

# Studia graeco-arabica

9



2019

### *Editorial Board*

Mohammad Ali Amir Moezzi, École Pratique des Hautes Études, Paris  
Carmela Baffioni, Istituto Universitario Orientale, Napoli  
Sebastian Brock, Oriental Institute, Oxford  
Charles Burnett, The Warburg Institute, London  
Hans Daiber, Johann Wolfgang Goethe-Universität Frankfurt a. M.  
Cristina D'Ancona, Università di Pisa  
Thérèse-Anne Druart, The Catholic University of America, Washington  
Gerhard Endress, Ruhr-Universität Bochum  
Richard Goulet, Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique, Paris  
Steven Harvey, Bar-Ilan University, Jerusalem  
Henri Hugonnard-Roche, École Pratique des Hautes Études, Paris  
Remke Kruk, Universiteit Leiden  
Concetta Luna, Scuola Normale Superiore, Pisa  
Alain-Philippe Segonds (†)  
Richard C. Taylor, Marquette University, Milwaukee (WI)

### *Staff*

Elisa Coda, Cristina D'Ancona, Giulia Guidara, Issam Marjani, Cecilia Martini Bonadeo

### *Submissions*

Submissions are invited in every area of the studies on the transmission of philosophical and scientific texts from Classical Antiquity to the Middle Ages, Renaissance, and early modern times. Papers in English, French, German, Italian, and Spanish are published. Prospect authors are invited to check the *Guidelines* on the website of the journal, and to address their proposals to the Editor in chief.

### *Peer Review Criteria*

*Studia graeco-arabica* follows a double-blind peer review process. Authors should avoid putting their names in headers or footers or refer to themselves in the body or notes of the article; the title and abstract alone should appear on the first page of the submitted article. All submitted articles are read by the editorial staff. Manuscripts judged to be of potential interest to our readership are sent for formal review to at least one reviewer. *Studia graeco-arabica* does not release referees' identities to authors or to other reviewers. The journal is committed to rapid editorial decisions.

### *Subscription orders*

Information on subscription rates for the print edition of Volume 9 (2019), claims and customer service: [redazione@pacinieditore.it](mailto:redazione@pacinieditore.it)

Web site: <http://learningroads.cfs.unipi.it/sga>

Service Provider: Università di Pisa, ICT - Servizi di Rete Ateneo

ISSN 2281-2687

ISSN 2239-012X (Online)

Registration at the law court of Pisa, 18/12, November 23, 2012.

Editor in chief Cristina D'Ancona ([cristina.dancona@unipi.it](mailto:cristina.dancona@unipi.it))

Mailing address: Dipartimento di Civiltà e Forme del Sapere, via Pasquale Paoli 15, 56126 Pisa, Italia.

Italian Scientific Journals Ranking: A (ANVUR, Classe A)

Indexing and Abstracting: ERIH PLUS (SCH ESF); Index Islamicus (Brill Bibliographies); Scopus (Elsevier)



© Copyright 2019 by Industrie Grafiche Pacini Editore, Pisa.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, translated, transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without prior written permission from the Publisher. The Publisher remains at the disposal of the rightholders, and is ready to make up for unintentional omissions. *Studia graeco-arabica* cannot be held responsible for the scientific opinions of the authors publishing in it.

### *Cover*

Māshad, Kitābhāna-i Āsitān-i Quds-i Raḍawī 300, f. 1v  
Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, *grec* 1853, f. 186v

## *Table of Contents*

Giulia Guidara <i>The Celestial Bodies in Enn. II 9 [33]</i> <i>Implications of Plotinus' Criticism of Gnostic Astrology</i> ..... »	1
Concetta Luna Addenda et corrigenda à l'édition de la Théologie platonicienne de Proclus ..... »	15
Tiziano Dorandi <i>Un manoscritto trascurato del I libro dell'Anthologion di Giovanni Stobeo:</i> <i>Ambrosianus A 183 sup. (76 Martini-Bassi)</i> ..... »	47
Biancamaria Giommoni <i>Nota sulle fonti della Risāla fī l-farq bayna l-rūḥ wa-l-nafs</i> <i>(Epistola sulla differenza tra lo pneuma e l'anima) di Qusṭā ibn Lūqā</i> ..... »	55
Sami Aydin <i>The Remnant of a Questions and Answers Commentary</i> <i>on Aristotle's Categories in Syriac (Vat. Syr. 586)</i> ..... »	69
Najib George Awad <i>Dāwūd ibn Marwān al-Muqammaṣ on the Trinity:</i> <i>A Moment in Abbasid Jewish-Christian Kalām</i> ..... »	107
Matthias Perkams <i>The Syro-Persian Reinvention of Aristotelianism:</i> <i>Paul the Persian's Treatise on the Scopes of Aristotle's Works</i> <i>between Sergius of Rēs'aynā, Alexandria, and Baghdad</i> ..... »	129
Richard Sorabji <i>The Cross-cultural Spread of Greek Philosophy (and Indian Moral Tales)</i> <i>to 6<sup>th</sup> Century Persian and Syriac</i> ..... »	147
Andrea Pintimalli <i>"L'espressione 'apoteosi' suona male alle orecchie dei musulmani"</i> <i>Al-Bīrūnī tra falsafa e comparazione religiosa</i> ..... »	165
Paul Hullmeine <i>Al-Bīrūnī's Use of Philoponus for Arguing Against the Eternity of the World</i> ..... »	183
Cristina D'Ancona <i>Philoponus, or "Yahyā al-naḥwī". An Overview</i> ..... »	203
Yehuda Halper <i>Are there Second Intentions in De Interpretatione 16 a 3-8?</i> <i>The Hebrew Aristotelian Commentary Tradition in the 13<sup>th</sup>-15<sup>th</sup> Centuries</i> ..... »	243

