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#### Cover

Mašhad, Kitābhāna-i Āsitān-i Quds-i Raḍawī 300, f. 1v  
Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, grec 1853, f. 186v

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I. Hadot, *Athenian and Alexandrian Neoplatonism and the Harmonization of Aristotle and Plato*, translated by M. Chase, Brill, Leiden – Boston 2015 (Studies in Platonism, Neoplatonism, and the Platonic Tradition, 18), x + 188 pp.

The topic of the harmony of Plato and Aristotle in late Antiquity has attracted much attention in recent scholarship. A volume revolving around it was published in 2006 by George Karamanolis,<sup>1</sup> and the late antique view that was phrased by Boethius as *Aristotelis Platonisque sententias in unam quodammodo revocare concordiam*<sup>2</sup> is dealt with in almost all the overviews of philosophy between the Imperial Age and what we call today the Middle Ages, be they historical or systematic.<sup>3</sup> There is general agreement in scholarship on the idea that, as Karamanolis puts it, “(...) the Platonists who did study Aristotle regarded him as being neither systematically nor radically in conflict with Plato. In fact, it turns out that the majority of Platonists in this era shared the view that Aristotle’s philosophy, when understood in the right spirit, is essentially compatible with Plato’s doctrine, as they interpreted it. Platonists actually maintained that the core of Aristotle’s philosophy both supports and complements Plato’s philosophy, and this, they argued, was not accidental”.<sup>4</sup> To the establishment of this opinion the A. of the book under review has significantly contributed in previous studies,<sup>5</sup> and one may wonder why she decided to come back once again to the same topic. As the A. says in the *Preface*, her aim is on the one hand to proceed chronologically, taking as her starting point the philosopher with whom Karamanolis’ book ends, Porphyry; on the other hand, the main scope the A. sets for herself is to argue against some opinions on the issue at hand that are “still widespread” in scholarship, and against which she “protest[s]” (p. ix).

<sup>1</sup> G.E. Karamanolis, *Plato and Aristotle in Agreement? Platonists on Aristotle from Antiochus to Porphyry*, Clarendon Press, Oxford 2006 (Oxford Philosophical Monographs).

<sup>2</sup> *Boethii In De Interpret. ed. II*, II, prolog., p. 80.1-2 Meiser, quoted in the book under review at p. 41; see also M. Zambon, “*Aristotelis Platonisque sententias in unam revocare concordiam*. Il progetto filosofico boeziano e le sue fonti”, *Medioevo* 28 (2003), pp. 17-49. This study is not taken into account by the A.

<sup>3</sup> Some recent examples include L.P. Gerson, “The Harmony of Aristotle and Plato according to Neoplatonism”, in H. Tarrant - D. Baltzly (eds.), *Reading Plato in Antiquity*, London 2006, pp. 195-221; R. Chiaradonna, “Platonismo e aristotelismo”, in R. Chiaradonna (ed.), *Filosofia tardoantica*, Carocci, Roma 2012 (Frecce, 132), pp. 85-101; D. Blank, “Ammonius Hermeiou and his School”, in L.P. Gerson (ed.), *The Cambridge History of Philosophy in Late Antiquity*, Cambridge U.P., Cambridge 2010, pp. 654-66; H. Baltussen, “Aristotelian Commentary Tradition”, in P. Remes - S. Slaveva Griffin (eds.), *The Routledge Handbook of Neoplatonism*, Routledge, London - New York 2014 (Routledge Handbooks in Philosophy), pp. 106-14 (this volume is reviewed below, pp. 399-407).

<sup>4</sup> Karamanolis, *Plato and Aristotle in Agreement?*, p. 3.

<sup>5</sup> In her *Le problème du néoplatonisme alexandrin. Hiéroclès et Simplicius*, Études Augustiniennes, Paris 1976, esp. pp. 147-58, the A. limited herself to present the tendency to include the Aristotelian *metriopatheia* and the Stoic *apatheia* within the framework of the Platonic ethical doctrine, as structured chiefly by Porphyry, and as attested in Simplicius’ commentary on Epictetus. Afterwards, she extended this pattern to a wide range of subjects covering logic, psychology, metaphysics and theology, and to the whole of the Neoplatonic philosophers, with the sole if notable exception of Plotinus. The studies she contributed to the subject broadly speaking are listed at pp. 180-2. The most representative of the A.’s position on this specific issue are the following: “Les Introductions aux commentaires exégétiques chez les auteurs néoplatoniciens et les auteurs chrétiens”, in *Les règles de l’interprétation*, pp. 99-122 (also in: *Simplicius. Commentaire sur les Catégories, fasc. I*, par I. Hadot, P. Hadot, Ph. Hoffmann, C. Luna, Brill, Leiden - New York - København - Köln 1990, [Philosophia Antiqua, 50], pp. 21-47); “Deuxième point du premier schéma introductif. La division néoplatonicienne des écrits d’Aristote”, in *Simplicius. Commentaire sur les Catégories*, pp. 63-93; “The Role of the Commentaries on Aristotle in the Teaching of Philosophy according to the Prefaces of the Neoplatonic Commentaries on the *Categories*”, *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy* Supplementary Volume *Aristotle and the Later Tradition* (1991), pp. 175-89.

The book falls into two main parts: an *Introduction* (pp. 1-53) and a survey of the positions held by Porphyry, Iamblichus, Themistius, Plutarch of Athens, Hierocles of Alexandria, Macrobius, Hermias of Alexandria, Proclus, Ammonius Hermeiou and his pupils, Damascius, Simplicius, and Priscianus of Lydia (pp. 54-172). This survey is complemented by an *Epilogue* (pp. 173-5). There is a *Bibliographical Index* (pp. 177-88), but no index of names.

