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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

J. Lameer, *The Arabic Version of Ṭūsī's Nasirean Ethics*. With an Introduction and Explanatory Notes, Brill, Leiden - Boston 2015 (Islamic Philosophy, Theology and Science. Texts and Studies, 96), IX + 550 pp.; 10 Plates, 34-41 pp.

Arabic versions from Middle Persian were quite numerous in the formative period of Arabic philosophy, namely between the second half of the 8th/2nd and the first half of the 10th/4th century. Gerhard Endress lists, in addition to some *specula principum* and the famous *Kalīla wa-Dimna*,¹ also works of logic,² astronomy, and astrology,³ on the latter topic further research has been provided more recently by Kevin van Bladel.⁴ With this volume by Joep Lameer we are faced with a much later Persian-to-Arabic translation, completed in a span of time between the end of the 13th/7th and the first decades of the 14th/8th century. Now the source language is no longer Middle Persian, rather “New Persian, besides Arabic” (p. 5), and the target language is Middle Arabic, whose typical features as they appear in this translation are described in detail by Lameer (pp. 21-30). The translation was the work of Rukn al-Dīn Muḥammad b. ‘Alī b. Muḥammad Ğurġānī, who was “alive in 728/1327. About his life, not much is known. We do know that at some point in time, he was a student of the famous Shī‘ite theologian al-‘Allāma al-Hillī (d. 726/1326)” (p. 9). The work translated by Rukn al-Dīn Ğurġānī and edited here is Naṣīr al-Dīn Ṭūsī’s *Nasirean Ethics*, *Akhlāq-e Nāṣerī*.⁵

The circumstances of the composition of the *Nasirean Ethics*, described in the Prologue of the work, shed light on its contents:

Persian polymath and statesman Naṣīr al-Dīn Ṭūsī (d. 672/1274) wrote his *Akhlāq-e Nāṣerī* at the beginning of a long and distinguished career. It was composed at the request of Nāṣīr al-Dīn ‘Abd al-Raḥīm b. Abī Maṣnūr (d. 655/1257), Ismaili governor of Quehestan in north eastern Iran, and most likely completed in the year 633/1236. While originally, Ṭūsī had been asked to make a Persian translation of Ibn Miskawayh’s (d. 421/1030) treatise on morals, the *Ṭahdhīb al-akhlāq*, after some reflection he concluded he would never be able to approximate the original Arabic. For this reason, and also because the *Ṭahdhīb al-akhlāq* did not discuss economics or politics the study of which had fallen into neglect by Ṭūsī’s lifetime, he decided to write a compendium comprising all three divisions of practical philosophy. In this way he was able to render the substance of the *Ṭahdhīb al-akhlāq* in the Persian language, at the same time resuscitating two other neglected branches of ethics. The resulting work thus contains an all-inclusive treatment of the moral conduct of man, passing from the micro-level of the individual, through the intermediary of the household and comparable social units, to reach its completion at the level of cities, regions, and states (pp. 1-2).

In other words, what the late 13th or early 14th cent. translation by Rukn al-Dīn Ğurġānī transmitted to the Arabic-speaking world was a Persian reworking of Miskawayh’s *Ṭahdhīb al-akhlāq*, implemented with an extensive treatment of economics and politics. In its turn, the *Ṭahdhīb al-akhlāq* derives from a series of sources that include Graeco-Arabic translations of ethical works dating back to the 9th or early 10th centuries.⁶

¹ G. Endress, “Die wissenschaftliche Literatur”, in H. Gätje (ed.), *Grundriss der Arabischen Philologie II. Literaturwissenschaft*, Reichert, Wiesbaden 1987, pp. 400-530, in part. p. 412 (with reference to earlier literature).

² *Ibid.*, pp. 412-14.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 413.

⁴ K. van Bladel, *The Arabic Hermes. From Pagan Sage to Prophet of Science*, Oxford U.P., Oxford 2009, pp. 27-40; Id., “The Arabic History of Science of Abū Sahl ibn Nawbaḥt (fl. ca. 770-809) and its Middle Persian Sources”, in F. Opwis - D. Reisman (eds.), *Islamic Philosophy, Science, Culture, and Religion*. Studies in Honor of Dimitri Gutas, Brill, Leiden - Boston 2012, pp. 41-62.