*Tools for Research*

Rüdiger Arnzen, Yury Arzhanov, Nicolás Bamballi, Slavomír Čéplö, Grigory Kessel

*The Quest for 'Falsehood', or a Survey of Tools*

*or the Study of Greek-Syriac-Arabic Translations* ..... » 263

*Reviews* ..... » 281

*Index of Manuscripts* ..... » 360

*Index of Ancient and Medieval Names* ..... » 362

*Index of Modern Names* ..... » 365

type of argument is employed here rather than being a direct quotation, which also explains the difference in wording between Ammonius, Philoponus, and Sergius.

§ 17 (p. 68) Salamander being unburning. The idea that the salamander is believed not to be destroyed by fire but rather that it extinguishes a fire that it enters, is reported already by Aristotle (*History of Animals*, V 19, 552 b 15-17). This belief was transmitted by several subsequent writers, such as Olympiodorus in his commentary on Aristotle's *Meteorology*.<sup>82</sup> The source of this Syriac commentary however is probably the more popular anonymous work called *Physiologus*, which is supposed to have been written in Greek during the second/third century A.D. During the following centuries it was translated into many languages, such as Latin, Syriac, Ethiopic, and Armenian. The old Syriac version is extant in incomplete form in two manuscripts, of which only one preserves the chapter on the salamander (*Vat. Syr.* no. 217, ff. 213r-219v). In the edition of the Greek text of the *Physiologus* by Sbordone, chapter 31 concerns the salamander's ability to put out fire,<sup>83</sup> and in the Syriac text edited by Tychsen the topic is found in chapter 9.<sup>84</sup> The same report about the salamander is also found in the other versions of the *Physiologus* and books on animals in Syriac.<sup>85</sup> In the Greek commentaries on Aristotle's *Categories*, this example is not found, although the salamander is said not to be hot by Elias (*In Cat.*, pp. 202.6, 204.6, and 220.26 Busse) in connection with the discussion on the relatives.

§ 18a (p. 68) The definition of the relatives and its attribution to Plato. The definition of the relatives that is given at the outset of chapter 7 of the *Categories*, is attributed to Plato also by Porphyry, which he says is corrected by Aristotle (*Cat.* 8 a 28-b 24) later on,<sup>86</sup> but Simplicius (*In Cat.*, p. 159.12-22 Kalbfleisch) reports that Boethus of Sidon (1<sup>st</sup> century BC) noted its connection to Plato (see also Fleet's nn. 25-27 *ad locum*).

§ 18b (p. 68) Relatives expressed by grammatical cases. The use of grammatical cases for the purpose of specifying the different ways in which things are related to each other is also found in Porphyry (*In Cat.*, p. 112.8-21 Busse) and Simplicius (*In Cat.*, pp. 162.19-163.5 Kalbfleisch). What in Greek is expressed by the grammatical cases through the change of word endings is in Syriac expressed by the addition of prepositional particles. This means that Syriac lacks the inflection of grammatical cases. This would perhaps indicate that the original of this commentary was written in Greek, but that conclusion would require an explanation to the high degree of adaptation to the grammar of the Syriac language that has been imposed on the text.

<sup>82</sup> Olympiodori *In Aristotelis Meteora Commentaria*, ed. G. Stüve, Reimer, Berlin 1900 (*CAG* XII.2), p. 331.13-18.

<sup>83</sup> *Physiologus*, ed. F. Sbordone, Società Dante Alighieri, Milano - Genova - Roma - Napoli 1936, pp. 101f.

<sup>84</sup> *Physiologus Syrus seu Historia Animalium XXXII* in *S. S. memoratorum, Syriace e codice Bibliothecae Vaticanae*, nunc primum edidit, vertit et illustravit O. G. Tychsen, Rostochii 1795, p. 7. A few words from the end of this chapter are unfortunately dropped in this edition and the manuscript should be consulted here (*Vat. Syr.* 217, f. 214v4-7). I intend however to prepare a new edition with translation of this Syriac version of the *Physiologus*.

<sup>85</sup> "Physiologus Leidensis", *Anecdota Syriaca*, vol. 4: *Otia Syriaca*, ed. J.P.N. Land, Brill, Lugduni Batavorum 1875, Ch. 52, pp. 75f. ["The Book of Natural Things"], Das "Buch der Naturgegenstände", herausgegeben und übersetzt von K. Ahrens, C.F. Haeseler, Kiel 1892, Ch. 118, p. 63; and Bar Bahlul, *Lexicon syriacum*, col. 1354 Duval.

