muslim society, particularly in the realm of philosophy. This development led to a division among Muslim scholars into two broad camps. One group embraced philosophy and sought to reconcile it with Islamic belief, while the other rejected philosophical influences, viewing them as a potential threat to religious doctrine.

The growing influence of the Ash'ari school contributed to the decline of Mu'tazilite dominance. Abu al-Hasan al-Ash'ari, having abandoned Mu'tazilite theology, established a new doctrinal framework aligned with Sunni theological principles. His followers strongly criticized the Mu'tazilites, and by around 300 AH, tensions escalated into armed conflict. Under the influence of the Ash'arites, Mu'tazilites were subjected to repression, and their leading scholars faced persecution.

As a result of recurring crises that posed serious threats to state stability, as well as the need to address newly emerging challenges, the Abbasid state was compelled to rely increasingly on external military forces. As previously noted, Al-Mu'tasim had already turned to Turkish forces to establish a personal army, a decision that would have long-lasting consequences for the political structure of the caliphate.

This situation, in turn, compelled Al-Mu'tasim to rely even more heavily on Turkish military forces as a primary source of support. At that time, the state was forced to confront the rebellion of Babak Khorramdin, while simultaneously facing external threats from the Byzantine Empire along its frontiers. In addition, unrest among the populations of Syria (al-Shām) and Egypt further exacerbated the internal instability of the caliphate. Although the Turks were widely recognized in the Islamic world for their bravery and military prowess, they lacked the capacity to administer the state effectively in its entirety. Nevertheless, over time, the influence of Turkish forces alongside other groups continued to expand. By the time of Al-Farabi, they had evolved into a dominant military aristocracy, controlling all major mechanisms of political power.

Al-Farabi regarded this militarization of governance as one of the principal causes of the decline of the state. This perspective may explain why, in his model of the "Virtuous City," he did not assign a central or decisive role to military power. Indeed, he did not consider many existing cities to be truly "virtuous." His clear rejection of military dominance is therefore not surprising, as he had personally witnessed the consequences of military supremacy and the destructive struggle for power that it produced within society. Furthermore, Al-Farabi directly observed the *ضعف* (weakness) of central authority, its detachment from religious legitimacy namely, from the principles of shari'ah and its increasing dependence on a military aristocracy. As a result, he recognized the immense difficulty of restoring the caliphate to its former strength and establishing a stable and effective system of governance. Nevertheless,

he maintained that the true solution lay, first and foremost, in the unification of political authority and the elimination of tyranny. Equally important was the need to harmonize divergent viewpoints and to construct a coherent system of belief grounded not merely in subjective opinion, but in demonstrative and rational proof. In his view, reliance solely on polemics and disputation cannot achieve genuine unity; on the contrary, such methods fragment society into sects and factions, thereby rendering the realization of a “virtuous city” nearly impossible. For this reason, Al-Farabi emphasized the necessity of turning to philosophical reasoning and wisdom as the only viable foundation for achieving intellectual unity, political stability, and an ideal social order (Benaabdelali, 1986).

The Decisive Importance of Arabic Sources in the Study of al-Farabi’s Legacy

Undoubtedly, Al-Farabi’s writings have made a profound contribution to the development of science and philosophy. It is widely acknowledged that he is one of the greatest figures of the Kazakh intellectual heritage. For this reason, translating his works from their original language into Kazakh entails a high degree of scholarly responsibility. Al-Farabi’s treatises were primarily written in Arabic, and the process of translating them into Kazakh has been ongoing since the Soviet period and continues to the present day. Such translation efforts require highly qualified specialists in the Arabic language. There exists a substantial body of academic literature devoted to Al-Farabi, his works, and his intellectual contributions. It is commonly noted that he mastered more than seventy languages; however, his surviving works are written in Arabic. References to Al-Farabi can be found in diverse sources, including biographical dictionaries of physicians, historical works on ancient cities and civilizations, and studies of Islamic philosophers. A close examination of these Arabic-language sources reveals that the information about Al-Farabi is often presented in varying forms and narrative sequences. For scholars engaged in the study of Islamic history and civilization particularly specialists in Farabi studies the ability to identify and critically analyze differences and peculiarities within Arabic-language sources is of paramount importance. The Farabi scholar Akhyn Kassymzhanov emphasizes that “to understand Al-Farabi as a spiritual enlightener of humanity is to grasp the very essence of his творчество (creative legacy).” He further notes that Farabi studies emerged as a distinct field in global scholarship in the second half of the nineteenth century and began to develop in Kazakhstan from the 1970s onward. According to him, the importance of studying Al-Farabi’s contribution to world culture and science was first substantiated by foreign scholars such as George Sarton, D. Berkal, and Alexandre Koyré.