⁵ The reference edition of this work, whose “tremendous resonance in the eastern lands of the Islamic world” is recalled in Lameer’s Preface, is M. Minovī - ‘A. Ḥaydarī, *Akhlāq-e Nāṣerī, Neveshte-ye Khwājah Naṣīroddīn Ṭūsī*, Khwārazmī Publishers, Tehran 1387. Further information on this and earlier editions is given at p. 1, n. 3. There is an English translation: *The Nasirean Ethics. Naṣīr ad-Dīn Ṭūsī*, Translated by G.M. Wickens, George Allen & Unwin, London 1964, reprinted Routledge Library Editions Iran, Oxford - New York 2011.

⁶ Among the works possibly forming the background of the *Nasirean Ethics* Lameer (pp. 6-7) lists the Arabic version of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, the *Summa Alexandrinorum* (a compilation of exegetical materials related to the *Nicomachean*

Lameer remarks that although “compilatory in character” the *Akhlāq-e Nāserī* is original in its “comprehensiveness and way of presentation” (p. 2); but even the compilation qua compilation is of great value for those interested in the transmission of philosophical texts, as we shall see below.

Another point of great interest in this volume is the fact that the manuscript through which the translation has come down to us is a *unicum*:

The present edition is based on the sole copy of Jurjānī’s translation to have surfaced to date, which is MS Leiden Or. 582. This manuscript was originally bought by the Dutch diplomat and man of letters Levinus Warner (d. 1665) during his stay in Istanbul in the years 1664-1665. After Warner’s death, all his manuscripts, including MS Or. 582, were legated to Leiden University, where they are since referred to as the *Legatum Warnerianum* (...). The manuscript’s purchase coincides roughly with the years during which Ḥājji Khalifa (= Kātib Çelebi, d. 1068/1657) compiled his famous bibliographical reference work the *Kashf al-zunūn* (1045-1068/1635-1657). Interestingly, Ḥājji Khalifa (who had the habit of mentioning translations whenever these came to his notice) lists the *Akhlāq-e Nāserī* as a Persian work, which can only mean that he knew of no Arabic translation. Although the Leiden manuscript’s place of purchase is unknown (whether Istanbul, Aleppo, or elsewhere), it is certainly tempting to imagine that Ḥājji Khalifa missed it by a hair’s breadth on one of his book-hunting expeditions (pp. 10-11).

This view into the history of the circulation of written documents adds a special charm to the reconstruction of the circulation of ideas, to which the volume under review contributes substantially. What we have here thanks to Rukn al-Dīn Ğurġānī, Levinus Warner, and Joep Lameer, is the translation into Arabic of a Persian work which was in its turn based on another work – Miskawayh’s *Tabḍīb al-ablāq* – rooted in the Graeco-Arabic translations of an earlier date. One may summarise the journey of texts and ideas as follows: Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics* and other sources of different philosophical origins were translated into Arabic in 9th century Baghdad; then, the texts themselves or the ideas conveyed by them travelled to Persia, where they were compiled by Miskawayh between the end of the 10th/4th and the first decades of the 11th/5th cent.; then again, around 1236/633, this work formed the basis of the Persian *Akhlāq-e Nāserī*, “the most celebrated ethical *compendium* to have been written in the history of Islam”, which over the centuries “stimulated an outpouring of summaries, commentaries, popular imitations and adaptations” (p. 2); eventually, a century later, the *Akhlāq-e Nāserī* was translated by Rukn al-Dīn Ğurġānī. The latter’s discipleship with al-‘Allāma al-Ḥillī – himself a pupil of Naṣīr al-Dīn Ṭūsī and a commentator of his works⁷ – places him in the area of Twelver Šī‘a, and his literary output is in Arabic;⁸ thus, one may imagine that the intended readership was that of the school of Ḥilla. Both the intricacies of mixed traditions and Naṣīr al-Dīn Ṭūsī’s purpose to endorse and expand Miskawayh’s *Tabḍīb al-ablāq* make Lameer’s edition a great opportunity to learn.