<sup>86</sup> Porph., *In Cat.*, p. 111.28f. Busse, see also Porphyry, *On Aristotle's Categories*, trans. by S. K. Strange, Cornell U.P., Ithaca N.Y. 1992, p. 113 n. 307 *ad loc.*







# *Dāwūd ibn Marwān al-Muqammaṣ on the Trinity: A Moment in Abbasid Jewish-Christian Kalām*

Najīb George Awad\*

## *Abstract*

This essay studies al-Muqammaṣ's Muslim *Kalām* text, *Twenty Chapters*, and focuses on his criticism of the Christian *Kalām* on the Trinity. It first analyzes al-Muqammaṣ's assessment of the Christian *Kalām* on the Trinity within the framework of his logico-philosophical discourse on God as 'the One'. It then tries to investigate which Christian *mutakallims'* Arabic works, among the ones we have extant today, could al-Muqammaṣ have read and had in mind when he argued against the doctrine of the Trinity in his *Twenty Chapters*. I conclude with some remarks on the dynamics of interaction between *mutakallims* in the Abbasid era, that can be extracted from the discoursing strategies of texts like al-Muqammaṣ's *Twenty Chapters*.

## *I. Introduction: al-Muqammaṣ and His Kalām*

One of the Jewish *mutakallims* of the early Abbasid era whom we know of today is Dāwūd ibn Marwān al-Muqammaṣ. The information we have on this Jewish philosopher and theologian come mainly from the pen of Abū Ya'qūb al-Qirqisānī (10<sup>th</sup> century A.D.). In his treatise, *Kitāb al-Anwār wa-l-Marāqib* (*The Book of Lights and Watchtowers*), al-Qirqisānī relates that al-Muqammaṣ was a philosopher who converted from Judaism to Christianity; it is believed by scholars today that al-Muqammaṣ turned back to Judaism again. It is believed also that al-Muqammaṣ was educated in philosophy and theology under a certain Nānā, who is probably to be identified with the Christian Jacobite *mutakallim*, Nonnus of Nisibis. He also was trained under the uncle of Nonnus and his mentor, Ḥabīb b. Ḥidmah Abū Rā'īṭa al-Takrītī, as I will propose in the ensuing sections. This education, it seems, drove him to compose *Kalām* works against Christian theology and to translate into Arabic Syriac Christian commentaries on the books of Genesis and Ecclesiastes.<sup>1</sup>

Scholars of Jewish *Kalām* find the value of al-Muqammaṣ and his legacy in the conjecture that, as far as we know today, he is "the first Jewish thinker to write a systematic theological work in Arabic", and probably one of the first active Jewish *mutakallims* who engaged with Christian and

---

<sup>1</sup> I am grateful beyond words to Prof. Sarah Stroumsa for kindly reading a first draft of this paper and generously offering part of her precious time to correct it and comment upon it. I am deeply indebted to the attentive and meticulous corrections and comments she made to improve and sharpen it. My most sincere thanks go also to the anonymous referees of *Studia graeco-arabica* for their remarks and improvements. If any mistakes or flaws remain, they are my sole responsibility.

<sup>1</sup> Abū Ya'qūb al-Qirqisānī, *Kitāb al-Anwār wa-l-Marāqib* (*The Book of Lights and Watchtowers*), ed. L. Nemoy, Alexander Kohut Memorial Foundation, New York 1939-1943, 5 Vols., as cited in the edition and translation by S. Stroumsa, *Dāwūd ibn Marwān al-Muqammaṣ: Twenty Chapters*, Brigham Young U.P., Provo 2016, p. xv. See also B. Chiesa - W. Lockwood, *Ya'qūb al-Qirqisānī on Jewish Sects and Christianity*, Peter Lang, Frankfurt am Main 1984, p. 137, and S. Stroumsa, "From the Earliest Known Judaeo-Arabic Commentary on Genesis", *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 27 (2002), pp. 375-95, in part. pp. 375-9.

Muslim interlocutors in *muğādalāt* (debates) in Iraq and Syria in the 9<sup>th</sup> century's Abbasid context.<sup>2</sup> On his sobriquet "al-Muqammaṣ", its connotations and background, scholars are not in agreement. Sarah Stroumsa, the critical editor of his writings, suggests that such a sobriquet, deriving from a Christian-Arabic term for Muslims or Arabs, reveals Dāwūd al-Raqqī's Arabic-speaking Jewish (and Christian at one point) identity, thus reflecting "his position at the crossroads of cultures, between the already-Arabicized Jewish community of the ninth century and the Syriac-Christian community he joined".<sup>3</sup>

One of al-Muqammaṣ's extant *Kalām* texts is known as *ʿIṣrūn Maqāla* (*Twenty Chapters*), written in Arabic script rather than in Hebrew script, as is common in Judaeo-Arabic, either due to the background of his education or because he wanted the book to reach the broader readership of the Abbasid intellectual society, whose lingua franca was Arabic.<sup>4</sup> These chapters manifest a content that is heavily loaded with, and deeply influenced by, the Neoplatonic-Aristotelian thought of the Greek-Arabic translation-interpretation-paraphrasing movement of the ninth century.<sup>5</sup> Yet, one cannot miss in these articles the arguments and expositions that al-Muqammaṣ relates on basic Christian theological doctrines, like the Trinity, Christology, and the Incarnation. The *Twenty Chapters* show a Jewish *mutakallim* familiar with some Muslim *Kalām* and the *falsafa* that were available in his era. Even more noticeably, the Chapters demonstrate that he was also acquainted with the Christian *Kalām*, as he explicitly and directly engages in this treatise with the Christian *mutakallims'* claims and logical-philosophical explanations of the Christian doctrine. Sarah Stroumsa eloquently articulates this when she states that such engagement tells us exactly what kind of Aristotelian Christian *Kalām* "influenced and shaped al-Muqammaṣ's thought".<sup>6</sup>

