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The Cross-Cultural Spread of Greek Philosophy (and Indian Moral Tales) to 6th Century Persian and Syriac

Richard Sorabji

Abstract
Pagan Greek philosophy spread to the Persian king Khushru I, a Zoroastrian, in the 6th century CE, who first gave the Athenian philosophers refuge from their Christian emperor, to hold (newly translated) discussions with them, and then got a report through 'Paul of Persia' of the Alexandrian school's case to Christian students for studying Aristotle's logic, in order to decide between conflicting claims about Christian doctrine. The Greek philosophical author of this (newly translated) case can be identified, and it has nothing to do with the equally fascinating autobiography of Khushru's physician, who got and translated into Middle Persian charming moral tales from India, but abandoned all effort to decide between conflicting Indian claims about religion.

1. The first diffusion, from Athens to King Khushru I Anushirwān of Persia

The ancient commentators on Aristotle translations, which started in 1987,[1] have now reached the point in 2019 at which we can better trace the 6th century CE diffusion of Greek Philosophy to other cultures, especially the role of Persia. The diffusion started largely through Syriac language, partly through Middle Persian and soon with an Armenian strand. It received an important impetus from the pre-Islamic Zoroastrian King Khushru I of the Sasanian dynasty, known as *Anushirwān* or *Anōshagruwān* ('of immortal soul'),[2] who ruled Persia from 531 to 579, and in whose court Syriac as well as Middle Persian was spoken.[3] The Persian king in the first year of his reign, gave refuge to the Athenian Neoplatonist philosophers, including Damascius, Simplicius and Priscian, whose teaching of a pagan Neoplatonist interpretation of Plato and Aristotle had been halted by the Christian emperor Justinian in Constantinople. The king in his memoirs was to say that he never turned anyone away on account of his religion. He posed ten questions to his guests, and Priscian, who was set to answer them, supplied his reading list in Greek science and philosophy at the start of his answers to the king, translated for the first time into a modern language, English, in 2016, in the ancient commentators on Aristotle series as Priscian, *Answers to King Khosroes of Persia*.[4]

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[1] Originally with Duckworth, London, now all available from Bloomsbury Academic, London, in print and online, with some in paperback, ed. from 1987 by Richard Sorabji, co-ed with Michael Griffin since the 100th volume in 2012.

[2] I thank Yuhan Vevaina for the translation "of immortal soul". F. de Blois, *Burzōy's Voyage to India and the Origin of the Book Kalīlah wa Dimnah*, Royal Asiatic Society, London 1990 (Prize Publication Fund, 23), p. 1 uses just 'immortal'.

[3] I take this information on language from J.P.N. Land, A*necdota Syriaca*, vol. 4, Brill, Leiden 1875 (online in http://dbooks.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/books/PDFs/555081467.pdf) from his Latin *Scholia in Pauli Persae Logicam* (*ibid*., pp. 99-113, which is printed some way after his Latin translation of his reconstruction of the Syriac text.

[4] R. Sorabji - M. Griffin (eds.), *Priscian, Answers to King Khosroes of Persia*, translated by P. Huby - S. Ebbesen - D. Langslow - D. Russell - C. Steel - M. Wilson, Bloomsbury, London 2016 (Ancient Commentators on Aristotle).

The Greek is lost, and so is the Persian (or Syriac) presented to the king. All that survived was a Latin translation from Greek of some 300 years later that misunderstood the Greek so badly, that a number of scholars were found across the world to make a reconstruction, or retro-translation, of the lost Greek. Their question was, "What can the original Greek have been to give rise at that particular later date to such misunderstandings in the Latin?" A translation of unintelligible Latin passages would have given unintelligible English, so what was translated was not the Latin, but the conjectured Greek. The translators also had to know something about the ancient science and philosophy about which the king was asking. The king had inquired about such philosophical topics as the soul, sleep and prophecy through dreams, and such scientific ones as the nature of tides and winds, and some of special interest to him as a Zoroastrian, such as why a benevolent Creator had allowed such animals as poisonous snakes. Priscian's answer to some extent anticipates Leibniz's answer in the 17th century, that the Creator's task was not merely to create the most beautiful creatures possible, but to create the most beautiful creatures compossible with each other, so that each has protection from the others, humans through intelligence, some through speed of flight, and others, like snakes, through lethal armament. When the Athenians moved on after 18 months, Anushirwān protected them from the emperor Justinian through a new treaty and his next Greek guest, Ouranios, was invited to debate such questions as whether the universe had a beginning.

Making these discussions intelligible provided one kind of revelation. But it then came to my attention that a couple of years earlier some more hints had been revealed, dating from 350 years after the Athenians' visit to Persia, about their feelings and activities at the time of their visit. In writing out the answers to Khushru's ten questions, Priscian started by providing his reading list in Greek Philosophy and Science, and he included a selection, which he called a *Chrestomathy*, from Strabo (63-4 BCE to about 24 CE), the Greek geographer and geologist with Stoic leanings. Strabo's own copy does not survive, but D. Marcotte has argued[5] that there is a later manuscript copy of these selections, again called a *Chrestomathy*, in the so-called 'Collection Philosophique' that was copied out in late 9th century CE Constantinople.[6] One group of manuscripts in this collection includes commentaries on Plato and Aristotle by the Athenian Neoplatonist philosophers Damascius and Simplicius, and the Alexandrian Neoplatonist philosopher Ammonius. Another group includes Damascius' metaphysical works and also a version of the Strabo *Chrestomathy*, from which certain re-workings emerge possibly attributable to the earlier Athenian refugees. In his *Prolegomena*, Strabo had made a list of well governed nations. But in this copy of the *Chrestomathy*, at the end of Strabo's list of well governed nations, there is a comment that the Athenians are not among these nations. Marcotte's conjecture is that this could have been a remark originally added by the Athenian philosophers, commenting on their having had their teaching stopped by the emperor Justinian, but subsequently re-copied as if it had already been written by Strabo. Marcotte also notes that this later version of the *Chrestomathy* contains further signs of interest in philosophy and in the Athenians' route of travel. It mentions some of Strabo's place names only for their connexions with philosophers, who are cited, when appropriate, with standard honorifics. The later version also seems to have

[5] D. Marcotte, "Priscien de Lydie, la géographie et les origines néoplatoniciennes de la 'Collection philosophique'", *Journal des Savants* (2014), pp. 165-203, esp. pp. 179, 189-203, recapitulated in M. Chase, "Damascius and al-Naẓẓām on the atomic leap", *Mnemosyne* 72 (2019), pp. 585-620, at 609-11. I mention only some of Marcotte's extensive evidence.

[6] On the "Collection philosophique" cf. J. Irigoin, "L'Aristote de Vienne", *Jahrbuch der österreichischen byzantinischen Gesellschaft* 6 (1957), pp. 5-10; N.G. Wilson, *Scholars of Byzantium*, Duckworth - Medieval Academy of America, London - New York 1983, pp. 86-8; L.G. Westerink, "Introduction", in *Damascius. Traité des premiers principes. I. De l'ineffable et de l'Un*, texte établi par L.G. Westerink et traduit par J. Combès, Les Belles Lettres, Paris 1986 (CUF), pp. LXXVI-VII.

reworked and supplemented Strabo's geography including discussion of the River Aboras and of the area surrounding the nearby town of Ḥarrān about 40 kilometers away. Both names are significant because it has been argued[7] that the Athenians may have travelled to the king's capital across that river and that, when the Athenians left the palace of Khushru, Simplicius moved to Ḥarrān, in order to complete his massive compilation of commentaries.

The transmission of Greek thought from the 6th century into Syriac or Middle Persian and other languages, was a major route by which it reached early medieval Islamic Philosophy in Arabic. And that in turn was vital to the quality of medieval Latin philosophy from the 13th century onwards, which benefited from Latin translations from Arabic, and hence to the quality of modern Western philosophy.