In this study two questions are interwoven that, as germane as they may be, should be kept distinct for the sake of clarity: on the one hand, that of the spread in late ancient philosophy of the idea that Plato and Aristotle agreed on most important issues, and on the other that of unanimity versus difference, with special emphasis on the religious allegiance, among the Neoplatonic schools that flourished around the Mediterranean sea at the end of Antiquity. The close relationship that the A. sees between the two questions is stated as follows: "Closely linked to the problematic of the harmonizing tendency is the question of whether there exists a general, striking difference between the theologies and religious practices of the Neoplatonists teaching at Alexandria and those who were professors at Athens. I will answer this question in the negative" (p. x). Working with the assumption that there is such a close link between the religious commitment of late ancient philosophers and their attitude towards Aristotle, the A. embarks first on arguing that the Neoplatonists of Alexandria, from Theon to Ammonius and his pupils, were as pious as the Neoplatonists of Athens. To this end, examples are quoted from the works of, or testimonies about Hierocles, Synesius of Cyrene, Hermias of Alexandria, and the teachers of the school of Horapollon: Isidore, Asclepiodotus and Heraiscus. The conclusion drawn by the A. is that "the pagan milieu at Alexandria, with its mixture of ancestral religiosity transcended by Neoplatonic philosophy" is "quite similar to the milieu of the pagan Athenian philosophers, except, perhaps, that the Egyptian element was even more prominent in Alexandria than at Athens" (p. 12). It is with Ammonius son of Hermias (d. between 517 and 526 AD) that the problems arise, because in his own school of philosophy the towering author was famously Aristotle; the A. contends that this does not imply any difference with the school of Athens which, in approximately the same period, had Plato's dialogues as its main focus.

The relationship between the issue of the religious commitment of the Neoplatonists of the two schools and that of the prevailing focus on Plato (Athens) or Aristotle (Alexandria) was established in two foundational studies by Karl Praechter dating from the beginning of the past century.<sup>6</sup> Praechter saw a relationship between the different attitudes towards theurgy in Athens and Alexandria on the one hand, and the respective different attitudes towards Aristotle on the other. In his opinion, the Neoplatonic school of Athens was strongly committed to the theology of late paganism, hence its emphasis on Plato's dialogues – in particular the *Timaeus* and *Parmenides*, both commented upon by Proclus in a theological vein, namely as providing the foundations for polytheism; on the contrary, the school of Alexandria, with its focus on Aristotle's logic, was more apt to coexist with the ruling Christianity. Being engaged against Praechter's reconstruction since the first book she devoted to the subject,<sup>7</sup> the A. assumes also in the book under review that establishing Ammonius' strong commitment to the pagan religiosity of the *Orphic Hymns* and the *Chaldaean Oracles* is tantamount to establishing that his metaphysics and theology did not part company with those typical of the school of Athens, notwithstanding the fact that his scholarly activity focussed on Aristotle.

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<sup>6</sup> K. Praechter, "Richtungen und Schulen im Neuplatonismus", in *Genethliakon K. Robert* (1910), pp. 105-56, reprinted in *Kleine Schriften*, G. Olms Verlag, Hildesheim 1973, pp. 165-216; Id., "Christlich-neuplatonische Beziehungen", *Byzantinische Zeitschrift* 21 (1912), pp. 1-27, repr. *ibid.*, pp. 138-64.

<sup>7</sup> See above, n. 5.

A reader who is not acquainted with the historiographical quarrel I have alluded to may find it difficult to understand the argument advanced at pp. 13-14. First the A. states that Ammonius' religiosity was in line with that which was practised at Athens: "Since his childhood in Alexandria, therefore, Ammonius had bathed in the atmosphere of theurgy, an atmosphere that his studies under Proclus at Athens certainly did not make him forget, and upon his return to Alexandria he found himself once again among colleagues who (...) were all filled with the syncretism and religiosity typical of late Neoplatonism" (p. 13). Then, the position of those who see a difference between the Athenian and Alexandrian versions of Neoplatonism is presented: "Yet it is essentially on the basis of the person of Ammonius and of the members of his school (...) that the hypothesis has been constructed that there exists a profound difference between the Alexandrian and the Athenian school" (*ibid.*). The discussion of Ammonius' doctrinal position is deferred until the second part of the book, but the A. deems it necessary to establish from the outset that "all we possess by Ammonius and the members of his school, except for Olympiodorus, are commentaries on treatises belonging to the preparatory Aristotelian cursus which, since Porphyry, preceded the Platonic cycle of Neoplatonic studies. (...) We should not be surprised, given the content of the texts to be commented, that his commentaries, and those of his school that deal with the logical treatises of Aristotle, do not quote either the *Chaldaean Oracles* or the *Orphica*, contrary to what happens in the commentaries written by Proclus on Plato's *Timaeus* and *Parmenides*" (pp. 13-14). And indeed, nobody could reasonably be surprised not to find the *Chaldaean Oracles* or the *Orphica* quoted in a commentary, say, on the *Categories*; but the argument advanced by the A. is not that the (hypothetical) pretension to find such texts mentioned in logical commentaries would be preposterous. Rather, the argument consists in assuming that if Ammonius does not show any concern for theological issues in his commentaries on Aristotle's logical works,<sup>8</sup> this is because all the Neoplatonists share in the idea that each work commented upon corresponds to a specific level of the audience. The examples presented in order to account for Ammonius' position are taken from Simplicius, from Iamblichus, and from Olympiodorus (p. 14). Now, it might well be the case that Ammonius did adhere, together with the aforementioned authors, to an overarching conception of philosophy in which Aristotle's logic was seen as the preparatory stage for an advanced cycle of studies focussed on Plato's dialogues read in the theological manner that features in Proclus. However, none of Ammonius' works on Plato that are occasionally referred to by his contemporaries<sup>9</sup> is available to be checked, neither do we have statements on Ammonius' part that elicit the A.'s reconstruction. Therefore, that he shared in the conviction summarized above is precisely the point that should be demonstrated, and it is