In this essay, I shall examine and analyze Dāwūd al-Muqammaṣ's critical and polemical *Kalām* on the Christian doctrine of the Trinity in his *Twenty Chapters*. I shall first read systematically al-Muqammaṣ's assessment of the Christian *kalām* on the Trinity within the framework of his logico-philosophical discourse on God as 'the One'. I will, then, try to investigate which Christian *mutakallims'* Arabic works from the ones extant today could al-Muqammaṣ have read and had in mind, when he argued against the Trinity in his *Twenty Chapters*. I will, finally, conclude with some remarks on the dynamics of interaction between *mutakallims* in the ninth century Abbasid context, which one can extract from the discoursing strategies of texts like al-Muqammaṣ's *Kalām*. My claims on al-Muqammaṣ's potential Christian sources will not be conclusively evident. We will never know exactly which Christian texts he had in mind when he wrote his criticism of the Trinity, because al-Muqammaṣ himself never names his sources in his text. What he does clearly and evidently, nevertheless, is to explicitly invoke claims and ideas on the Trinity he knew that Christian *mutakallims* held. By this, he invites us to speculate on who could these Christians be. My suggestions here will then be probabilities and not certainties, as a response to an invitation to investigate triggered by al-Muqammaṣ's himself. Probabilities are not against historical investigation,

<sup>2</sup> Stroumsa, "From the Earliest Known Judaeo-Arabic Commentary on Genesis" (above, n. 1), p. 375.

<sup>3</sup> Stroumsa, *Twenty Chapters*, p. xviii, and Ead., "From the Earliest Known Judaeo-Arabic Commentary on Genesis" (above, n. 1), p. 379. See also on the Arabic-speaking Jewish community in late Antiquity and early Islam H. Ben-Shemmai, "Observations on the Beginnings of Judaeo-Arabic Script", in D.M. Friedenreich - M. Goldstein (eds.), *Beyond Religious Borders: Interaction and Intellectual Exchange in the Medieval Islamic World*, University of Pennsylvania Press, Philadelphia 2012, pp. 13-29.

<sup>4</sup> Stroumsa, *Twenty Chapters*, p. xxii.

<sup>5</sup> Stroumsa, *Twenty Chapters*, p. xxiii.

<sup>6</sup> Stroumsa, *Twenty Chapters*, p. xxiv.

since historical-textual research aims only at ‘probabilistic truths’, as Robert Hoyland and Aziz al-Azmeh remind us.<sup>7</sup> Finally, in studying the *Twenty Chapters*, I rely on the precious critical edition which Sarah Stroumsa produced in her 1989 *Dāwūd ibn Marwān al-Muqammaṣ, Twenty Chapters*. This text is now available in a publication from Brigham Young University Press that appeared in 2016. While using Stroumsa’s Arabic text, I present my own English translation of the passages quoted.

## II. The Trinity in the Twenty Articles

Dāwūd al-Muqammaṣ divides his *Kalām* treatise *‘Iṣrūn Maqāla* into four main parts: on knowing and how to perceive the nature of things; on the being, origin and purpose of the world; on the nature and existence of God and, finally, on the ethical value and *telos* of creation. In this *Kalām*, chapters seven to eleven are dedicated to the truth of God. Al-Muqammaṣ there develops four basic inquiries: is God Creator? How many creators originated the world? Who is God? And how is God who He is? When al-Muqammaṣ reflects on God’s ‘how-ness’ (*kayfiyya* or *kayf Allāh*), namely through chapters eight, nine and ten, he touches upon the Christian *Kalām* on the Trinity, with some reflections on Christology and Incarnation. In this section, I will display a systematic reading of al-Muqammaṣ’s arguments against the Trinity by offering a constructive anatomy of his views. I will read these views within the broader framework of his *Kalām* on God the One and Creator.

It is important to notice that al-Muqammaṣ does tackle the question of ‘how God is God?’ after engaging the inquiry on ‘who is God?’ For him, the ‘who’ decides the ‘how’ and shapes its content philosophically. Who God is for al-Muqammaṣ is deduced from the fundamental fact that the maker of the world (*fā’il al-‘ālam*) is ‘one’ and not two.<sup>8</sup> From arguing for the oneness of the maker of the world, al-Muqammaṣ moves into elaborating on the ‘who-ness’ of this One and maker. He does this by claiming that this maker, and only this, is called by the name or noun or word (اسم / *ism*) ‘One’: *ism al-wāḥid*. ‘One’ is not just designative of a quantitative knowledge on how many makers were involved in making the world. More substantially, it is a qualitative name that ontologically signify the being, the nature, and the essence of this maker as such: God is one (*Allāh wāḥid*) essentially as ‘God the One’.

In order to unpack the connotations of calling God ‘the One’, al-Muqammaṣ sets out six meanings or senses of the name ‘One’.