2. Sanskrit moral tales of talking animals and humans from India to King Khushru I Anushirwān of Persia

The Persian king's physician, Burzōye, brought moral tales to his king also from India. To follow the account of François de Blois,[8] he may first have explored India for medical plants and then stayed on the imperial site now occupied by the city of Patna in Bihar, where he managed to translate for his king into Middle Persian a selection originally of ten Sanskrit moral tales about animal and human behaviour, although the number of stories, specially of inset stories, was later greatly increased. The original ten, according to François de Blois,[9] included five tales from the *Pañcatantra*. This Indian work consists of five frame stories about instructively ingenious or stupid animal and human behaviour, with many subordinate stories inset within each frame. The first four frame stories are the friendship of the lion king and the bull, the cooperation of crow, mole, deer and tortoise, the defence of the crows from the owls, the friendship with a monkey of the crocodile with a jealous wife. The fifth frame story concerns the man advised in a dream by a hoard of gold coins shaped like a religious mendicant that he could secure the gold hoard by clubbing the apparition on the head when he visited, which he did the next morning. A barber, who saw what happened, stupidly tried clubbing ordinary religious mendicants, with different results. The first story inset within the fifth frame story is the mother's over-hasty slaying of the mongoose, which had killed not, as she assumed, her baby, but the baby-threatening cobra.

The origin of the Indian *Pañcatantra* itself was described in more than one way, but in one version it was presented as the work of a philosopher who undertook to teach the art of governance in 6 months to three young lay-about princelings, by telling stories about political relations largely among animals.[10]

Burzōye, according to François de Blois, p. 13, may have chosen the first four frame stories and the first inset story within the fifth frame. To these five stories, he suggests, Burzōye's text added a

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[7] So M. Tardieu, *Les paysages réliques. Routes et haltes syriennes d'Isidore à Simplicius*, Peeters, Louvain-Paris 1991 (Bibliothèque de l'École des Hautes Études. Section des sciences religieuses, 94).

[8] F. de Blois, *Burzōy's Voyage to India and the Origin of the Book of Kalīlah wa Dimnah*, Royal Asiatic Society, London, 1990. De Blois warns that ambiguities on a number of questions are due to scripts of some ancient Near Eastern languages not supplying vowels, nor agreeing on transliteration of consonants between languages.

[9] De Blois, *Burzōy's Voyage to India*, p. 13. In these stories, the lion (elsewhere sometimes the tiger) is king with other animals as jealous courtiers, while jackals can be cunning.

[10] As such, the *Pañcatantra* belongs to the widespread literary genre of the *Specula principis*. Cf. D. O'Meara - J. Shamp, *Miroirs de prince de l'Empire romain au IVe siècle*, Academic Press Fribourg, Fribourg 2006; on the Arabic versions of the genre, cf. D. Gutas, "The Greek and Persian Background of Early Arabic Encyclopedism", in G. Endress (ed.), *Organizing Knowledge. Encyclopaedic Activities in the Pre-Eighteenth Century Islamic World*, Brill, Leiden 2006 (Islamic Philosophy Theology and Science. Texts and Studies, 61), pp. 91-101.

further three about statecraft from Book 12 of the Sanskrit *Mahabharata*[11] and a story about the Buddha's interpretation of a king's eight dreams as foretelling degenerate times.[12] A translation from Burzōye's Middle Persian into Syriac, was made by the Christian priest Bōḏ, who is said to have lived around 570 CE.[13] Burzōye's text was expanded with further moral tales[14] in Arabic translations from the Middle Persian, starting as early as around 750 CE with the Arabic version drawn by Ibn al-Muqaffaʿ (who died about 757 CE) from the Middle Persian, under the title *Kalīla and Dimna* (the names of two jackals). Two jackals had also featured in the Sanskrit of the first frame story of the Indian *Pañcatantra*, where the treacherous jackal destroyed the friendship between lion and bull by deceiving them about each other.

The surviving Arabic manuscripts of *Kalīla and Dimna* date from centuries later than Ibn al-Muqaffaʿ, so it is hard to be sure whether the stories the Arabic manuscripts contain had all been selected already by Ibn al-Muqaffaʿ himself, or whether Ibn al-Muqaffaʿ fully accommodated even the still earlier original Middle Persian selection as reconstructed by François de Blois. But one major story which was not in the earlier Middle Persian selection and which Ibn al-Muqaffaʿ may well have added himself was that of the *Prosecution of Dimna*, the treacherous jackal who had deceived the lion king into killing his best friend, the bull.

In this new story, the panther, who had been the lion king's teacher, overheard the jackal Kalīla rebuking the treacherous jackal Dimna for deceiving the lion king into killing his friend, the bull. The panther reported the overheard conversation to the lion king's mother, but the lion king, having been deceived once, was scrupulous in investigating the truth, before condemning Dimna to death. There is disagreement as to the purpose for adding the story. It might be wondered whether Ibn al-Muqaffaʿ had a motive for presenting this sequel to the original story of the lion king, because of his personal relationship to the Caliph. He worked in Basra as secretary for two uncles of the Caliph, but another uncle of the Caliph, a brother of these two uncles, made an attempt to seize the Caliph's throne, and Ibn al-Muqaffaʿ was persuaded by the two uncles to appeal to the Caliph to spare the challenger. The Caliph took against the appeal and seems later to have had Ibn al-Muqaffaʿ executed as well. I do not know whether Ibn al-Muqaffaʿ had wanted in the new story, partly in the light of his relation to the Caliph, to present in the lion king a model of rulership better than the original one, a model in which the lion king, even if belatedly, was circumspect about condemnation.

Kalīla and Dimna, as well as the *Pañcatantra* on which it partly draws, had an extensive effect on Western literature, especially on some stories in *The Arabian Nights* and among La Fontaine's *Fables*, with traces of influence recorded also in the curiously named 13-14th century *Gesta Romanorum*,

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[11] *Mahabharata* Book 12, chapter 138: a protective compact between cat and mouse should be timed, so that the cat cannot resume its natural hostility. 12, 139: When the infant prince killed the offspring of the bird who brought it daily fruit, and in return lost his eyes to the bird's talons, the bird was right that trust cannot be restored after injury even in just revenge. 12, 111: A jackal, repenting of sins in his last human incarnation, abstained from meat, and agreed with misgivings to become minister to a king tiger. But when the jealous other servants accused him falsely of taking the tiger king's meat, he too refused entreaties for reconciliation and returned to the forest.

[12] The story may be derived from the Buddhist legend of King Caṇḍa in the *Jātaka* tales 77, but there there are 16 dreams. The version of that legend closest to the story translated by Burzōye is said by de Blois, *Burzōy's Voyage to India* (above, n. 8), p. 13, to be the Tibetan version.

[13] De Blois, *Burzōy's Voyage to India*, p. 2.

[14] There is a more comprehensive French translation of *Kalīla and Dimna* by André Miquel: Ibn al-Muqaffaʿ, *Le livre de Kalila et Dimna*, traduit de l'arabe par A. Miquel, Klincksieck, Paris 1957 (Études arabes et islamiques, Série 2. Textes et traductions, 1; reprint 1980, 2012), but I have not seen more than selections in English. If there is not a more comprehensive English one, this could be a good task for a team of Arabists.

Boccaccio's *Decameron*, Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*, some stories of Grimm and Brer Rabbit. It also influenced the Persian 12th century *Conference of the Birds*.