<sup>8</sup> The only one which is penned by Ammonius himself is that on the *De Interpretatione*, whereas the courses Ammonius taught on Porphyry's *Isagoge* and on Aristotle's *Categories* and *Prior Analytics I* were published ἀπὸ φωνῆς Ἀμμωνίου by anonymous students, and that on *Metaphysics A-Z* by Asclepius of Tralle: cf. Blank, "Ammonius Hermeiou and his School" (quoted above, n. 1), pp. 661-2. Philoponus' commentaries on the *Prior* and *Posterior Analytics*, on the *De Gen. Corr.* and on the *De Anima* incorporate substantial parts of Ammonius' courses, as is made clear by the titles themselves: for instance, that of Philoponus' *In An. Post.* is entitled Σχολιακαὶ ἀποσημειώσεις ἐκ τῶν συνοουσιῶν Ἀμμωνίου τοῦ Ἑρμείου μετὰ τινῶν ἰδίων ἐπιστάσεων. For more details see G. Giardina, "Philopon (Jean –). Œuvres", in R. Goulet (ed.), *Dictionnaire des Philosophes Antiques*, CNRS-Éditions, Paris 2012, Va = P 164, pp. 467-8 and 473-7.

<sup>9</sup> Ammonius is the author of a lost monograph on *Phaed.* 65 D 5-6 which is mentioned by Olympiodorus, *In Phaed.* 8, § 17.6-7 Westerink; Olympiodorus also says he heard Ammonius commenting upon the *Gorgias* (Olymp., *In Gorg.*, p. 199.8-10 Westerink), and Photius reports that Damascius mentioned Ammonius as "the man who interpreted Plato's books for him, τοῦτον καὶ τῶν Πλατωνικῶν (βιβλίων) ἐξηγητὴν αὐτῷ γεγενῆσθαι Δαμάσκιος ἀναγράφει", *Bibl. Cod.* 181, vol. II, p. 192 Henry = T. III Athanassiadi). Olympiodorus' and Damascius' reports are mentioned by the A., p. 15 and p. 20.

puzzling for the reader to find that this point, instead of being argued for, is taken as a premiss in this argument. The A. says: “We can therefore say, basing ourselves on Damascius and in the absence of other indications, that Ammonius himself probably had a preference for the works of Aristotle (but never to the point of omitting the explanation of Plato’s works). It is also possible, however, that lessons on Aristotle were more in demand among students, who also included Christians. With regard to Olympiodorus, however, by whom we possess commentaries on Aristotle and on Plato, we cannot, owing to a lack of biographical elements, say anything objective about his preferences, either in one sense or the other, and this also holds true for Asclepius, Elias, and David. As we shall see later on, however, *all* these philosophers, including Ammonius, conceived of the Aristotelian cursus as a preparation for the Platonic cursus, and not as a subject of study sufficient in itself” (p. 16, my emphasis). However, the subsequent parts of the book, to which the A. addresses the reader in the relevant footnote (51 of p. 16), do not deal with Ammonius, but with Porphyry, Eugenius (the father of Themistius), Syrianus, and Proclus. All in all, the proof that Ammonius was convinced that Aristotle’s philosophy counted as a preparation for Plato’s consists in the fact that other Neoplatonists, in various places and times, held this position: thus the existence of an underlying uniformity in the Neoplatonic schools – the demonstrandum – is part of the demonstration.<sup>10</sup>

It is the firm conviction of the A. that the only difference between Athenian and Alexandrian Neoplatonism is determined by what one might call the social status of the two groups. “If one leaves aside the constraint exerted by Christians on pagans, beginning with the end of the 5<sup>th</sup> century, and the consequences it had for teaching – a constraint that was much stronger at Alexandria than at Athens –, the only difference between the teaching of Neoplatonic philosophy at Athens and the teaching delivered at Alexandria consists (...) in its organization. The members of the school of Athens, founded by Plutarch of Athens around 400, formed a private community that lived off its own revenue, deriving primarily from donations. The patrimony of these Neoplatonists produced a considerable annual income, so that the professors did not depend on honoraria paid by their students, unlike what happened in Alexandria. (...) The teachers of what is called the ‘School of Alexandria’, by contrast, did not live in a community with their students, and it is an anachronism to say that they occupied a ‘chair in philosophy’ subsidized by the city” (p. 22-3). One may hesitate