Wa id ḍakarnā ism al-wāḥid, fa-naḥnu ḥuzarā’ al-naqassim ism al-wāḥid wa-naqūlu ḥīna’idīn wa-nuḥbir ‘alā ayy tilka al-wuḡūhi naz’amu anna Allāha wāḥid. Fa-naqūlu inna al-wāḥid yuqālu ‘alā sittati awḡuh: wāḥid fi l-basāṭa, wa-wāḥid fi l-tarkīb, wa-wāḥid fi l-ḡins, wa-wāḥid fi l-naw’, wa-wāḥid fi l-adad, wa-wāḥid annahu lā-maṭīla lahu.

And since we mentioned the name ‘the One’, we are careful to divide the noun ‘the One’. Therefore, we say and tell in what sense do we claim that God is ‘one’. So, we say that ‘the One’ is said after six aspects: one in simplicity, and one in composition, and one in genus, and one in species, and one in number, and one because it has no equivalent.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>7</sup> R. Hoyland, “History, Fiction and Authorship in the First Centuries of Islam”, in J. Bray (ed.), *Writing and Representation in Medieval Islam*, Routledge, London 2006, pp. 16-46; A. al-Azmeh, *The Arabs and Islam in Late Antiquity: A Critique of Approaches to Arabic Sources*, Gerlach Press, Berlin 2014, p. 33.

<sup>8</sup> Stroumsa, *Twenty Chapters*, art. 8, pts. 1-32, pp. 139-65.

<sup>9</sup> Stroumsa, *Twenty Chapters*, 8.33, p. 165.

Al-Muqammaṣ's attention to the multiple meanings of 'the One' is motivated by his concern about disallowing any sense of plurality or manyness that implies any form of division in God Himself. For him, God's oneness depends on adamant emphasis on 'singleness'; on stressing and centralizing the sense of 'contra-manyness'; of defending a minimalist perception of God's Being (perhaps a Mu'tazilite thought form). This is why in the ensuing points of his eighth chapter he casts away the meanings of 'one' that he believes obscures 'singleness' and supports any rate of manyness or diversity in God's identity. He strongly maintains that 'the One' names God's uniqueness in terms of being and action (i.e. God has no peer or equal), and he rejects other senses of 'the One', deeming them irrelevant and inapplicable to naming God.

Fa-naqūl annahu qad qāla ba'd al-'ulamā' al-muwaḥḥida inna Allāh wāḥid bi-l-basāṭa, ya'nī annahu wāḥid ḡayr muḥtalif al-dāt bi-waḡhin min al-wuḡūh. Qāla: fa-hādā ma'nā wāḥid fi l-basāṭa. Wa-qāla āḡar inna Allāh wāḥid fi l-dāt wa-l-fi'l, ayy innahu lā-naẓīra lahu fi dātīhi wa-lā miṭāl lahu fi fi'lihi. Wa-hādāyn al-waḡhayn ṣaḡīḡayn ḡami'an inna Allāh wāḥid fi annahu ḡayr muḥtalif al-dāt, wa-wāḥid bi-annahu lā naẓīra lahu fi l-dāt, wa-wāḥid bi-annahu lā 'adīla lahu wa-lā miṭāl fi l-fi'l. Fa-ammā al-wuḡūh al-bāqīya fa-innahā munkasira.

So we say that some 'monadizer' scholars said that God is one in simplicity, which means that He is one without any differentiation or distinction in any possible way in His being. [He] said this is the meaning of 'one in simplicity'. Another [monadizer] said that God is one in being and action, meaning that God Has no peer in His being and no similar in His action. Both senses are alike accurate [in saying] that God is one in the sense that He has no differentiation in being and He is one in the sense that His being Has no peer and one in the sense that there is neither equal nor similar to Him in action. All the remaining meanings [of 'the One'] are defeated.<sup>10</sup>

It is essential to start analyzing al-Muqammaṣ's refutation of the Trinity from his systematic departure from an argument on the accurate understanding, in his opinion, of 'the One' as God's name, or as God's 'who-ness'. Al-Muqammaṣ's rejection of the Trinity is nothing but a logical consequence of the choices he made to interpret 'the One' and what it names in/as God. What he selected to be for him the accurate sense of 'the One' from the six meanings he discerned drives him to the conclusion that the Christian *Kalām* on God as triune would prove implausible if it is to be scrutinized from a logico-philosophical understanding of the notion of the 'one'.

Al-Muqammaṣ dedicates the remaining of chapter eight to a refutation of the Trinity on the basis of two philosophical points related to the terminology of 'essence' (*ḡawḡhar*) and 'persons' (*aqānīm*) on the one hand, and to the notion of analogy and its boundaries on the other.<sup>11</sup> Before I expose briefly al-Muqammaṣ's treatment of these two aspects, let me point out that he starts his *Kalām* on the Trinity with a worth-pondering positive attention to an understanding of God's identity (or divine who-ness) he agreed upon with Christian *mutakallims*. Al-Muqammaṣ relates that the Christians and him believe that God is the creator of the world, the one who caused it (*muḡḡdiṭ*) from nothing, and that God is one essence (*ḡawḡhar*), not three gods.<sup>12</sup> Yet, al-Muqammaṣ here pauses and declares that the difference between him and the Christians lies exactly in the point of how they understand this world's Creator to be 'the One'. In other words, al-Muqammaṣ suggests that he

<sup>10</sup> Stroumsa, *Twenty Chapters*, 8.44, p. 175.