3. Talking animals in Greek: Aesop and a real one in Porphyry

The best known stories with talking animals in ancient Greece are ascribed to Aesop, who was born around 620 BCE, but the existing stories were written over later centuries, and the best known are short and snappy compared with the stories in *Kalīla and Dimna*. Porphyry, however, the 3rd century CE Neoplatonist commentator on Aristotle, claimed to have reared a partridge in Carthage who really spoke to him in Greek.[15] Aristotle himself had said in his *On Interpretation* that the unwritable (ἀγράμματοι 16 a 26-29) sounds of animals do indeed show something (δηλοῦσί γέ τι, 16 a 28), but are not composed of nouns and verbs, because the latter are based on a convention or agreement (κατὰ συνθήκην, 16 a 26-27), rather than being natural. Porphyry allowed that animals (ζῷα) do speak (εἰπεῖν) in their own way, and can think (διανοεῖσθαι) before they speak, but not in the sense that they can reason, rather, in the sense that they can voice (φωνεῖν) silently in their soul what they are going to say (Porphyry, *On Abstinence from Killing Animals* 3.3.2). This distinction between speaking and silently saying something to oneself fits with the distinction attributed to Porphyry's lost commentary on Aristotle's *On Interpretation* by Boethius, writing in Latin in the 2nd edition of his own commentary on Aristotle's *On Interpretation*. According to Boethius, Porphyry made a distinction between three kinds of speech: written, produced vocally, and assembled in the mind.[16]

4. The second diffusion of Greek Philosophy from Alexandria to King Khushru I Anushirwān of Persia

After the Athenians had left King Khushru, it was Paul of Persia who dedicated to the king an account of Aristotle's logic from the *other* great Greek Neoplatonist philosophy school in Alexandria. My question will be, who was Paul's source for the account he gives the king? Paul of Persia is said to have had Syriac as his native language, although he also knew Persian, offering three Persian names for the sun.[17]

Two other works by Paul of Persia are known. First his abridged commentary on another work of Aristotle's, *On Interpretation*, which is said in two of its manuscripts to have been translated into

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[15] Porphyry, *On Abstinence from Killing Animals* 3.4.7, translated by G. Clark, repr. Bloomsbury, London 2014 (Ancient Commentators on Aristotle).

[16] I discuss Porphyry's three-fold distinction of languages, in particular the idea of inner thought as a distinct mental language, and its pre- and post-history, in *The Philosophy of the Commentators 200-600 AD, A Sourcebook*, Cornell U.P., Ithaca (N.Y.) 2005, vol. 3, *Logic and Metaphysics*, chapter 7 b, and in "Meaning: Ancient Comments on Five Lines of Aristotle", in Ch. Shields, *The Oxford Handbook of Aristotle*, Oxford U.P., Oxford 2012, ch. 24, pp. 635-6. Cristina D'Ancona reminds me that the Stoics (*SVF* II 135; II 223), after Plato, but before Porphyry, also had a two-fold distinction between internal (ἐνδιάθετος) and external (προφορικός) speech (λόγος), which was known to Porphyry's teacher Plotinus (cf. *Enn*. I 2[19], 3.29; V 1[10], 3.7-8).

[17] Henri Hugonnard-Roche points out Paul's knowledge of these two languages, but does not give a reason for doubting that he also knew Greek, which would have been needed for studying in Alexandria: cf. H. Hugonnard-Roche, "Paul le Perse", in R. Goulet (ed.), *Dictionnaire des Philosophes Antiques* (=*DPhA*), Va, CNRS Éditions, Paris 2012, pp. 183-7, p. 185. In a later article, "Sur la lecture tardo-antique du *Peri Hermeneias* d'Aristote: Paul le Perse et la tradition d'Ammonius. Édition du texte syriaque, traduction française et commentaire de l'*Élucidation* du *Peri Hermeneias* de Paul le Perse", *Studia graeco-arabica* 3 (2013), pp. 37-104, esp. p. 39, Hugonnard-Roche expresses a more tentative view, that we do not know if Paul knew Greek. I agree that we do not know, because there is no direct evidence. But I hope that my indirect evidence creates some probability.

Syriac from Persian.[18] The remaining work has been identified by Dmitri Gutas as by the relevant Paul and he thinks it too was originally written in Middle Persian.[19] It features in an Arabic work by Miskawayh (932-1030 CE) on grades of happiness and the role of theoretical and practical philosophy in acquiring them. But it relates to Paul's known interests because Miskawayh includes an extensive classification of Aristotle's theoretical and practical philosophy, which he ascribes to a certain Paul and presents as having been addressed to the same Persian king, Anushirwān. The same classificatory work of Paul's is also described in Arabic by al-Fārābī (died 950 CE). There is a partial French translation of the classificatory work by M. Arkoun[20] and D. Gutas has translated into English a short quotation and summarised the classification. He thinks Paul's classification may first have been translated into Arabic by Abū Bišr Mattā (died 940 CE).

Paul of Persia is said to have been a Nestorian Christian, though a later report in Barhebraeus, based on the Nestorian Chronicle of Seert, says that when Paul failed to become the Metropolitan bishop of Persia, he converted to Zoroastrianism. The text that concerns us, Paul's introduction to logic, survives in a Syriac version with a 19th century Latin translation by J.P.N Land.[21] Land, in *Anecdota Syriaca*, vol. 4, argues in Latin in his section *Scholia in Pauli Persae Logicam*, pp. 101-2 cited above, that documents like Paul of Persia's account of Aristotle's logic are likely to have been presented to the king in Syriac originally, not through Middle Persian, but the majority think that Paul is more likely to have used Middle Persian.[22] This is thought to be true of Paul's other two known works, and the hostile ancient Greek historian Agathias seems to suppose that Khushru's knowledge of Aristotle was gained through his own 'barbarous' language and in spite of his being a Persian.[23]

H. Hugonnard-Roche has given a rough date for Paul's composition of this introduction to Aristotle's logic, ascribing to Barhebraeus the claim that Paul composed it when Ezechiel was the Nestorian Patriarch, i.e. 567-580 CE.[24] That leaves a little leeway if Paul actually attended lectures in Alexandria first and wrote them up from his notes a little later.

Land complains that the Syriac text of our work has been corrupted by a careless and puerile scribe. He has therefore tried to 'purge the text', making an emended reconstruction of what the Syriac may have been and translates that into Latin. I think Land's view is exaggerated that the text is so corrupt that we cannot be sure it is even an abridgement of Paul. Certainly, I hope to identify the Alexandrian source of its preface to the Aristotelian logic, so that it is a text not only ascribed to Paul, but also

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[18] So H. Hugonnard-Roche, *La logique d'Aristote du grec au syriaque. Études sur la transmission des textes de l'Organon et leur interprétation philosophique*, Vrin, Paris 2004 (Textes et traditions, 9), p. 234, note 4. I am grateful to Matthias Perkams for pointing this out to me.

[19] D. Gutas, "Paul the Persian on the Classification of the Parts of Aristotle's Philosophy", *Der Islam* 60 (1983), pp. 231-67.

[20] M. Arkoun, *L'humanisme arabe au IVe-Xe siècle. Miskawayh, philosophe et historien*, Seconde édition revue, Vrin, Paris 1970 (Études musulmanes, 121), pp. 228-33.

[21] Land, *Anecdota Syriaca* (above, n. 3).

[22] So S. Brock, "From Antagonism to Assimilation: Syriac Attitudes to Greek Learning", in N. Garsoïan - Th. Mathews - R.W. Thomson (eds.), *East of Byzantium. Syria and Armenia in the Formative Period*, Dumbarton Oaks, Washington DC 1982, pp. 17-34, n. 64. Matthias Perkams has also pointed out to me that two Syriac manuscripts of Paul of Persia's brief commentary on another work of Aristotle's, *On Interpretation*, say that the Syriac has been translated from Persian to Syriac by someone else, Severus Sebokt, according to Hugonnard-Roche, *La logique d'Aristote du grec au syriaque*, p. 234, n. 4. The ancient historian Agathias seems to suppose that Khushru's knowledge of Aristotle was gained through his own 'barbarous' language and inspite of his being a Persian, *Histories*, 2.28.

[23] Agathias, *Histories*, 2. 28.