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<sup>10</sup> This sort of *petitio principii* reappears also at pp. 31-32, where Proclus’ assessment of the scope of the *Cratylus* and Ammonius’ assessment of that of the *De Interpretatione* are presented as follows: “The difference between the goals that Ammonius and Proclus attribute to Aristotle’s *De Interpretatione* and to Plato’s dialogue *Cratylus* respectively, leaps to the eye, and this difference in goals is closely linked to the place in the order of Neoplatonic studies that the two authors assign to the two works on which they are commenting. In the preparatory Aristotelian cycle (...) the *De Interpretatione* occupies the second place in the first stage (...). The *Cratylus*, in contrast, is situated in the fourth place of the Platonic cycle, and was therefore addressed to much more advanced students (...).” But the fact that both works did belong to one and the same curriculum of Neoplatonic studies in effect both at Athens and at Alexandria is precisely what should be proven. The key passage attesting that such an Aristotelian-Platonic curriculum has been practised is the well-known biographical information provided by Marinus in § 13 of the *Vita Procli* (= pp. 15-16 Saffrey-Segonds-Luna) where we are told that Syrianus taught Proclus the Aristotelian corpus as a preparation to the “greater mysteries” of Platonic philosophy (this passage is commented upon at pp. 103-4). What should be proven in my opinion is that this systematic progression was practised also by Ammonius in Alexandria. A passage by Elias, *In Cat.*, p. 123.9-11 Busse, quoted and commented upon at p. 140, does indeed state that Aristotle’s works count as an introduction to Plato’s; but the issue at hand is whether or not there is reason to say that also in Alexandria the Platonic works were taught in the same vein as in Athens, and the trouble is that there is no evidence that Ammonius did so. He lectured on the *Gorgias* and on the *Phaedo* (see the preceding note), but not on the “theological” dialogues *Timaeus* and *Parmenides*; Olympiodorus, on his part, commented upon the *First Alcibiades*, the *Gorgias*, and the *Phaedo*; there are no commentaries on Plato authored by other disciples of Ammonius.



to take for granted the privileged social status of the philosophers teaching in Athens.<sup>11</sup> Be that as it may, the implication is that the Alexandrian philosophers were less free to teach their doctrines: “This very different status of the Neoplatonic teachers of Alexandria and Athens had consequences: the fact of not being financially independent, as the Neoplatonic teachers of Athens were, and of not being able, for this reason, to limit themselves to dispensing their teaching behind closed doors, in front of a restricted circle of chosen students, made the Neoplatonic teachers of Alexandria, from the end of the 5<sup>th</sup> century, much more vulnerable than their Athenian colleagues to the growing power of the Christians” (p. 25).<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> The learned volume by M. Di Branco, *La città dei filosofi. Storia di Atene da Marco Aurelio a Giustiniano*, Olschki, Firenze 2006 (Civiltà veneziana. Studi, 51), casts some doubts on this: mainly but not exclusively on the basis of *Expositio totius mundi*, a mid-fourth century anonymous work containing a description of late ancient Athens, Di Branco provides a detailed explanation of the economic importance of the students for the city, that is hardly fitting with the idea that the teachers of philosophy were as independent from their audience as they appear to be from the A.’s account quoted above. Di Branco says: “Per l’anonimo autore dell’*Expositio*, la Grecia è un paese in cui il glorioso passato costituisce, in ultima analisi, una risorsa per il presente. L’economia della regione, che la fondazione di Costantinopoli ha ulteriormente impoverito, sottraendole risorse al suo approvvigionamento, è ai limiti della sussistenza: solo Corinto si mantiene attiva in campo commerciale, ma ciò che caratterizza nel complesso l’*Achaia*, *Greciae et Laconiae terra* è la fama *doctrinarum et orationum*, dalla quale dipende la grande fioritura degli *studia* tardoantichi. (...) Le informazioni fornite dall’*Expositio*, proprio per il loro carattere esemplare, sembrano confermare la visione di un’economia ateniese essenzialmente basata sulle attività legate alla sfera ‘scolistica’ (...)” (pp. 61-2). Conversely, the decline of the city is connected to the decline of the *studia*, that occurred during Proclus’ lifetime. The analysis conducted by Di Branco is worth quoting in full: “Il cinquantennio che coincide con lo scolarcato di Proclo (437/8-485 d.C.) ha un’importanza decisiva nella storia di Atene tardoantica: si tratta di un periodo di grandi trasformazioni, che investono massicciamente il tessuto economico, politico e religioso della *polis*, provocando al suo interno mutamenti irreversibili, al punto che non sembra improprio individuare nell’età di Proclo quella forte cesura nella vita cittadina ateniese che erroneamente gli archeologi avevano creduto di cogliere nel momento del sacco erulo. (...) Si è visto come, verso la metà del IV secolo, l’*Expositio totius mundi* individui negli *studia* di retorica la principale fonte di sussistenza di Atene, che – secondo l’anonimo autore del trattato – si differenzia dalle altre regioni della Grecia proprio per la particolarità della sua economia; si è potuta constatare la perfezione organizzativa del ‘sistema scolastico’ ateniese (il cosiddetto *nomos attikós*), la sua lunga durata e la sua adattabilità alle diverse situazioni politiche, grazie alla quale si mantenne pressoché inalterato nonostante i tentativi di limitarne l’autonomia da parte del potere imperiale. Tuttavia tale sistema dovette subire un duro colpo dalla politica culturale di Teodosio II. Questo imperatore (...) istituì una scuola imperiale a Costantinopoli, che prevedeva cattedre di retorica, grammatica, filosofia e discipline giuridiche. (...) Una simile iniziativa ottenne naturalmente l’effetto di sottrarre prestigio, e di conseguenza studenti alle scuole ateniesi, provocando il collasso del sistema (...). Il mancato afflusso nella *polis* ateniese dei capitali connessi all’attività delle scuole, drenati irreversibilmente verso Costantinopoli, determina il crollo dell’economia ateniese, i cui disastrosi effetti sono appunto quelli attribuiti da Frantz a immaginarie incursioni barbariche. La città cambia e si disgrega rapidamente perché è costretta a riorganizzare la propria struttura economica e non è in grado di sostituire il ‘sistema scolastico’ in crisi con un altro tipo di attività, riducendosi a un’economia di pura sussistenza” (pp. 131-2 and 133-4). Thus, even though it is fair to assume that the A.’s claim that the Neoplatonic philosophers were appointed with rich donations is grounded on documentation in the sources, it seems difficult to imagine that the philosophers were not paid by their students. The book under review shows no acquaintance with Di Branco, *La città dei filosofi*.