<sup>11</sup> Stroumsa, *Twenty Chapters*, 8.46-60, pp. 177-187.

<sup>12</sup> Stroumsa, *Twenty Chapters*, 8.46, p. 177.

and the Christians concur to a considerable extent about who God is as ‘the One’. They part ways, nevertheless, in regard to how God exists and lives as ‘the One’: a disagreement on the issue of the ‘how-ness’, not necessarily on that of the ‘who-ness’.

Al-Muqammaṣ’s first disagreement with the Christians’ conception of ‘how God is the One’ lies in the notions and terminology they use to speak about oneness. According to him, the Christians speak about the Trinity by means of the terms ‘essence’ (*ḡawhar*) and ‘persons’ (*aqānīm*). They say:

Huwa wāḥid fī l-ḡawhar wa-huwa ṭalāṭa fī l-aqānīm, wa-hādā l-qawl ‘inda l-mantiq huwa ṭalāṭat aṣḥās ya’ummuhā naw’un wāḥidun, miṭla Sa’īd wa-Yazīd wa-Ḥalaf, alladīna ta’ummuhum insāniyya wāḥida.

He [i.e. God] is one in essence and He is three hypostases, and this saying according to logic implies three persons pervaded by one nature, like Said, Yazid and Khalaf, who are pervaded by one humanity.<sup>13</sup>

To this claim, al-Muqammaṣ reacts by asking about the conceptual connection between the essence (*ḡawhar*) and the hypostases (*aqānīm*): the essence can either be the sum of the three hypostases, or it is something other than them. If the Christians say that the essence is the hypostases per se (and the Jacobites say so, according to al-Muqammaṣ),<sup>14</sup> this would imply that God is mathematically one (i.e. singular) and never three. Al-Muqammaṣ, thus, opines that we must speak of one *ḡawhar* and one *uqnūm* (hypostasis), rather than three hypostases (*aqānīm*). Otherwise, the oneness of the essence is abolished. So, either we speak of three *aqānīm* and discard the ‘one *ḡawhar*’ terminology, or we maintain the ‘one *ḡawhar*’ terminology and give up the ‘three *aqānīm*’.

Ḥaddiṭūnā ‘an ṭalāṭat aqānīm allatī za’amtum annahā ḡawharan wāḥidan: hiya ḍalika l-ḡawhar wa-l-wāḥid faḡaṭ lā-ṣay’a aḥara ḡayra, am hiya huwa wa-ṣay’ aḥar ḡayruhu? Fa-kāna ḡawābuhum annahā huwa wa-laysa ṣay’un aḥara ḡayra, fa-alzamnāhum annahā kānat hiya huwa wa-laysa ṣay’un aḥara ḡayra, aḥḥada amrayn: immā ibṭāl kawnahā ḡawhar wāḥid, in kāna ṭalāṭat aqānīm, aw ibṭāl kawnahā ṭalāṭat aqānīm in kānat ḡawhar wāḥid.

Tell us about ‘three hypostases’, which you claimed that it is ‘one essence’: is it this essence only and nothing else other than it, or is it it and something else other than it? Their answer was: it is it and not something else other than it. [Now] if it was it and not something else other than it, we imposed on them one of two orders: either revoking its being one essence, if it was three hypostases, or revoking its being three hypostases, if it was one essence.<sup>15</sup>

On the other hand, al-Muqammaṣ relates, some Christians (the Melkites, according to him) tend to give a different answer, suggesting that the ‘three hypostases’ are not the ‘one essence’ in itself.<sup>16</sup> To this idea, al-Muqammaṣ responds with a counter-question: if the three are other than the one (not it as it is), what then are the three hypostases? Are they essences (*ḡawābir*) or accidents/attributes (*a’rād*), or are they neither? If they are accidents, and if they say they are the essence in itself, they then made God Himself an accident (*‘arad*). If, on the other hand, they said ‘they are essences’, they ended up making in God essences that are equal in number to what they call *aqānīm* (hypostases), which means God is not one because God is no longer ‘one essence’ (*ḡawhar wāḥid*).<sup>17</sup>

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>14</sup> Stroumsa, *Twenty Chapters*, 8.47, p. 177.

<sup>15</sup> Stroumsa, *Twenty Chapters*, 8.49, pp. 179-81. See also 8.48, p. 179.

<sup>16</sup> Stroumsa, *Twenty Chapters*, 8.55, p. 185.

<sup>17</sup> Stroumsa, *Twenty Chapters*, 8.55, p. 185.

Finally, some Christians, al-Muqammaṣ states, explain that they understand the name ‘the One’ to mean ‘no one is peer or similar to Him’: God is the uncaused Cause (*‘illa ġayr ma’lūla wa-sabab ġayr musabbab*). Others say that God is neither ‘essence’ nor ‘accident’, for everything else other than Him is either essence or accident; for them, God is called ‘the One’ to mean this and nothing else. These Christians, al-Muqammaṣ maintains, are not his counterparts because they just echo what he personally says about ‘the One’.<sup>18</sup>

With his abolition of the Trinitarian terminology and its notional implications, al-Muqammaṣ interweaves a parallel refutation to the Christians’ use of the analogical methodology (*qiyās*). He pauses in particular at the Christians’ use of the analogy of ‘three golden coins’ to explain the relation between the notions of ‘three *aqānīm*’ and ‘one *ġawhar*’. According to al-Muqammaṣ, this is how the Christians use such analogy to vouch for the plausibility of ‘one-in-three’ logic.