[24] Hugonnard-Roche, "Sur la lecture tardo-antique du *Peri Hermeneias* d'Aristote" (above, n. 17), p. 37.

taking its description of the logic from a source which could have instructed Paul. I shall confine myself here to Paul's Preface, but his account of Aristotle's logic that follows also deserves study.[25]

Some of my Syriacist colleagues, to be acknowledged below, have been kind enough to tell me about the Syriac version of Paul's Preface, or to show me initial drafts of a translation of it, and a literal rendering of Syriac seems harder to follow than Land's reconstruction in Latin. But Land, on the other hand, may have been more periphrastic than necessary, so that in my English translation below of Land's Latin I shall insert a few alternative paraphrases based very loosely on information from my Syriacist colleagues.

Paul's account of Aristotle's logic closely follows the syllabus introduced by the head of Greek Philosophy in Alexandria from the 5th to 6th centuries CE, Ammonius. Ammonius introduced a series of introductory issues preceding his commentary on the earlier *Introduction* (or *Isagôgê*) to Aristotle's logic by the commentator Porphyry (232/3-309 CE). Ammonius' commentary on Porphyry has itself been translated in the *Ancient Commentators on Aristotle* series by Michael Chase, and published in 2019.[26]

The preface to Ammonius' commentary on Porphyry included an introduction to Philosophy, giving no fewer than six definitions of Philosophy,[27] an enumeration of the parts of Philosophy,[28] and a survey of features of Porphyry's earlier *Introduction* to be commented on before reading it.[29] Only then did Ammonius' commentary on Porphyry's *Introduction* follow, with Porphyry's own wording presented at intervals as extracts or lemmata for comment. Ammonius further provided, or had his students edit, separate commentaries on three logical, and hence introductory, works by Aristotle,[30] and the commentary on the first logical work in the Aristotelian curriculum, his *Categories*, is preceded by a further set of introductory questions on studying Aristotle's Philosophy, said to have been inherited from Ammonius' teacher, Proclus.[31] These introductions and the definitions of Philosophy helped in the diffusion of Aristotelian philosophy to other cultures,[32] because they provided an easy entry to the subject for Greek students and others alike, such as his Syriac-speaking student Sergius of Reš'aynā. So did Ammonius' system for presenting his lectures in the syllabus in the form of commentaries. Only one on Aristotle and the one on Porphyry did he edit himself.

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[25] I thank Wilfrid Hodges for first telling me of Paul of Persia's treatment of syllogism and of the subsequent interest of Ibn al-Muqaffa' in 8th century CE in Paul's treatment of logic.

[26] Ammonius, *Interpretation of Porphyry's Introduction to Aristotle's Five Terms*, translated by M. Chase, Bloomsbury Academic, London - New York 2019 (Ancient Commentators on Aristotle).

[27] *Ibid*., p. 2, line 16 to p. 9, line 24.

[28] *Ibid*., pp. 9.25-16.20.

[29] *Ibid*., pp. 21.10-23.24. Goal, usefulness, authenticity, order of reading, reason for the title, division into chapters, and under what part of philosophy the work is subsumed.

[30] *Ammonius. On Aristotle's Categories*, translated by M. Cohen - G. Matthews, Bloomsbury Academic, London - New York 2014 (Ancient Commentators on Aristotle), and *Ammonius. On Aristotle On Interpretation, Chs 1-9 with Boethius. On Aristotle On Interpretation 9*, translated by D. Blank, Bloomsbury Academic, London - New York 2014, Chs 10-14 in progress, *On Aristotle's Prior Analytics 1.1* in progress.

[31] Where do the names of the philosophical schools come from? The division of Aristotle's writings. Which work to take first. The utility of Aristotle's philosophy. Guides to its utility. How should the student prepare himself for lectures. The form of the narrative. Why is Aristotle deliberately obscure? Prerequisites for the study of each work. What sort of person should the commentator be?

[32] Further detail in R. Sorabji, *Introduction* to R. Sorabji (ed.), *Aristotle Re-interpreted. New Findings on Seven Hundred Years of the Ancient Commentators*, Bloomsbury Academic, London 2016, pp. 48-53. On the Arabic diffusion cf. Chr. 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, 177), pp. 86-130.

The others he entrusted to his students to edit, including his most brilliant student, Philoponus. The students' editions were described as commentaries "from Ammonius' seminars" or "from his voice". This was good not only for the students chosen, but also for making available a huge body of commentary on the syllabus.

The six definitions of Philosophy recorded by Ammonius were

> Knowledge of beings qua beings
>
> Knowledge of the divine and human
>
> Assimilation to God, within the limits of human capacity (this is drawn from Plato's definition of something different – justice, explicated by him in terms of flight from attachment to the body,[33] but Ammonius explains that the political philosopher imitates God's providence by taking an interest in human law,[34] as well as imitating him by knowing, as in the first two definitions).[35]
>
> Preparation for death (again the recommendation for avoiding attachment to body, this time from Plato's *Phaedo*, but with an added warning against the misinterpretation of Cleombrotus, who acted on it as an invitation to suicide, so that a criticism of suicide is needed).
>
> Art of arts and science of sciences, inspired by Aristotle *Metaphysics* A 2, 982 a 16-17.
>
> Love of wisdom about natural things (Ammonius presents this as a qualified version of Pythagoras' definition, "love of wisdom").

These definitions were still being discussed in 15th century Florence.[36]

Paul kept only two of these definitions, "Art of arts" and "Assimilation to God". But he added two. The first was "Philosophy is the understanding (*scientia* in Land's Latin) of all that is within you". The second was "Philosophy is understanding what everything is by its essence (*ithutha*)". To the second definition he adds that someone who wants to know what human or horse is does not ask how many humans or horses there have been, are, or will be. This is a direct echo of Ammonius' comment on a different definition of Philosophy, his first ("Knowledge of beings qua beings"). For immediately after that definition, Ammonius adds, "For the philosopher does not set himself to know enumeratively all the humans in the world (in the next paragraph he adds horses), but to know what is the nature (φύσις) of human. For the philosopher considers what is the essence (οὐσία) and being (εἶναι) of each thing".[37]

The definition of Philosophy as an understanding of what is within you has a number of antecedents. One is that drawn from Ammonius' seminars on Aristotle's *Metaphysics* by his student Asclepius: the soul contains λόγοι, in this case concepts, e.g. of health in the doctor's soul. But already in the 4th century BCE Aristotle had praised those who spoke of the soul as the place of forms (εἴδη), provided that was applied to the intellectual soul. He might have been referring to his teacher Plato's presentation of Socrates as asking Parmenides whether each form is a thought (νόημα), which can exist only in souls,[38] although the latter was not the view Socrates was represented as endorsing.

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[33] Plat., *Theaet*. 176 B 1.

[34] Ammonius, *Interpretation of Porphyry's Introduction* (above, n. 26), p. 3.11-19.

[35] *Ibidem*.

[36] By Donato Acciaiuoli. See D. Lines, "Defining Philosophy in fifteenth-century Humanism", in J. Kraye - M. Meserve - A. Ossa-Richardson, *Et Amicorum: Essays on Renaissance Humanism and Philosophy in Honour of Jill Kraye*, Brill, Leiden 2017 (Brill's Studies in Intellectual History, 273), pp. 275-95.

[37] Ammonius, *Interpretation of Porphyry's Introduction* (above, n. 26), pp. 2.23-3.1; similarly p. 3.25 ff.

[38] Arist., *De Anima* 429 a 27-28; Plat., *Meno* 80 D - 86 C; *Parm*. 132 B.

The founder of Neoplatonism, Plotinus, in the 3rd century CE, says, "I mean by 'reasoning' (λόγος) surveying what the soul has within itself (λέγω δ' ἐκ λόγου τὸ σκοπεῖσθαι περὶ τῶν ἐν αὐτῇ)".[39] Priscian's *Answers to King Khushru*, ch. 1, on the soul, says at p. 45.18, "it is impossible to know things outside, without first knowing one's self".