A table of contents was put by Naṣīr al-Dīn Ṭūsī at the beginning of his work, and features also in the Arabic version: it occupies pp. VIII-IX in Lameer’s edition. The *Nasirean Ethics* falls into three main *Discourses* (*Maqālāt*), respectively on ethics, economics, and politics. The first *Discourse* is subdivided into two main parts, one devoted to the principles of ethical science, and the other to the ends sought in it. The other two branches, economics and politics, do not feature such a subdivision. That the *Nasirean Ethics* is closely dependent upon Miskawayh’s *Tabḍīb al-ablāq* is not only declared by Naṣīr al-Dīn Ṭūsī himself, but also evident on comparison

Ethics whose Greek original is lost and whose Arabic version is only fragmentarily extant, but which is available to us in an Arabic-to-Latin version of the 13th cent.); a “Stoicized paraphrase of Book One (and perhaps also Book Two) of Aristotle’s *Politics*” – on which more later – the so-called *De Virtute*, namely a Neoplatonic text on the grades of virtue embedded in Miskawayh’s *Tabḍīb al-ablāq*; some ethical works by Galen and the latter’s summaries of Plato’s *Republic*, *Laws*, and *Statesman*; finally, Bryson’s *On Man’s Management of his Estate*, which is lost in Greek, but extant in Arabic.

⁷ Cf. S. Schmidtke, *The Theology of al-‘Allāma al-Ḥillī* (d. 726/1325), Klaus Schwarz Verlag, Berlin 1991 (Islamkundliche Untersuchungen, 152).

⁸ The literary output of Rukn al-Dīn Ğurġānī amounts to “more than thirty titles”, as we learn from Lameer, pp. 9-10: the information comes from “an inventory of his writings in his own hand”. As Rukn al-Dīn Ğurġānī declares in the Prologue of the translation of the *Nasirean Ethics*, he translated into Arabic also other works by Naṣīr al-Dīn Ṭūsī.

of the sequence of the chapters in both works.⁹ The comparison shows also that Ṭūsī regularly expands upon topics dealt with in a more synthetic way by Miskawayh.

The *Tabḏīb al-ahlāq* is subdivided into six *Discourses*. The first deals with the principles of ethics (*Mabādi' al-ahlāq*), and occupies some 30 pages in Zurayq's edition, most of them devoted to the definition of the soul;¹⁰ it is echoed in the first section *On Principles (Fī Mabādi')* of the first *Discourse* in the Arabic *Nasirean Ethics*, where it occupies some 90 pages of Lameer's edition.¹¹ The quantitative comparison is of course not a fair one, because the size of both page and script is different in Zurayq's and Lameer's editions, and much space in the latter is taken by the annotation at the bottom of the page; but, inaccurate as it might be, the different extension suggests that Ṭūsī has expanded his treatment with respect to his source. As for Miskawayh's second *Discourse*, on "character" (خُلُقٌ = ḫ̣uḥuq),¹² upon comparison it appears that in the first part Ṭūsī describes "character" and its education, as well as virtues and their grades, in the same way as Miskawayh. After this point, however, he parts company with the latter. In Miskawayh we find here an excursus entitled "A section on the education of the young, and of boys in particular, most of which I have copied from the work of Bryson",¹³ followed by another section on the "benefits of the education of the young".¹⁴ These topics have been moved by Naṣīr al-Dīn Ṭūsī to his own treatment of Economics.¹⁵ When Miskawayh, still within the context of his second *Discourse*, resumes his main purpose after the quotation from Bryson's *Oikonomikos*,¹⁶ he turns to a description of the hierarchy of degrees of sociability from wild beasts to man, from man to his communities, and from these to the city and its rulers. Ṭūsī devotes a specific treatment to these points, and does this in his own section on Politics, namely the third part of his work. In other words, after the initial two sections the order of the subjects dealt with in the *Nasirean Ethics* does no longer follow that of Miskawayh, even though the latter – as is apparent from Lameer's annotation – remains the main source of Ṭūsī in the whole treatise.