Min qibali anna qad naġid talāṭat danānīr dahabun wāḥid lā šay’a ġayra; ta’ nī innahā laysat fiḍḍa wa-lā dahab wa-lā nuḥās ġayr al-dahab. Wa-hiya talāṭat al-danānīr, wa-huwa wāḥid, wa-tilka al-talāṭa huwa dālīka l-wāḥid. Wa-kaḍālika naqūlu talāṭat al-danānīr hiya awsiyya wāḥida lā ġayrahā. Na’ nī innahum lā ġamādiyya lā fardiyya wa-lā ġayra dālīka siwā l-awsiyya.

In regard to our finding of the three coins to be one gold and nothing other than it, what we mean is that [the coins] are not silver and [they are] neither gold nor copper other than [their] gold. And, they are three coins and it [i.e. the gold] is one, and these three are this one. We similarly say that these three coins are one *awsiyya* (transliteration of *ousia*) and nothing other than [this *ousia*], meaning [by this] that they are neither inanimate nor individual nor anything else except the *awsiyya*.<sup>19</sup>

To this, al-Muqammaṣ replies by suggesting that the Christians’ explanation of their analogy responds to a question other than the one they were expected to address. No one, he argues, is actually asking the Christians whether or not they speak of three coins that have three different natures other than gold.<sup>20</sup> The question, instead, is whether the coins are only and exclusively the gold, or they are both the gold and something else beside it. If the Christians discern this logical implications of this analogy, al-Muqammaṣ suggests, they will realize that it does not serve well their purpose. For, if they said that the coins are nothing other than their golden nature, they are no more speaking about ‘coins’: coins are not just their essence (the gold they are made of), but also their inscription (*naqṣ*) and their stamp (*ḥatm*). Without the inscription and stamp, coins are not ‘*danānīr*’ (coins), even though they are indeed gold.<sup>21</sup> Hence, coins are not just their essence (*ġawhar*). They also are their accidents (*a’rād*). But the Christians, like al-Muqammaṣ himself, as the latter already conceded, do not allow the existence of accidents in the one God: accidents are attributes of created or caused things, not of the creating uncaused cause. Their presumed existence in the uncaused cause would negate its definitional oneness. Be that as it may, the analogy of ‘three coins-one gold’ is inconvenient to explain what the Christians want to say in their belief that God is ‘one essence’, though He is ‘three hypostases’. This analogy will entail that there are in God things other than the essence (i.e. the persons), as

<sup>18</sup> Stroumsa, *Twenty Chapters*, 8.59-60, p. 187.

<sup>19</sup> Stroumsa, *Twenty Chapters*, 8.48, p. 179)

<sup>20</sup> Stroumsa, *Twenty Chapters*, 8.48, p. 179; 8.50, p. 181: *Inna qad ‘alimnā anna al-talāṭat danānīr, allatī hiya dahab laysa siwā l-dahab min al-ġawābir, lā fiḍḍa wa-lā dahab wa-lā nuḥās wa-lā raṣāṣ* (“We understood that the three coins, which are gold and nothing but gold among gems, is neither silver, copper nor lead”).

<sup>21</sup> Stroumsa, *Twenty Chapters*, 8.50, p. 181.

in the three coins there are things other than the *ousia* of gold (i.e. the inscription and stamp).<sup>22</sup> Al-Muqammaṣ's conclusion is that

Fa-in bāna min maqāyisihim allatī ataw bihā anna l-ṭalāṭat aqānīm in kanāt hiya al-ḡawhar al-wāḥid lā ḡayra ḡawhar wa-lā 'araḍ, fa-qad baṭula immā l-ḡawhar al-wāḥid wa-ṭabata al-ṭalāṭat aqānīm, wa-immā an yakūn qad baṭalat al-ṭalāṭat aqānīm wa-ṭabata l-ḡawhar al-wāḥid. Wa-in kāna ḡālīka min qawlihim fāsīd, fa-laysa li-qawlihim, in qālū inna al-ṭalāṭat aqānīm hiya ḡālīka l-ḡawhar al-wāḥid lā ḡayrahu ḡawhar wa-lā 'araḍ ma'nā.