The resulting four definitions of philosophy in the preface that Paul records do not end up particularly close to the six definitions introduced by Ammonius and still followed in Alexandria by Ammonius' last successor, David. Gutas sees Paul as strongly influenced by David, as his contemporary, although he admits that David does not contrast knowledge with belief (or faith, as I have called it), as Paul does in his preface. I too have seen Paul as influenced by Elias' and David's exhortations to study Philosophy, and some influence from his Alexandrian contemporaries there will have been. But any major influence from David might be better sought in the main part of Paul's introduction to Aristotle's logic. Gutas finds only one similarity in the introduction's preface,[40] and the preface has a rather different character from what follows it. Certainly, the preface does not display the kind of elaboration which Gutas sees as a hallmark of David.

Paul's preface starts in its first paragraph with an opening sentence of salutation to the King, and with this definition of Philosophy as understanding of what is within, which he uses to say to Khushru that in offering him Aristotle's logical work, he is only offering what Khushru already has within him. But that is not strange, because people make offerings to Khushru from the paradise of his own dominion, and (sacrificial) offerings to God of God's own creatures. Apart from the citation of Ammonius' definition of Philosophy, the application to Khushru is clearly Paul's own.

The second paragraph emphasises the need for care of the soul as the internal receptacle (of concepts), but with the second, or at least the third, paragraph, Paul seems to me to be following his Alexandrian source. Certainly, for his exposition of Aristotle's logic, which follows the preface, Paul will have needed a good knowledge, either direct or indirect, of the Alexandrian curriculum in Aristotle's logic. A possible indirect route would have been by Paul's studying the introductory material in Sergius of Reš'aynā's commentary in Syriac on Aristotle's *Categories* addressed to Theodore, based on Sergius' own well authorised studies in Alexandria probably under Ammonius, or by talking to Sergius, if he met him. But Sergius died in 536 CE, rather too early for a conversation, especially if Paul composed his introduction to Aristotle's logic between 567 and 580 CE. Moreover, crucially, from the accounts by Henri Hugonnard-Roche of Sergius' commentary in Syriac,[41] I see no passage in them like the one I shall come to next in Paul, on the value of Aristotle's logic for deciding about religious disputes. In addition, Paul shows no trace of the interest in medicine which Hugonnard-Roche stresses in Sergius' text. Further, Hugonnard-Roche makes the point that Paul does not discuss Aristotle's *Categories*. This may be because Sergius had done so already. I think

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[39] Plot., *Enn*. III 8[30], 3.13-14. I thank Michael Griffin for the reference.

[40] David lists angels, God and soul as free from matter in both reality and thought, and Paul's preface cites these same three (Land, *Anecdota Syriaca*, above n. 3, p. 17) as not being sensibles, i.e as intelligibles.

[41] H. Hugonnard-Roche, "Sergius de Reš'ainā", in Goulet (ed.), *DPhA*, Vol. VI, CNRS Éditions, Paris 2016, pp. 214-27; Id., "Aux origines de l'exégèse orientale de la logique d'Aristote: Sergius de Reš'ainā († 536) médecin et philosophe", *Journal Asiatique* 277 (1989), pp. 1-17. In the latter, Hugonnard-Roche cites the *Ecclesiastical History* of pseudo-Zacharias and Ḥunayn ibn Isḥāq as confirming Sergius' stay in Alexandria. He finds the introductory material on Aristotle in this commentary of Sergius on Aristotle's *Categories* close enough to be following the prooemium of Ammonius' commentary on the earlier *Introduction* (*Isagōgē*) to Aristotle's logic by Porphyry. He stresses the need to use the Paris manuscript of Paul's commentary addressed to Theodore, because this, unlike the London ms, contains all the relevant introduction to Aristotle's logic.

Paul is therefore more likely to have studied directly in Alexandria, not at second hand through Sergius. Of course, the alternative remains possible that Paul learnt about the material he records in his preface through having seen a record of the relevant Alexandrian lectures brought back by some *unknown* person from Alexandria to Persia. But the more intermediaries we postulate, the less likely it is that the material could have remained so revealingly close as I shall argue it did to the original teaching in Alexandria. There are already intermediaries enough if the Syriac version was translated from Middle Persian, and copied by a Syriac scribe whom Land considered puerile.

The third paragraph broaches the tricky question of why Christian students in Alexandria should study pagan Greek philosophy. In the sixth century, the students in Alexandria became increasingly Christian, but in the fifth century, there had been riots in 486 between pagan and Christian students, some of the Christians admittedly from a monastery outside Alexandria, followed by an investigation from the imperial capital, Constantinople in 488-9, with some philosophy teachers tortured and some fleeing.[42] The pagan philosopher Ammonius was the man trusted by the city's Christian authorities to take over supervision of the philosophy teaching, and he kept the peace and ensured the continuation of the Alexandrian school, unlike the Athenian, for another century. In the fifth century, at least before the riots, Christian students did not need encouragement to study pagan Greek philosophy. That question was a later one, and Paul's preface reflects an attempt in sixth century Alexandria to open the ears of Christian students to pagan Greek philosophy as a vital supplement to Christian faith.

The argument is very striking. There are disagreements about the nature of God, whether the universe was created, and if so, whether out of nothing, and whether humans have free will. One doesn't know which view to accept, and there is no demonstrative proof, so recourse must be had to faith or understanding. Faith is concerned with things remote from us and uncertain, understanding with things close to us (presumably because understanding operates on concepts within us) and manifest. Even those who have belief on matters of faith defend their position by quoting Saint Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians 13:12, "Now we see as if in a glass darkly, but then we shall see face to face". Saint Paul himself, then, recognises that there is something better than faith: seeing face to face.

This amounts to an exhortation by a Christian to study Greek philosophy. An exhortation is not a surprising thing to find near the beginning of an Alexandrian introduction to philosophy. Both Elias and David provide exhortations in Lecture I of their Alexandrian introductions, and L.G. Westerink has argued that Elias and David were both students in Alexandria of Olympiodorus (still teaching 565),[43] so that Paul too could have overlapped with Elias and David as a student, and been familiar with their interest in exhortation. It will become relevant that Olympiodorus overlapped with Philoponus. Understanding is compared in the fourth paragraph with seeing face to face. Understanding (I presume now in the Creator) produced the creation and beauty of the universe and joy and peace in the angels. We should applaud the kind of faith in which these things are especially to be found, and reject the kind that is merely idle prattle.

The fifth paragraph reminds us that understanding involves the soul looking into itself, from which Philosophy arose. It will become relevant that the paragraph uses visual metaphors for understanding (*conspectus*, θεωρία – another Greek loan word in Latin and Syriac – *intuere*, *adspicere*),

[42] E.J. Watts, *Riot in Alexandria. Tradition and Group Dynamics in Late Antique Pagan and Christian Communities*, University of California Press, Berkeley - Los Angeles - London 2010 (The Transformation of the Classical Heritage, 48).

[43] Cf. L.G. Westerink, "The Alexandrian Commentators and the Introductions to their Commentaries", in R. Sorabji (ed.), *Aristotle Transformed. The Ancient Commentators and Their Influence*, Cornell U.P., London 1990, pp. 325-48, at 328-39.

and a simile with an archer's gaze – *aspectus*. The first paragraph had already contrasted the eye of the body with the eye of the soul.

The sixth and seventh paragraphs of the preface add in two of the definitions recorded by Ammonius, of Philosophy as the "Art of Arts", or "Assimilation to God".