<sup>12</sup> To this is linked the question of the arrangement made by Ammonius with the Christian authorities at Alexandria, which has attracted much attention in scholarship and which is discussed by the A. at pp. 18-22. A balanced account of this vexed question has been provided by A. Sheppard, “Philosophy and Philosophical Schools”, in A. Cameron-B. Ward-Perkins-M. Whitby (eds.), *The Cambridge Ancient History volume XIV, Late Antiquity Empire and Successors A.D. 425-600*, Cambridge U.P., Cambridge 2000, pp. 835-54, esp. p. 851: “Combining pagan culture with Christianity would be harder for a Neoplatonist philosopher than for a poet or a historian. A Christian poet can comfortably use Homeric motifs or even write a learned poem on Dionysius (if Nonnus was a Christian when he wrote the *Dionysiaca*); a historian like Procopius can avoid committing himself on matters of theology; but a philosopher discussing Aristotle’s *Metaphysics* or Plato’s *Timaeus* has to decide where he stands on the relationship between the creator God, divine Intellect and the One

Thus, the overall picture is that of a complete harmony between the doctrinal positions of the two groups of Neoplatonic philosophers, that however cannot be directly established as to the crucial issues, because only one of the two groups was free to expound all the parts of the common doctrine including the theological developments, while the other, being forcibly more compliant with its audience, kept silent on them. This elicits, in the A.'s view, the reconstruction of a systematic doctrine shared by all the Neoplatonists qua Neoplatonists, with the preparatory part of the curriculum, going from Aristotle's logic to the metaphysics, expounded by the Alexandrian philosophers, and the theological Platonic pinnacle expounded by the Athenians: "of Proclus, we have the good fortune to possess his commentaries on the *Parmenides* and the *Timaeus*, the summum of Platonic theology according to the Neoplatonists, and these commentaries give us complete information on the complexity of the hierarchy of his ontological system concerning the first principles. Most fortunately, we can also read his biography, or rather his hagiography, composed by his disciple Marinus, who gives a good description of his extreme religiosity. We lack all this with regard to Ammonius. The few preserved books of the commentary by his disciple Asclepius on Aristotle's *Metaphysics*, the culmination of the preparatory Aristotelian cycle, merely allow us to say (...) that the ontological doctrine of Asclepius-Ammonius, in the context of the interpretation of this work, is by no means distinct from that of Proclus-Syrianus. In contrast, we have no way of knowing whether he had followed, or would have followed Proclus in all the details of his hierarchical subdivisions of the first principles" (p. 39).

The idea that on the issue of the interpretation of Aristotle's *Metaphysics* there is a complete agreement between Syrianus and Ammonius (in Asclepius' *reportatio*<sup>13</sup>) surfaces also in other parts of the book,<sup>14</sup> and this brings me to the main point of this review. According to the A., it is possible to detect different "degrees" in a sort of scale from a minimum to a maximum of harmonization of Plato and Aristotle that, as we have seen before, was the position shared by the Neoplatonists on this issue. It is not completely clear to me whether the A. intends that this holds true for all the Neoplatonists or only for those taken into account in this book, namely from Porphyry onwards. On the basis of the section devoted to "The meaning of the term 'Harmonization' and its historical background" (pp. 41-51), it seems that in the A.'s opinion all of the philosophers of Platonic allegiance shared in the conviction that there was such a harmony.<sup>15</sup> If so, one wonders what is the position that the A. assigns to Plotinus in this scale from a minimum to a maximum of harmonization, but the point receives no treatment in the book. And indeed, the focus is on the post-Plotinian Neoplatonists; thus, I understand that the claim "The only variant in the whole history of this tendency is the degree of this harmonization, greater or lesser" (p. 65) applies chiefly to them. The question becomes crucial apropos the comparison between Ammonius' and Syrianus' interpretation of the metaphysical doctrine of Aristotle. A section of the book is devoted to the question "Did the tendency of Ammonius' school to harmonize the philosophies of Aristotle and Plato bear a greater resemblance to the intense tendency

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or on the eternity of the world. But if, in a city like Alexandria, pagans and Christians mixed freely and shared a common culture, then we should not be surprised by Ammonius' agreement with the patriarch, the editing of Ammonius' lectures by the Christian Philoponus and Olympiodorus' instruction of Christian pupils. It is the Athenian Neoplatonists, clinging firmly and almost exclusively to pagan tradition, who are the odd ones out".

<sup>13</sup> See above, n. 8.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. p. 28, n. 85; p. 94, n. 113; p. 105.