⁹ *Tabḏīb al-ahlāq li-Abī 'Alī Aḥmad b. Muḥammad Miskawayh* ḥaqqāqahū Quṣṭanṭīn Zurayq, al-Ġāmī'a al-Amīrkiyya fī Bayrūt, Beirut 1966, English trans.: *The Refinement of Character. A Translation from the Arabic of Aḥmad ibn-Muḥammad Miskawayh's Tabḏīb al-Aḥlāq* by C.K. Zurayq, The American University of Beirut Centennial Publications 1866-1966, Beirut 1968. From Lameer's annotation in all the relevant places it becomes evident that Naṣīr al-Dīn Ṭūsī relies entirely on Miskawayh for his quotations from Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* and from Galen's *De Usu partium*. In what follows, the Arabic version of Ṭūsī's work will be labelled *The Arabic Nasirean Ethics*.

¹⁰ *Tabḏīb al-ahlāq*, pp. 3.1-30.10 Zurayq (Arabic) = pp. 5-26 English trans. This part of the first *Discourse*, both in Miskawayh and in Naṣīr al-Dīn Ṭūsī, follows the lead of the Arabic Plotinus. Discussing the point as it deserves would exceed the limits of this review, but I deem it useful to outline the main points in the definition of the soul that depend upon the *ps-Theology of Aristotle*: the soul is not a body nor a part of a body, nor one if its accidents; it does not need any of the bodily faculties for its existence; it is an incorporeal substance, capable of receiving many forms and performing many different actions, whereas bodies are limited. These topics derive from Chapter III of the pseudo-*Theology*, in itself derived from Plotinus' treatise IV 7[2], *On the Immortality of the Soul*.

¹¹ *The Arabic Nasirean Ethics*, pp. 93-187 Lameer. The pagination of this volume is complicated: its 'Western' part goes from p. 1 to p. 59 and includes the Introduction, the Plates and the Bibliography. The Arabic part bears a double pagination, starting with p. ١٢ (at the bottom) and p. 72 (Western), at the top. The Indexes (*nominum*, *locorum*, and a *Fihrist of the Arabic terms*) are placed at the end of the Arabic part, so that after p. 59 (end of the Bibliography) the reader has p. 550 (top), namely the end of the Arabic part of the Index. For easier reference, I give for the Arabic part the top pagination, that does not match the Arabic pagination at the bottom.

¹² This section occupies pp. 31.1-73.11 Zurayq (Arabic) = pp. 29-65 English trans.

¹³ *Tabḏīb al-ahlāq*, p. 55.3-62.7 Zurayq (Arabic) = pp. 50-55 English trans.

¹⁴ *Tabḏīb al-ahlāq*, pp. 62.9-64.14 Zurayq (Arabic) = pp. 55-7 English trans.

¹⁵ *The Arabic Nasirean Ethics*, pp. 357-83 Lameer.

¹⁶ As detailed by M. Plessner, *Der Oikonomikos des neupythagoreer 'Bryson' und sein Einfluß auf die islamische Wissenschaft, Edition und Übersetzung der erhaltenen Versionen nebst einer Geschichte der Ökonomik im Islam mit Quellenproben in Text und Übersetzung*, Carl Winter Verlag, Heidelberg 1928, Miskawayh attests the full version, in all likelihood abridged, of the *Economics* by the Neo-Pythagorean called 'Bryson', fragmentarily quoted by Stobaeus. Cf. B. Centrone, "Bryson", in R. Goulet (ed.), *Dictionnaire des Philosophes Antiques*, II, CNRS Éditions, Paris 1994, pp. 141-2.

An example taken from the beginning of both works, where they run parallel, will give an idea of Ṭūsī's way of expanding upon a topic he finds in Miskawayh, and by the same token will also suggest the kind of additional sources that he might have consulted.

The Prologue of the *Ṭahdīb al-ahlāq* opens with the assessment of the scope (*ḡarad*) of the treatise: the attainment of a character leading to sound actions and virtuous behaviour. For virtue to be established as a permanent habit in the soul, an art is needed:

غرضنا في هذا الكتاب أن نحصل لأنفسنا خلقاً تصدر به عنا الأفعال كماها جميلة، وتكون مع ذلك سهلة علينا لا كلفة فيها ولا مشقة، ويكون ذلك بصناعة وعلى ترتيب تعليمي.