At the same time, the mathematician and Farabi scholar Audanbek Kobesov argues that interest in Al-Farabi’s scientific heritage dates back much earlier. He points out that for over a thousand years, scholars from various parts of the world have continuously studied Al-Farabi’s works. Among them are authors who wrote in Arabic and Persian, such as Ibn al-Nadim (d. 995), al-Bayhaqi (d. 1169), Ibn al-Qifti (d. 1241), and Haji Khalifa (d. 1657); in Latin, figures such as Venica (1484) and Camerarius (1638); in French, Kosegarten (1840); in German, Heinrich Suter (1902); in English, George Sarton (1927); in Turkish, C. Ülken (1950); in Russian, S. N. Grigoryan (1958); in Uzbek, M. Khayrullaev (1963); and in Kazakh, M. Ysqaqov (1967). Thus, he significantly expands the historical scope of Farabi studies and underscores its long-standing and international character (Kobesov, 1968). Divergent scholarly opinions regarding the number of Al-Farabi’s treatises underscore the necessity of a critical examination of Arabic written sources, as well as the continued search for works that remain lost or undiscovered. For example, while some researchers estimate that Al-Farabi authored up to 200 treatises,

other sources suggest that his corpus exceeds one hundred works. These discrepancies highlight the importance of rigorous philological and historiographical analysis within Farabi studies. One of the most significant bibliographical sources is the work of Ismail Pasha al-Babani, entitled *هدية العارفين* (*Hadiyyat al-'Arifin*), in which, in the second volume (p. 39), he lists Al-Farabi's works and records their number as 103, while noting the existence of additional writings beyond those enumerated (Al-Babani, 1955, p. 39). Similarly, Ibn Abi Usaybi'a, in his well-known biographical compendium *عيون الانباء في طبقات الاطباء* (*Uyun al-Anba fi Tabaqat al-Atibba*), provides a list of 113 works attributed to Al-Farabi (Usaybi'a, 1886). In the same vein, Jamil Azm, in his book *عقود الجواهر* (*Uqud al-Jawhar*), presents a biographical account of the philosopher and likewise lists 113 of his works (Azm, 1326). A substantial portion of information about Al-Farabi has been preserved in the writings of Ibn Khallikan. In his renowned work *وفيات الاعيان* (*Wafayat al-Ayan*), he describes Al-Farabi as the greatest among Muslim philosophers, asserting that no one had reached his level in this field (Khallikan, 1977). He also reports that Ibn Sina benefited from Al-Farabi's works and notes that Al-Farabi was born in Turkic lands before later relocating to Baghdad. On page 155 of the same work, Ibn Khallikan records the following statement regarding Al-Farabi's appearance at the court of Sayf al-Dawla: «فدخل عليه وهو بزي الاتراك» indicating that he entered wearing Turkish attire. However, a different account is provided by Ibn al-Ibri in his work *تاريخ مختصر الدول* (*Tarikh Mukhtasar al-Duwal*), where he states: «واقام في كنفه مدة بزي اهل التصوف وقدمه سيف الدولة واكرمه» meaning that Al-Farabi lived for a period in an ascetic manner, wearing Sufi garments, and that upon his arrival, Sayf al-Dawla received him with honor and respect (al-Ibri, 1973). Such variations in Arabic historical and biographical sources demonstrate that a considerable body of information about Al-Farabi remains either insufficiently explored or not fully integrated into contemporary scholarship. This further emphasizes the necessity for systematic and critical engagement with primary Arabic sources in order to reconstruct a more accurate, nuanced, and comprehensive understanding of his intellectual legacy. Depending on whether they are approached from religious, philosophical, or scientific perspectives. Throughout intellectual history, the thinker has been honored with such titles as the "Initiator of the Islamic Renaissance," the "Pinnacle of Islamic Philosophy," and the "Second Teacher," following Aristotle.

For instance, Ismail Pasha al-Babani, in his work *هدية العارفين* (*Hadiyyat al-'Arifin*), describes Al-Farabi as «الحكيم» ("the sage") (Al-Babani, 1955). Likewise, Ahmad al-Alawna, in his biographical compendium *الاعلام* (*al-A'lam*), notes in volume 7 (p. 20) that Al-Farabi is «يعرف بالمعلم الثاني», meaning "he is known as the Second Teacher" (Al-Alawna, 1998). Similarly, Ibn Kathir, in his historical work *البداية والنهاية* (*al-Bidaya wa al-Nihaya*), refers to Al-Farabi as a Turkic philosopher and further characterizes him as a master of musical science, capable of making people laugh, cry, or even fall asleep through his art (vol. 11, p. 224) (Kathir, 1991). At the same time, it is noteworthy that many scholars did not include Al-Farabi in their classical *tabaqat* (biographical classification) works. Such inconsistencies within Arabic-language sources remain a relevant issue in contemporary scholarship. Questions such as who first documented Al-Farabi's biography, and how he was represented in the works of his contemporaries, still require further detailed investigation.