<sup>15</sup> In the A.'s view, the tendency to harmonize Plato's and Aristotle's views can be traced back to Antiochus of Ascalon: "Following Antiochus, what most Middle Platonists and *all* Neoplatonists did was to interpret Plato with the help of Aristotle and the Stoics, considering the doctrines of the latter two as a prolongation of the teaching of Plato" (p. 49, my emphasis).



of Iamblichus, or to the limited one of Syrianus-Proclus?” (pp. 146-55). The answer is that “Asclepius’ commentary ‘according to the oral classes of Ammonius’ on books A-Z of the *Metaphysics* shows that Ammonius and Asclepius admitted, more often than Syrianus-Proclus, an agreement between the doctrines of Plato and Aristotle. Between the very strong harmonizing tendency of Iamblichus, of Plutarch-Hierocles, and later of the school of Isidorus-Damascius on the one hand, and the much more restrained tendency of Syrianus-Proclus on the other, Ammonius and his school, including David and Elias, are probably situated somewhere in the middle” (p. 153).

It is true that for Syrianus Aristotle held some doctrines that were in agreement with Plato’s: in his eyes both philosophers, at variance with the ancient φυσικοί, acknowledged the transcendent nature of the real causes, even though Aristotle failed to realize that such causes are properly efficient, and not only final. This tenet features in Syrianus’ work on the *Metaphysics*, as remarked by the A.<sup>16</sup> She is obviously aware of the fact that in this same work Syrianus, at variance with Ammonius, takes a clear anti-Aristotelian stance; but she thinks that it is only a question of emphasis put on details whose discussion is out of place in a commentary on the *Metaphysics*. Since Ammonius claims that the scope of this work is to deal with being qua being (*In Metaph.*, p. 2.10-11 Hayduck, commented upon by the A., p. 27), this “excludes, at the same time, the entire divine hierarchy beyond being, and therefore the ὑπερούσιοι such as the One, the henads, etc.” (p. 27). Hence “this generally limited discussion to the ontological level of beings, and prohibited the systematic display of entities surpassing this level, as for instance the Ineffable of Damascius, the One, and the Monad and the Dyad of unlimited power of Syrianus, etc.. I say ‘generally’, for there are books M and N and the second part of book A of the *Metaphysics*, in which Aristotle openly attacks some fundamental Pythagorico-Platonic dogmas concerning the Ideas and the Idea-Numbers, and in this context it became inevitable for any Neoplatonist to mention occasionally, while defending themselves, certain details of their own theology that transcended the level of beings: this is what Syrianus does, as do Asclepius-Ammonius” (*ibid.*). However, the question of the nature of the Platonic Ideas and of Aristotle’s position about them is precisely an ontological one: thus, on this issue the respective positions of Syrianus and Ammonius can be taken into account and compared to one another.<sup>17</sup> If one does so, one realizes how different they are.

In commenting upon the well-known Aristotelian statement that to say that the Forms are paradigms is to use empty words and poetical metaphors (*Metaph.* M 4, 1079 b 23-26), Syrianus affirms:

φανταστῶς γὰρ αὐτῶν ἀκούομεν καὶ μορφωτικῶς· διὸ καὶ δοκοῦσιν αἱ φωναὶ μετενηνέχθαι ἀπὸ τῶν παρ’ ἡμῶν ζωγράφων ἢ τῶν ἄλλων χειροτεχνῶν, ἐπεὶ νοῦν τις δημιουργικὸν ὑποστάτην καὶ αἴτιον τῶν ὄλων ἐνθυμηθεῖς, αὐτῷ τῷ εἶναι κατὰ τὴν αὐτοῦ ιδιότητα τὰ πάντα γεννῶντα καὶ ἀξιῶντα προνοίας ὑποθέμενος, οὐκ ἂν ἐπιζητήσειεν οὔτε τὸ ποιητικὸν αἴτιον τῶν πάντων οὔθ’ ὅπως παράδειγμα λέγομεν εἶναι τὸ ποιῶν καὶ τὰ ἐν αὐτῷ τῆς διακοσμῆσεως. πῶς δὲ καὶ διαρρήδην εἰπόντος τοῦ Πλάτωνος “ἥπερ οὖν νοῦς ἐνούσας ἰδέας ἐν τῷ ὅ ἐστι ζῶν, ὅσαι τε καὶ οἶαι, καθορᾶ, τοσαύτας καὶ τοιαύτας διενόηθη δεῖν καὶ τόδε σχεῖν”, ὡς μηδενὸς τοιούτου ῥηθέντος ἐπιζητεῖ,

<sup>16</sup> Cf. Syr. *In Metaph.*, p. 8.2-11 Kroll; pp. 10.32-11.5 Kroll.

<sup>17</sup> The A. *ibid.*, contends that “We have the commentaries of Syrianus on books M and N, as well as those on books B and Γ, but by Asclepius-Ammonius only the commentaries on books A-Z have been preserved. Except for the case of books B and Γ, this deprives us of the possibility to carry out point-by-point comparisons between these two commentaries”. But this obviously does not prevent the reader from comparing the two authors on the key issues such as the status of intelligible Forms, that are addressed by them repeatedly in their respective works on Aristotle’s *Metaphysics*.

τί τὸ ποιοῦν πρὸς τὸ παράδειγμα· ἔδει γὰρ μὴ κατανωτίζεσθαι τὰ ῥηθέντα σαφῶς, ἀλλ' εἴπερ εἶχε τι πρὸς αὐτὰ λέγειν, μνημονεύσαντα τῆς δόξης τοῖς ἐγχωροῦσιν ἐλέγχους κατ' αὐτῆς χρήσασθαι· ὁ δὲ τοσοῦτον ἀπέχει τοῦ δύνασθαι τι πρὸς τὴν ἀληθῆ τοῦ Πλάτωνος θεωρίαν εἰπεῖν, ὡς ἀναγκάζεσθαι καὶ τε συγχωρῆ καὶ τε ἀπαγορεύη, τὰ αὐτὰ τρόπον ἕτερον ἐκείνῳ φθέγγεσθαι (Syr. *In Metaph.*, p. 117.14-28 Kroll).