5. The source of Paul of Persia's Preface

I can now address my question, whose teaching in Alexandria is Paul presenting to the king of Persia after his opening compliments to the king? I have so far mentioned Ammonius and he has a role to play. But there is someone else. I notice that, after Paul's one-sentence greeting to the King of Persia, the first two paragraphs show his source at home in twice quoting what Christians call the Old Testament, the ancient Jewish part of their Bible. Although Ammonius was a master of reconciliation, he did not have that kind of attachment to the Old Testament. But what I think even more decisive is the cleverness of the use of the ensuing quotation from the message of the Christian Saint Paul in the Christian New Testament, "Now we see as if in a glass darkly, but then we shall see face to face". Who would have been clever enough to tell Christian students that their own New Testament believes there is something better than faith, and use that to persuade them to study pagan Greek Philosophy? Faith is central to Christian beliefs. It is cited in the next verse of Saint Paul, 13:13, Augustine makes it the path to salvation in his anti-Pelagian works,[44] and in the much later Protestant tradition of Luther, it is even said that it is the faith of Christians, not their good works, that will lead to their eternal salvation. The influence of Ammonius is relevant, but not necessarily because Paul's treatise recalls his lectures. Ammonius died between 517 and 526 CE, well before Khushru ascended the throne of Persia. But there is a person who would have been likely to call such close attention to Ammonius in his lectures, and that is Ammonius' cleverest pupil and his predominant editor, John Philoponus. Moreover, Philoponus was exceptional as being the only Christian commentator on Aristotle in the Alexandrian school of Philosophy, who could easily and naturally have quoted the Bible to Christian students. Above all, his outstanding cleverness makes him the obvious candidate for the comparison of faith with seeing as if in a glass darkly, and of Philosophy with seeing face to face. We have also seen that the timing fits. Elias and David, as pupils of Olympiodorus, may have been contemporaries of Paul of Persia. Olympiodorus was a rough contemporary of Philoponus.

That had been my main case for citing Philoponus as the philosopher providing the ideas in Paul of Persia's *Preface*. But Michael Griffin has pointed out to me as corroboration four analogies between Paul's Preface and one of the works of Philoponus on a Christian subject, the Christian conception of God's creation of the world, as opposed to his works on pagan Greek Philosophy. In his *De Opificio mundi*, *On the Creation of the World*, Philoponus twice, at pp. 58 and 246, quotes Saint Paul on our now looking as if with a glass darkly, and speaks of the angels in the Gospel of Saint Matthew 18:10, as always looking at God face to face. At p. 58.11-12, Philoponus uses the visual metaphor for intellect: "God is invisible only to perceptible eyes, but He is seen with the intellect that is pure". At p. 124.15 ff, Philoponus praises Saint Basil, for using demonstrative proof to those with understanding and recommending others to have the simple firmness of faith.

[44] I thank Mark Edwards for the point.

If Philoponus is Paul's source for his preface, that would explain why Hugonnard-Roche finds some similarities, as well as differences, between Paul and Stephanus in the latter's commentary on Aristotle's *On Interpretation*,[45] since Stephanus also learnt from Philoponus.

6. Three rival identifications of the source

I will consider three rival identifications of the main source in Alexandria influencing Paul's preface, leaving aside the unsurprising influence of David already mentioned. The eminent Syriac scholar Henri Hugonnard-Roche has taken it that it was Paul of Persia himself who first put together the Christian ideas in the preface, and takes this as a sign of his Christianity.[46] I think it is indeed a sign of Paul's Christianity that he found Philoponus' appeal to Christian students attractive, just as Philoponus intended. But the Christian citations could more plausibly have derived from Philoponus' teaching in the Alexandrian philosophy course, rather than having been initiated by Paul. After all, it was from some version of the Alexandrian philosophy course that the ensuing summary of Aristotle's logic derives.

I am very grateful to Matthias Perkams for alerting me to two alternative explanations from the 1930s of Paul's preface to his account of Aristotelian logic.[47] Both assume again that Paul is composing, rather than reporting, in his preface and both compare with Paul's preface another preface, or introduction, written by Burzōye, as mentioned above, the physician to King Anushirwān, Khushru I, the pre-Islamic Sasanian king of Persia. This was Burzōye's autobiographical account of his visit to India presented as an introduction to his translation from Sanskrit of Indian moral tales for the Persian king. But I think neither interpretation looks closely enough at what is being said in the paragraph of Paul's preface on which they rely about Faith without Philosophy leaving one open to conflicting views.

The intended point of similarity is that Burzōye's autobiographical piece complains of irresolvable differences of opinion on religious matters, giving as the main example one of those cited by Paul that also was prominent in the philosophical arguments between the Christian philosopher Philoponus and the Greek pagan Neoplatonists such as Proclus. It concerned the Creator and his Creation and the beginning and end of the universe. The intended inference is that such discussions of religious divergence were to be expected in the court of the Persian king, and hence might be composed for the king by Paul. But Burzōye's reaction is entirely different from the one in Paul which finds philosophical examination of such conflicts useful. Instead, Burzōye dismisses the rival religious opinions as accepted merely from tradition, based on illusions and useless to investigate, and finds it better instead to live the ascetic life approved by all Indian religions, at least up to the end of his Indian visit.[48]

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[45] Hugonnard-Roche, "Sur la lecture tardo-antique du *Peri Hermeneias* d'Aristote" (above, n. 17), pp. 39-40, 85, 87-89, 100-101.

[46] H. Hugonnard-Roche, "Sur la lecture tardo-antique du *Peri Hermeneias* d'Aristote" (above, n. 17). See his three other important articles to date on Paul: (i)"Le *Traité de logique* de Paul de Perse: une interprétation tardo-antique de la logique aristotélicienne en syriaque", *Documenti e studi sulla tradizione filosofica medievale*, 11 (2000), pp. 59-82; and (ii) "La constitution de la logique tardo-antique et l'élaboration d'une logique 'matérielle' en syriaque", in V. Celluprica - C. D'Ancona - R. Chiaradonna (eds.), *Aristotele e i suoi esegeti neoplatonici. Logica e ontologia nelle interpretazioni greche e arabe*, Bibliopolis, Napoli 2004 (Elenchos. Collana di testi e studi sul pensiero antico, 40), pp. 55-83; (iii) "Du commentaire à la reconstruction: Paul le Perse interprète d'Aristote", in J. Lössl - J.W. Watt (eds.), *Interpreting the Bible and Aristotle in Late Antiquity*, Ashgate, Farnham, UK, 2011, pp. 207-24. (i) and (ii) repr. in Id., *La logique d'Aristote du grec au syriaque* (above, n. 18).

[47] The two interpretations are explained by P. Kraus, "Zu Ibn al-Muqaffaʿ", *Rivista degli studi orientali* 14 (1934), pp. 1-20 at pp. 14-20.

[48] The relevant part of Burzōye's autobiographical piece is translated into English by de Blois, *Burzōy's Voyage to India*

If one wanted to find a closer parallel within the ambit of King Anushirwān in Persia, one might look instead at the report of the Greek historian Agathias, who tells us that King Anushirwān of Persia invited, after the visit of the Athenian philosophers at the start of his reign in 531-2 CE, another Greek philosopher, Ouranius. But this philosopher was very unlike both the Athenians and Paul of Persia, as being a Pyrrhonian sceptic. In other words, he was one who regarded rival philosophical opinions as so equally balanced that they enabled one to secure peace of mind by suspending judgement on all of them. Paul shows no interest in Pyrrhonian peace of mind and neither did King Anushirwān. The king's interest was rather in arranging inter-religious debates between Ouranius and Zoroastrian priests on familiar subjects, and the specifically mentioned topics are the eternity or otherwise of the universe, the analysis of coming into existence, nature, and whether one should posit a single first principle (Agathias, *Histories* 2. 29. 7-11).