Even the question of his place of birth (فاراب) is subject to varying interpretations in historical sources. For example, the Egyptian scholar Mustafa Abd al-Raziq, in his work *فيلسوف العرب والمعلم الثاني* (*Faylasuf al-Arab wa al-Muallim al-Thani*), devotes a section entitled «المعلم الثاني الفارابي» to this issue, where he writes: «و لم يشذ عن و الفارابي منسوب إلى فاراب. و لا البيهقي في كتابه المخطوط القول بذلك إلا ابن النديم في الفهرست، فإنه يقول: أصله من الفارياب من أرض خراسان، و لا البيهقي في كتابه المخطوط»

في تاريخ الحكماء، فإنه يذكر أن الفارابي من فارياب (تركستان). ولكن النسبة إلى فارياب هي فاريابي. وقد ذكر معجم البلدان أسماء جماعة من الأمة نسبوا إليهما منهم محمد بن يوسف الفاريابي. This passage indicates that Al-Farabi is generally attributed to Farab, although Ibn al-Nadim, in his *الفهرست (al-Fihrist)*, claims that he originated from Faryab in Khurasan. Similarly, al-Bayhaqi, in *تاريخ الحكماء (Tarikh al-Hukama)*, associates him with Faryab (Turkestan). However, as noted, the correct nisba (attribution) to Faryab would be “Faryabi,” and geographical dictionaries such as *معجم البلدان (Mu’jam al-Buldan)* mention individuals bearing that designation, including Muhammad ibn Yusuf al-Faryabi (Abd al-Raziq, 1945). Such discrepancies within Arabic historical sources clearly demonstrate that a substantial body of material related to Al-Farabi remains in need of careful and systematic scholarly investigation.

The Contemporary Scientific Relevance of al-Farabi’s Philosophy

The study of al-Farabi’s intellectual legacy is not driven solely by historical interest. His philosophy remains highly relevant in the contemporary context for several important reasons. First, he proposed a model of governance grounded in reason, education, virtue, and the common good as a response to societal crisis. Such a model acquires particular significance in the face of modern challenges, including ideological polarization, religious radicalization, political populism, and moral disorientation.

Second, al-Farabi did not conceive of religion and philosophy as mutually exclusive or antagonistic domains; rather, he understood them as different epistemological levels through which truth is apprehended. This perspective offers a valuable theoretical framework for contemporary debates within Muslim societies concerning the relationship between religion and rationality, as well as between faith and science.

Third, his concept of the “Virtuous City” provides a moral-intellectual interpretation of the relationship between state and society. In this framework, political authority is not reduced to a purely administrative mechanism, but is understood as a social structure aimed at guiding individuals toward intellectual and moral perfection. The assertion that al-Farabi’s legacy has retained its relevance in addressing contemporary social and political issues requires further elaboration. Indeed, it is neither possible nor appropriate to transpose his ideas mechanically into the modern context. Nevertheless, the fundamental principles underlying his philosophy—justice, rationality, social cohesion, knowledge, moral education, and purposeful leadership—remain universal categories of enduring significance. Furthermore, as emphasized in the second text, Arabic sources play a crucial role in illuminating how al-Farabi’s ideas interacted with the intellectual culture of his own time. This insight is equally important today, as it underscores the necessity of approaching al-Farabi not merely as an object of national pride, but as an active and influential participant in both Islamic and global intellectual history.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the philosophy of Abu Nasr al-Farabi should not be understood as an abstract system detached from its historical context. Rather, it represents a complex civilizational phenomenon that emerged at the intersection of political crisis, religious-intellectual debates, the translation movement, and broader processes of intellectual inquiry within the Islamic world of the 9th–10th centuries. At the core of his philosophy lies the idea of a society that leads humanity toward happiness, a form of leadership that guides society toward perfection, and a rational framework that directs leadership itself toward its proper purpose. These ideas were not formulated in isolation; rather, they constitute an intellectual

response to the historical realities he witnessed, including the rise of military aristocracy, the weakening of political authority, the fragmentation caused by religious conflicts, and the deepening of social inequality.

From this perspective, the study of al-Farabi's philosophy must proceed along two complementary lines. First, his ideas should be interpreted within their historical, political, and religious contexts. Second, the sources through which these ideas have been transmitted must be critically examined in terms of their nature, reliability, and textual tradition. Only such an integrated approach can ensure a genuinely scholarly understanding of al-Farabi's legacy. Ultimately, al-Farabi is not merely a thinker of the past; he remains a profound intellectual guide for contemporary reflections on reason and virtue, knowledge and society, and the relationship between philosophy and religion. Therefore, the study of his philosophy is not only an exploration of a historical figure, but also a meaningful pathway toward addressing fundamental questions of modern civilization.

Academically, this research contributes to contemporary Islamic philosophy by emphasizing the importance of contextual and manuscript-based approaches in understanding classical Muslim thinkers. Furthermore, the study highlights the relevance of Al-Farabi's political philosophy for contemporary discussions concerning governance, ethical leadership, and the relationship between religion and political authority in modern Muslim societies.

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