Yes, but only if we take the Forms in an impressionistic and literal-minded sense; in that case the expressions seem to be metaphors taken from painters or other craftsmen in this realm of existence, since if someone thinks of a demiurgic Intellect which is creator (*hupostatés*) and cause of all things, postulating that it generates everything by virtue of its very being, in accordance with its own peculiar nature (*idiotés*), and accords it providential care, one would not seek further either the efficient cause of everything or (to understand) in what sense we call the creative agent (*to poioun*) and its contents the paradigm of the ordered world. But how can he, when Plato states explicitly, "According, then, as Intellect perceives Forms existing in the Essential Living Creature, so many and suchlike as exist therein did he determine that this world should also possess", as if nothing of this sort had been said, now rise the question "what is it that creates looking towards the paradigm"?; for he should not just blandly ignore what Plato says, but if he had some objection to make to it, he should have made reference to the doctrine in employing relevant arguments in refutation of it. He, however, is so far from having anything to say against the true theory of Plato as to be compelled willy-nilly to say the same things as him in another way (trans. Dillon-O'Meara).<sup>18</sup>

Let us now turn to Ammonius. In his commentary on *Metaph.* B 2, 997 b 3-5, ὡς μὲν οὖν λέγομεν αἴτια τε καὶ οὐσίας εἶναι καθ' ἑαυτὰς εἴρηται ἐν τοῖς πρώτοις λόγοις περὶ αὐτῶν, Ammonius (in Asclepius' wording) says:

ὡς τοῦ αὐτοῦ διδασκαλείου ὑπάρχων ὁ Ἀριστοτέλης φησὶ τὸ λέγομεν. ἱκανῶς οὖν ἀντίπομεν ἐν τῷ μερίζοντι Α πρὸς τὰς ἰδέας ἐλέγχοντες ὅτι οὔτε ἀριθμούς δυνατὸν λέγειν αὐτὰς οὔτε ἕτερόν τι τοιοῦτο, καὶ ὅσα ἄλλα εἴρηται ἐν ἐκείνοις. καὶ πρὸς πάντα δὲ ἀπελογησάμεθα, ὡς φησιν ὁ ἡμέτερος φιλόσοφος, δεικνύντες ὡς ὅτι αἴτια ὑπάρχουσι τῶν τῆδε. οἱ γὰρ λόγοι οἱ δημιουργικοὶ παρακτικοὶ ὑπάρχουσι τῶν τῆδε καὶ οὐσίαι οὐσαι ἐν τῷ δημιουργῷ· οὔτε γὰρ αὐταὶ καθ' αὐτὰς ὑπάρχουσιν ὡσπερ τὰ αἰσθητά. οὐ γὰρ τοῦτο ἔλεγεν ὁ Πλάτων ὅτι ἀνθρωπὸς τίς ἐστὶν αὐτὸς καθ' αὐτὸν ὑπάρχων ὁ ἔχων ὄνυχας καὶ τρίχας, καὶ ἵππος καὶ ὅσα ἄλλα τοιαῦτα, ἀλλὰ λόγους δημιουργικοὺς ὑπετίθετο ὄντας ἐν τῷ δημιουργῷ, καθ' οὓς λόγους παράγει πάντα ἅπερ παράγει· οὐ γὰρ ἀλόγως ποιεῖ καθάπερ τὰ ἄψυχα. ὁ οὖν Ἀριστοτέλης διαμάχεται τοῖς κακῶς ἐκλαμβάνουσι τὰ τοῦ Πλάτωνος. [...] καὶ πρὸς τούτους μὲν διαμάχεται ὁ Ἀριστοτέλης, ὡς εἴρηται, πρὸς τοὺς λέγοντας εἶναι ἀνθρωπὸν αὐτὸν καθ' αὐτὸν ἐν ὑποστάσει, καὶ οὕτως ἐξ αὐτοῦ παράγεσθαι τὰ ἄλλα, ὁμοίως δὲ καὶ ἐπὶ τῶν ἄλλων. ὁ μέντοι γε Πλάτων, ὡς πολλάκις εἴρηται, οὐ τοῦτο ὑποτίθεται, ἀλλὰ λόγους δημιουργικοὺς εἶναι παρὰ τῷ θεῷ τοῦ ἀνθρώπου καὶ πάντων τῶν γινομένων (Ascl., *In Metaph.*, pp. 166.24-36 and p. 167.21-26 Hayduck).