The comparison of Paul's prefatory remarks with Burzōye's autobiographical remarks on religious disputes is further complicated by the fact that the original Middle Persian of Burzōye's text is lost, although it is preserved in an Arabic translation of the 8th century CE by Ibn al-Muqaffaʿ, of *Kalīla and Dimna*, and in all non-mutilated Arabic manuscripts of that.[49] This led to one interpretation by F. Gabrieli in 1932 of Burzōye's text as so translated, which regards the remarks about conflicting religious views as an accretion imposed on Burzōye's text by scepticism on the part of Ibn al-Muqaffaʿ himself about religious knowledge, but re-ascribed to the earlier time of Burzōye, to avoid criticising his own Muslim faith. The implication of scepticism would, however, jeopardise the comparison with Paul of Persia on religious disputes, because Paul is not recording scepticism, but optimism about the value, for the time being, of applying Aristotle's logic to unthinking divergences of religious doctrine before we see God face to face. In addition, Paul of Persia is not questioning the value of religious knowledge,[50] but drawing attention to a difficulty that faith needs to overcome by seeking philosophical knowledge or understanding in the mean time.

A different interpretation of Burzōye's reference to conflicting religious views is offered by P. Kraus. He thinks that neither Paul nor Burzōye reflect scepticism, but the openness of their Persian king Anushirwān to debate. As another indication of the king's openness, he has been taken probably to have had a Christian wife.[51] Indeed, the king sought knowledge by many means, by asking questions of the Athenian philosophers, by listening to Ouranios, the Pyrrhonian sceptic, and by arranging debates, including a debate between two Christian sects, the Nestorian to which Paul of Persia himself originally belonged and the monophysite. Nestorian Christians believed that the human and divine natures of Christ were distinct, monophysites that they were unified into one hypostasis. We do not know whether Paul was comfortable with this particular debate, but he benefited later from the open-minded policy of Anushirwān, if the later report of Barhebraeus, based on the Nestorian *Chronicle of Seert* is right, that, on failing to become the Metropolitan Bishop, Paul converted to Zoroastrianism.

However, once again, Paul's prefatory remarks on religious disagreements as a problem to be alleviated as far as possible by philosophical knowledge or understanding do not seem to refer to debates as the solution. Indeed, for beginners good teaching may be more useful than good debating for helping them to decide between different views, given the rhetorical element in debating. Paul,

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(above, n. 8), on his p. 26, on the basis of Nöldeke's 1912 German translation, but with extra Arabic manuscripts consulted.

[49] De Blois, *Burzōy's Voyage to India* (above, n. 8), pp. 24-5, 27.

[50] Kraus, "Zu Ibn al-Muqaffaʿ" (above, n. 47), pp. 15, 19.

[51] So M. Tardieu, "Chosroès', in Goulet (ed.), *DPhA*, Vol. II, CNRS Éditions, Paris 1994, pp. 309-18, at 317.

we have seen, is likely to have studied directly in Alexandria, but study there was a guided course from a master, so that debate would not have been prominent either in direct or in indirect reports. Of course, students were allowed to raise objections to the master, and I have drawn attention[52] to cases in which the brilliant Philoponus raised objections to his teacher, Ammonius, in class. In addition, some of Philoponus' commentaries are headed as taken from the seminars of Ammonius with critical reflections (ἐπιστάσεις) of Philoponus' own. But that is not at all like the debates between specialists staged by Anushirwān.[53]

I have argued that the exhortation in Paul to study Aristotle's logic had originally been addressed to Christian students. It remains to consider whether Paul of Persia, in writing to King Anushirwān, wanted to present as his own message to the king the exhortation with Christian quotations (albeit not identified as Christian) to Christian students. This was an exhortation to safeguard their Christian faith by gaining philosophical knowledge through Paul's exposition, so as to avoid the pitfalls of disagreements among religious views. But Anūshiruwān was not a Christian. At most it was said in the Nestorian *Chronicle of Seert* that Anūshirwān had sympathy for Christians and preferred their religion to all others.[54] But this does not mean that he converted to Christianity, or that he could have afforded to convert.[55] Moreover, Anūshirwān needed no urging to study Aristotle, but had already long before shown the highest interest in Greek philosophy in 531 CE, the first year of his reign, by inviting the Athenian philosophers to take refuge in his court from the Christian emperor Justinian, and who had in the interim had them answer ten philosophical and scientific questions.[56] Moreover, Anūshiruwān had positively encouraged the expression of religious disagreement for many years, without anxiety, and partly in order to learn. Nor would it have been tolerable for Paul to speak to his king as having so little knowledge of philosophy, after all the king's endeavours, and as having so little familiarity with different religious points of view, that he needed to be protected by a former student's epitome of the Alexandrian logic curriculum.

Could Paul of Persia, then, have had a different reason for wanting to present the exhortation to philosophy as his own? Could Anushirwān have invited Paul to encourage the king's Persian subjects to study Greek philosophy as a safeguard against exposure to disagreements? But then Paul would have had to speak with warmth about the wisdom of the king's invitation.

I therefore return to my proposal that, after his preliminary compliments to Anushirwān, Paul of Persia' prefatory remarks adapt or follow Philoponus' exhortation to Christian students in Alexandria to learn from the Aristotle logic curriculum, in order to surmount the problem faced by Faith of religious disagreements.

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[52] In Sorabji (ed.), *Aristotle Re-Interpreted* (above, n. 32), esp. *Introduction*, pp. 71-2 and Ch. 14, "Dating of Philoponus' Commentaries and of his Divergence from his Teacher Ammonius", pp. 367-92.

[53] The different approaches to divergence of opinion recorded by Paul (studying Aristotle's logic) and acknowledged by Burzōye (giving up) are only two. A different one that I have recorded elsewhere (*Freedom of Speech and Expression*, Rutgers University Lectures, Vol. 2, in preparation 2020, for Oxford University Press) is well illustrated in India. The Buddhist king Ashoka and the Moghul emperor Akbar recommended that people with different views learn from each other. Gandhi favoured the Jain idea that everyone has only partial knowledge, like blind men feeling different parts of an elephant: trunk, tail, ears, tusks. He reacted by seeking traces of truth in different religions. A major English advocate of learning from views rival to one's own was John Stuart Mill in his *On Liberty* of 1869.

[54] *Histoire Nestorienne (Chronique de Séert)*, in *PO*, Vol. VII, fascicle 2, p. 147.

[55] I know of no evidence for the assumption of A.M. Schilling that he converted to Christianity, cf. A.M. Schilling, *Die Anbetung der Magier und die Taufe der Sāsāniden. Zur Geistesgeschichte des iranischen Christentums in der Spätantike*, Peters, Leuven 2008 (CSCO Subsidia 120), pp. 46 ff.

[56] Priscian, *Answers to King Khosroes of Persia* (above, n. 4).

Appendix

What follows is my English translation of J.P.N. Land's reconstruction in Latin of the corrupt Syriac text of the preface[57] to a treatise composed by Paul the Persian from the logical work of the philosopher Aristotle, addressed to King Khushru I of Persia, with variations suggested to me by Sebastian Brock, not as his final thoughts, but as an improvement on my attempt to translate from Land's Latin by supplying a little information about the Syriac. I have acknowledged these suggestions in round brackets following the letter 'B', without wishing to suggest that this is how he would have translated, if he were himself translating the whole passage. I am very grateful also for a sight of other translations, in draft only, from the Syriac.[58]

Preface

To Anushirwān (the Immortal),[59] King of Kings, best of men, his servant Paul offers greetings.

Philosophy, which is the understanding (*scientia*) of all things, is within you. And from the philosophy which is within you I send you a gift. And this is not strange, because people offer you gifts from the paradise of your dominion, and sacrifice victims to god himself from the creatures of that same god. But the gift which I send is made by speech. For philosophy is expounded by speech, which is better than all the other gifts. For this is what is said about philosophy by philosophy itself: "My fruits are better than pure gold and than refined silver"[60] Look at them: wellbeing, courage, power, dominion, preeminence, sovereignty, peace, justice and laws. And to speak briefly about those good effects, even the universe itself is made and governed by understanding – just as the eye of the soul, which is blind and devoid |p. 1| of the sight of any things, is illuminated and lightened by understanding alone, understanding which is better than a thousand thousand eyes of the flesh. For the only true eye is that which sees all because of the kinship it has with the truth which is in the whole. For as the eye of the body sees because its nature is like the external light, in the same way the eye of the soul looks at (*intuere*) the light which is in the whole because of its [B]: (affinity) with the intelligible light which is in the whole. And as the person whose bodily eyes are weak in relation to sensory light sees nothing at all or little, in the same way the person whose eyes are little accustomed to the intelligible light discerns (*cernere*) either nothing at all or not enough.