Our object in this book is to acquire for ourselves such a character that all our actions issuing therefrom may be good and, at the same time, may be performed by us easily, without any constraint or difficulty. This object we intend to achieve according to an art, and in a didactic order (ed. and trans. Zurayq).¹⁷

Naṣīr al-Dīn Ṭūsī expands on this topic as follows:

لما كان المطلوب في هذا الكتاب جزءاً من أجزاء الحكمة وجب شرح معنى الحكمة وقسمتها إلى أقسامها فنقول: الحكمة في عرف أهل المعرفة معرفة الأشياء كما ينبغي على قدر الإمكان ليصل النفس الإنسانية إلى كمالات يمكن حصولها لها.

Since our goal in this book is one of the parts of wisdom, an account of the meaning of 'wisdom' and of its subdivision into its subdivisions is necessary. Thus we say: 'wisdom', in the sense in which the scholars take the term, is the knowledge of the things as far as it is possible according to the measure of the capacity that the human soul has to attain the perfection which is within its reach.¹⁸

While Miskawayh limited himself to alluding to the "art, *ṣinā'a*", that is required to ensure the theoretical foundations of virtue, Ṭūsī defines it as "wisdom, *ḥikma*" and provides its definition. To this end he has recourse to the first of the definitions of philosophy that had become canonical in Greek late Antiquity and that, as detailed in Christel Hein's fundamental work,¹⁹ were adopted in the formative period of Arabic-Islamic philosophy. In David's *Prolegomena* it runs: φιλοσοφία ἐστὶ γνῶσις τῶν ὄντων ἣ ὄντα ἐστίν (p. 28.22-23 Busse); in the Arabic rendering, as echoed by al-Kindī in his *First Philosophy*, the *ṣinā'at al-falsafa* is the "science of the things in their truth according to the measure of the human capacity, *'ilm al-ašyā' bi-ḥaqā'iqihā bi-qadr ṭāqat l-insān*" (p. 97.8-10 Abū Rīda = p. 9.8-9 Rashed-Jolivet). This example shows that in his endeavour to complete Miskawayh's exposition Ṭūsī had recourse to sources that made him acquainted, be it directly or indirectly, with Graeco-Arabic philosophical literature.²⁰

On this ground, it is only natural to think that he might have had access in some form to Aristotle's *Politics*: first, at variance with Miskawayh's *Ṭahdīb al-ahlāq* there is a section devoted specifically to politics in his work; second, the Aristotelian definition of man as φύσει πολιτικὸν ζῷον is quoted there.²¹ However, a note of caution is necessary here. The Aristotelian tenet of man as a political animal resurfaces here and

¹⁷ *Ṭahdīb al-ahlāq*, p. 2.6-9 Zurayq (Ar.), English trans. p. 1.

¹⁸ *The Arabic Nasirean Ethics*, p. 78.2-5 Lameer.

¹⁹ The transmission to the Arabic-speaking world of the late Antique definitions and subdivisions of philosophy is examined by Ch. Hein, *Definition und Einteilung der Philosophie. Von der spätantiken Einleitungsliteratur zur arabischen Enzyklopädie*, P. Lang, Frankfurt - Bern - New York 1985 (Europäische Hochschulschriften, Reihe XX, Philosophie, Bd. 177), pp. 86-130.

²⁰ At p. 89.5-7 Lameer, Ṭūsī claims that in his exposition of practical wisdom (*al-ḥikma al-'amaliyya*) he will rely on the tenets of the ancient and contemporary philosophers (*min al-ḥukamā' al-mutaqaddimin wa-l-mutā'ḥbirin*).

²¹ The allusion mentioned above, n. 6, to a "Stoicized paraphrase of Book One (and perhaps also Book Two) of Aristotle's *Politics*" is resumed at p. 400, n. 2. Here, as a commentary to Ṭūsī's tenet *al-insān madaniyy bi-l-tab'*, Lameer refers to his previous mention of this paraphrase: "The statement that man is [a] political [animal] by nature, may be found in Aristotle, *Politics* I 1253 a 2-3. As stated in the Introduction, section 2, there was a summary of Book I and maybe also of Book II of Aristotle's *Politics* available in Arabic in the 4th/10th century".