It is as a pupil of the same school that Aristotle adopts the expression 'we say'. We have therefore already argued sufficiently in book *Alpha meizon*, when we said against the Forms that it is impossible

<sup>18</sup> *Syrianus. On Aristotle Metaphysics 13-14*, transl. by J. Dillon and D. O'Meara, Duckworth, London 2006 (Ancient Commentators on Aristotle), pp. 79-80.

to define them either 'numbers' or anything of the same kind, as well as all the other objections that we raised there. And against all these points we have alleged a defence, as our professor of philosophy says, showing that they are indeed causes of the things of the visible world. And indeed, demiurgical reasons are productive of the things of the visible world and are substances that subsist in the Demiurge: for they by no means subsist in and by themselves, as the things that fall under sense-perception. In fact, Plato did not say that there is a 'man' subsisting in and by himself, provided with nails and hairs, or a horse, or anything of this kind, rather he posited demiurgical reasons having their being in the Demiurge, reasons according to which he produces everything that he produces; indeed, it is not the case that he produces without reason, as inanimate things do. Therefore, it is against those who misunderstand Plato's doctrines that Aristotle is arguing. (...) It is against them that Aristotle is arguing, as we said before, namely against those who maintain that there is a 'man' subsisting in and by himself, and that it is in this way that from him other instances are produced, and analogously in the other cases. But Plato, as we said repeatedly, does not maintain this; rather, he maintains that the demiurgical reasons, both of 'man' and of every other item of the world of coming-to-be, subsist in God.

What the unbiased reader finds in these two passages is on Syrianus' part the assessment that Aristotle completely misunderstood Plato on the issue of the nature of intelligible Forms, and, on Ammonius' part, the assessment that Aristotle did not criticize the Platonic doctrine of Forms in and by itself, but only an erroneous interpretation of it. The difficulty that these two passages raise for the scholars who believe in the complete unanimity of all the Neoplatonic philosophers can hardly be circumvented by demoting this issue to the rank of "details" (pp. 27, 28, 39).

The fact is telling that Ammonius devoted a monograph to argue that Aristotle's Unmoved Mover is not only the final cause of the universe but also its efficient cause, coupled with the fact that in his own commentary on the *Metaphysics* he refers to Syrianus' criticisms against Aristotle (*In Metaph.*, p. 433.9-30, commented upon by the A. at p. 112). Syrianus, as the A. correctly remarks, had criticized Aristotle on this point, and Proclus followed in his footsteps (p. 28 and p. 153, referring to Procl., *In Tim.*, I, pp. 266.21-268.24 Diehl). Ammonius' lost monograph and extant passages show a clear intention to provide his own response to the anti-Aristotelian attack of Syrianus and Proclus, and an evident intention to rehabilitate Aristotle. According to Ammonius, Aristotle was by no means as opposed to Plato as some contend. Now, the philosophers who misunderstood Aristotle's intentions, both on the issue of efficient versus final causality and on that of the nature and place of intelligible Forms, are clearly his *complatonici*<sup>19</sup> Syrianus and Proclus. It was Ammonius who established the curriculum starting from logic and culminating in Aristotle's metaphysics, that has been so deeply studied by the A. in other contributions (see above, n. 5) and also in this book (pp. 126-46); it is in Ammonius' school that Aristotle's theology as expounded primarily in the *De Caelo* became the main issue at stake, as shown by Philoponus' attack and Simplicius' response, thus paving the way for the later, and in the long run prevailing version of the topic of the "harmony between Plato and Aristotle": that in which the unique, transcendent Unmoved Mover became the core of the doctrine of Aristotle, the First Teacher, *al-mu' allim al-awwal*.<sup>20</sup> But this happened first and foremost as a

<sup>19</sup> Cf. A. Della Torre, *Storia dell'Accademia Platonica di Firenze*, Carnesecchi, Firenze 1902 (repr. Bottega d'Erasmus, Torino 1960, 1968<sup>2</sup>), p. 656.

<sup>20</sup> G. Endress, "La 'Concordance entre Platon et Aristote', l'Aristote arabe et l'émancipation de la philosophie en Islam médiéval", in B. Mojsisch - O. Pluta (eds.), *Historia Philosophiae Medii Aevi. Studien zur Geschichte der Philosophie des Mittelalters*, Grüner, Amsterdam - Philadelphia 1991, pp. 237-57.

rectification of the anti-Aristotelian attacks of Syrianus and Proclus, and implied the progressive abandonment of the topic of Aristotle's system of knowledge as a mere preparatory step to Plato's theology. It is true that this idea surfaces here and there in the Alexandrian isagogical literature,<sup>21</sup> but in the main bulk of the literary output of the school – the commentaries on Aristotle – it fades away, and the scene is by now dominated by Aristotle. Not only by Aristotle as the unparalleled teacher of all branches of knowledge, from logic to the natural sciences, from psychology to cosmology, but also by Aristotle as the key author on properly theological issues: the nature and causality of the Unmoved Mover, the eternity and divinity of the cosmos. True, the “theological” dialogues *Timaeus* and *Parmenides* are acknowledged as the pinnacles of the Platonic curriculum also in Alexandria, as attested by the anonymous *Prolegomena*<sup>22</sup> inspired by Iamblichus' canon; but they are no longer commented upon, and there is no evidence of the use of Proclus' commentaries on them on the part of Ammonius or his pupils. Or better, it is fair to say that the decisive test of verifying whether or not the echoes of Proclus' commentaries on the *Timaeus* and *Parmenides* are present in the works of Ammonius, Asclepius, Philoponus, Olympiodorus, David and Elias has not yet been done.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> See above, n. 10.

<sup>22</sup> *Anon. Prolegomena in Platonis philos.*, 26.23-44 Westerink-Trouillard-Segonds.

<sup>23</sup> Instead, the use of Proclus' logical commentaries on Aristotle in the Alexandrian commentaries on the various works of the *Organon* has been documented extensively by C. Luna - A.-Ph. Segonds, “Proclus de Lycie”, in Goulet (ed.), *DPhA*, Vb [2012] = P 292, pp. 1546-657, esp. pp. 1555-62.