So it is very well said by one of the philosophers: "The wise person (*sapiens*) has eyes within the head, but the fool walks around in darkness".[61] Many of the ancients have dedicated themselves forever to fleeing this deadly darkness, and surveying (*conspicere*) the supreme light, for they have found that the care of the mind is better than any other care. For a human is composed of soul and body, but the soul is better than the body by as much as the rational is better than the non-rational and the living than what lacks life, since it is because of the soul that a human is a living, rational thing.

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[57] Land's Latin translation is in *Anecdota Syriaca*, vol. 4, *Pauli Persae Logica*, pp. 1-30, esp. pp. 1-5 (on line in http://dbooks.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/books/PDFs/555081467.pdf – retrieved on 2019-12-18).

[58] I have drawn in my footnotes, as acknowledged below, from footnotes supplied along with a draft translation from Syriac made for me by Salam Rassi.

[59] I thank Matthias Perkams for explaining the name to me.

[60] Proverbs of Solomon 8.19.

[61] Ecclesiastes 2.14.

The care and embellishment of the soul is understanding (*scientia*) and proceeds out of knowledge. And either humans themselves seek and find understanding, or it is provided by learning (*disciplina*). Part of learning indeed is simply transmitted from human to human, but part [B]: (is as it were) sent by intellectual beings <lit. 'by a sending from'; i.e.? by angelic inspiration>.

But people are found quarrelling (*pugnantes*) among themselves and [B]: (refuting one another). Some indeed say that god is one [B]: (alone), others not one, some that god has opposite properties, some no opposite properties. Some say god is omnipotent, some not omnipotent. [B]: (Some say that he is creator of the universe and everything in it, others hold that he is not creator of everything). There are some who say [B]: (that the universe is made out of nothing), while others contend that god has made it out of <pre-existing> matter. There are some who claim that the universe is without beginning and also endures without end, |p. 2| while there are some who teach otherwise. And there are some who say that humans are free by their will, and some who [B]: (refute) this. And there are many other similar things which people say and write in their [B]: (traditions), in which they are seen [B]: (refuting each other and saying the opposite to one another. On this account, it is not easy for us to accept and believe all these teachings, nor indeed is it possible: in order to hold to one and leave aside another, or to choose one and reject another, what is required of us is revealed <means of> knowledge) by which we may leave aside other things and have faith in one. But there is no clear demonstrative proof of this matter, which is why recourse is sought in faith (*fides*) and in understanding (*scientia*).[62] For understanding works on things that are close by and manifest, faith on all things that are remote and not surveyed (*conspicere*), nor known (*cognoscere*) by reasoning that is certain. The latter things are doubtful, the former free of doubt. All doubt produces disagreement, the absence of doubt unanimity. Knowledge therefore is preferable to faith (*fides*) and to be chosen before the latter. For even those who have belief (*credere*), when investigating matters of faith, draw their defence from understanding (*scientia*), by saying, "it will come about that what we believe today, we will understand (*scire*) hereafter". (Now we see as if in a glass darkly, but then we shall see face to face).[63] Because understanding brings about the governance and beauty of the world, and the ease of souls and [B]: (the joy of intelligible beings <i.e. angels]>)[64], we need to applaud that faith in which these things are especially to be found, whereas that which is deprived of these and idly prattles[65] the opposite, |p. 4| we should consider despicable and cheap, and we should rebuke it.

Since therefore unqualified understanding arises out of surveying (*conspectus*) and meditating on all things, [B]: (reflection) itself is wisdom and those who meditate are called wise. In understanding lies the highest view (*theoria*) over a thing, in the likeness of a target put before an archer on which he turns his sight (*aspectus*). Indeed, when the soul looks (*intueri*) outside itself, it discerns little, but if it turns to itself and bends down to itself, it perceives (*adspicere*) every thing in itself, as God does. And indeed what is rightly known (*cognosci*) from the judgment and decision of the soul is called its view (*theoria*),[66] a view through which and from which philosophers have discovered philosophy, which is understanding (*scientia*) of [B]: (everything as it <really> is).

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[62] Also in Philoponus.

[63] Epistle 1 of Paul to the Corinthians, 13:12. Also in Philoponus.

[64] Sebastian Brock tells me there is a probable corruption in the Syriac. Angels are also cited in this context by Philoponus.

[65] I take this expression, more vivid than Land's, from Salam Rassi.

[66] Salam Rassi points out to me that the Greek word *theoria* was a loan word in Syriac.

But knowledge is of two kinds. Of one kind is that which we choose only for the sake of knowing some thing, as when we seek to know whether the sun travels above the moon or not, and from what cause and in what way sun and moon get into conjunction. Of the other kind is that which we have about our activities and business, for example about [B]: (metal-working) or public business. Moreover, everything is an object of sense or of intellect and either is a substance (*ousia*),[67] or belongs to a substance, or is in a substance. So since philosophers seek to have understanding of everything, there is rightly added to the definition of philosophy "which is concerned with what a thing is".[68] For someone who wants to know what a human or horse or anything else is does not investigate how many humans or horses there have been or are or will be in the world,[69] since that is something indefinite, if not by reason of nature, at any rate by reason of our own mind, for what is indefinite cannot be known by us. Rather, that person seeks concerning humanity what is the essence of human. For every human is equal to every other in being human. For understanding (*scientia*) is found in what is equal, not in what is indefinite. Similarly in other examples.

So philosophy is an accurate understanding of sensible and intelligible things and of substance and what belongs to substance and what is in substance. Further, philosophy is the art of all arts and the learning of all forms of learning, because it is ready as the instrument of all arts and forms of learning, and further the operations of those arts and forms of learning can be chosen in the first instance because of philosophy. For it is with the aid of philosophy that humans have discovered letters, the art of speaking and the other types of knowledge, along with the conjunction of letters, and the combination of nouns and verbs. And the other arts have also necessarily got their start from it, whether the art of piloting or any other arts whatever, whereas philosophy alone furnished its own instruments, and needed no other art, and its activities are also the options most worthy of choice.

Further, philosophy is assimilation to the divine, so far as humans can be similar to it.[70] For God knows (*cognoscere*) and acts and philosophers also in the image of God, have knowledge and act in their own diminished way.

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[67] Salam Rassi pointed out to me *ousia*, as well as *theôria*, as Syriac uses of loan words from Greek.

[68] Sebastian Brock has confirmed for me that this rendering of Land's Latin "*ea quae versatur in eo, quid sit*" (p. 4.20), is a possible rendering of the Syriac. In other words, the reference is to Philosophy being interested in the essence (lost Greek may have been τί ἐστι) of men and horses, which explains the next point that it is not concerned with the number of humans or horses.

[69] Cf. Ammonius, *Interpretation of Porphyry's Introduction* (above, n. 26), p. 2.23-25: "For the philosopher does not set himself to know enumeratively all the humans in the world, but to know what is the nature of human". Similarly *ibid*., p. 325 ff. But I suspect a lacuna or misunderstanding in the Syriac, because Ammonius is making these remarks about the definition of Philosophy as "Knowledge of being *qua* beings" (*ibid*., p. 2.23-25) and about human and horse having a different essence (one of two meanings of Greek οὐσία, p. 3.25ff.)

[70] A phrase applied to justice by Plat., *Theaet*. 176 B 1.

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