there in philosophical Arabic literature, but this and some other isolated reference to the *Politics* does not elicit the claim that the work itself or a work based on it were available in Arabic. Sh. Pines advanced in 1975 the hypothesis that a paraphrase of Books I and II of the *Politics* was composed at some point between the Hellenistic and Imperial ages; such a hypothetical work, that would have incorporated the Stoic refusal of slavery by nature, was in Pines' eyes apt to explain some features of al-Fārābī's political doctrine.²² Pines' hypothesis has been gradually transformed into a reality; but there is a testimony by Averroes that, despite appearances, suggests that the *Politics* remained unknown to the Arab readership. To Averroes it remained in any case sadly precluded – *et nondum pervenit ad nos qui sumus in hac insula*, he says. Averroes also expresses his hope that elsewhere in the Islamic world an exemplar existed, and refers to al-Fārābī as to one who might have had access to it.²³ Apparently, this is a testimony in favour of the existence of an Arabic translation of Aristotle's *Politics*: Averroes seems to testify that al-Fārābī was indeed acquainted with it; but, as Rémi Brague aptly remarks, that passage shows rather that "l'absence de la *Politique* dans les bibliothèques du monde musulman, n'a pas été sans laisser des regrets. La *Politique* a été recherchée. Elle a même été trouvée, en un sens, mais sous les espèces trompeuses de l'ouvrage apocryphe *Le secret des secrets*, qui porte parfois le titre de *La Politique* d'Aristote".²⁴

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²² S. Pines, "Aristotle's *Politics* in Arabic Philosophy", *Israel Oriental Studies* 5 (1975), pp. 150-60 (repr. in *The Collected Works of Shlomo Pines*, II, *Studies in Arabic Versions of Greek Texts and in Medieval Science*, The Magnes Press, The Hebrew University - Brill, Jerusalem - Leiden 1986, pp. 146-56, here pp. 155-6 (of the reprint): "One possibility is that these passages are derived from a text composed by Aristotle himself or, close to his time, by an adherent of his school; this text may have been a recension or paraphrase or an abridgment of Book One or Books One and Two of the *Politics*. (...) Another possibility is that the Arabic passages related to Aristotle's *Politics* are derived from a paraphrase of Book One and perhaps also of Book Two of this work composed in the Hellenistic or Roman period; this paraphrase may have been influenced by Stoic teaching. This could account for the criticism of slavery and for al-Fārābī's conception of a world state (...). On the whole the last one [i.e. possibility] according to which the Arab is a paraphrase or abridgment of a part of the *Politics* composed in the Hellenistic or Roman period appears to be the most probable".

²³ R. Brague, "Note sur la traduction arabe de la *Politique*, derechef, qu'elle n'existe pas", in P. Aubenque (ed.), *Aristote politique*, PUF, Paris 1993, pp. 423-33, quotes *in extenso* this important passage from Averroes' *Middle Commentary* on the *Nicomachean Ethics* (extant in Latin and in Hebrew, only fragmentarily attested in Arabic), p. 429: "Et hic explicit sermo in hac parte huius scientiae; et est ea quae habet se in scientia civili habitudine notitiae, quid est sanitas et aegritudo in arte medicinae; et illa quam promisit est pars quae habet se in hac scientia habitudine effectivae sanitatis et destructivae aegritudinis in medicina. Et est in libro eius qui nominatur liber de regimine vitae; et nondum pervenit ad nos, qui sumus in hac insula (...). Et fortassis erit aliquis amicorum qui adducat librum in quo erit complementum huius scientiae, si Deus voluerit. Apparet autem ex sermone Abyin arrim Alfarabii quod inventus est in illis villis. Si vero hoc non contingerit, et Deus contulerit inducias vitae, perscrutabimur de hac intentione iuxta mensura nostri posse". This statement is repeated also in the Prologue of Averroes' commentary on Plato's *Republic* (lost in Arabic, extant in Hebrew and Latin): cf. E.R. Rosenthal, *Averroes' Commentary on Plato's Republic*, Cambridge 1969³, p. 112: "The first and second part of this science <of Politics> stand in the same relationship to each other as do the books of Health and Illness and the Preservation of Health and the Removal of Illness in Medicine. The first part of this art <of Politics> is contained in Aristotle's book known as *Nicomachea*, and the second part in his book known as *Politica*, and in Plato's book upon which we intend to comment. For Aristotle's *Politica* has not yet come into our hands".

²⁴ Brague, "Note sur la traduction arabe de la *Politique*", p. 424.