If it appeared from the analogies they brought about that the three hypostases are the one essence per se, neither as an essence other than the *ḡawhar* nor as accident, this entails either that the one *ḡawhar* is abolished and the three hypostases are proved, or the three hypostases are abolished and the one *ḡawhar* is proved. And, if this saying of theirs was an error, then there is no meaning to their words if they said that the three hypostases are this very one essence and neither an essence other than it nor an accident.<sup>23</sup>

Al-Muqammaṣ' refutation of the Trinity in Chapter Eight is not the only reflection on the Trinity one can find in his *Twenty Chapters*. He tackles other aspects from the discourse on the Trinity in Chapter Ten as well. His attention to the Trinity there comes within the framework of his discussion of how does God exist as 'the One' and how God's life manifests His simple oneness. This treatment is to be traced back to his discussion earlier, in Chapter Nine. There, al-Muqammaṣ relates that if God is 'one' in terms of simplicity, there is no state of differentiation or duality within God's being. And indeed, being 'the One', God is the First who has no beginning and the Last who has no *telos*, the uncaused Cause.<sup>24</sup> Al-Muqammaṣ here relates God's being to His attributes, viewing the latter as expressions of God's oneness. If the attributes name God's oneness (in the sense of single-ness), they must then pertain to God's simplicity, and not imply numerical status in the divine essence. So, when we say, for instance, that God is a living Being (*ḡayy*), we do not mean that God and His state of living (*ḡayyāt*) are two things (duality) differentiated within God's being: God is a living being, He is not 'living by a life' (*ḡayyūn bi-ḡayyāt*). The second option implies that 'life' is something independent other than God, a second reality beside God, and that God exists by it.<sup>25</sup> For al-Muqammaṣ, claiming that God lives by means of 'life' entails that God contains a duality within Himself. This means that God is composite, for "whatever lives by means of something other than itself is a composite, *kullu ṣayyīn yaḡyā bi-ḡayrihi fa-huwa murakkab*".<sup>26</sup> Against this, and in order to defend a strict mathematical oneness, al-Muqammaṣ suggests that God does not live by 'life', rather God is His own state of living.

It is in connection to the discussion of Chapter Nine, that al-Muqammaṣ touches upon the doctrine of the Trinity again in Chapter Ten. According to him, the Christians are the ones who believe that God lives by a life; that is God and his state of living are distinct like two things. The Christians do this, he opines, when in their Trinitarian discourse they say that God lives by a life

<sup>22</sup> Stroumsa, *Twenty Chapters*, 8.51, p. 181.

<sup>23</sup> Stroumsa, *Twenty Chapters*, 8.52, p. 181.

<sup>24</sup> Stroumsa, *Twenty Chapters*, 9.2, p. 19): *bal naqūlu annahu wāḥidun fī l-basāṭa, ayy annahu lā iḡtibāl fī ḡātibi wa-annahu fī ḡātibi lā ṭāniya labu, wa-tafsīr ḡālīka annahu al-awwal alladī lā ibtidā'a labu, wa-l-āḡir alladī lā ḡāyat labu wa-annahu al-'illa al-ḡayr ma'lūla wa-l-sabab al-ḡayr musabbab.*

<sup>25</sup> Stroumsa, *Twenty Chapters*, 9.7-8, p. 195.

<sup>26</sup> Stroumsa, *Twenty Chapters*, 9.15, p. 203.

called ‘Holy Spirit’ (*rūḥ al-quḍus*), and that God knows by a knowledge called ‘the Word’ (*al-kalima*) or ‘the Son’ (*al-Ibn*).

Fa-in za‘ama anna ḥayātahu ḡayrahi, fa-qaḍ yalzamuhu anna Allāh tabāraka lam yazal wa-ḡayrahu, wa-ḍālīka qawl al-Naṣāra fi iṭbāt al-taṭlīt id ḡa‘alū Allāh ḥayyun bi-ḥayāt hiya Rūḥ al-Quḍus wa-‘ālimun bi-‘ilmun huwa al-Kalima wa-huwa alladī sammūhu al-Ibn, wa-haḍā huwa al-širk al-šarīḥ.

So, if he claims that [God’s] life is other than Him, he is compelled [to say] that God, be blessed, co-eternally exists with another, and this is the Christians’ saying to verify the triad-ness, for they made God a living being by means of a life that is the Holy Spirit and [made Him] knower by means of a knowledge that is the Word, who is the one they named the Son, and this is frank polytheism.<sup>27</sup>

Against this, al-Muqammaṣ emphasizes that God is a living (but also knowing) being by means of His very own self or in Himself, and not by means of a life that is other than Himself.<sup>28</sup> After stressing this, he insists again that it is Christianity, in its Trinitarian logic, that disallows us to say that God is a living Being, or a knowing Being, without associating Him with a ‘life’ and a ‘knowledge’ other than Himself.<sup>29</sup> To this, al-Muqammaṣ responds in Chapter Nine that if the Christians accept that apophatic language is appropriate to speak analogically about God, and if they concede that saying ‘God is living’ implies that ‘God is not dead’, they should then evenly approve the apophatic explanation of ‘God is living’ to be ‘God is not living by means of a life other than Himself’ or also that ‘God is not knowing by means of a knowledge other than Himself’. This apophatic analogical logic must be accepted by them, and if it was embraced by them, this would prevent them from saying that ‘God lives by means of a life called Holy Spirit’ or that ‘God knows by means of a knowledge called the Word/Son’.<sup>30</sup>

What are the ultimate logical consequences of the previous understanding of God for the Christian doctrine of the Trinity? According to al-Muqammaṣ, the Christians must seriously reconsider the plausibility of speaking about God’s ‘how-ness’ in Trinitarian terms, not just question the expression in triadic way of God’s ‘who-ness’: not only for God’s being per se, but also for God’s modes of existence, the Trinity is logically and ontologically irrelevant and inappropriate.

In Chapter Ten, al-Muqammaṣ demonstrates how the Trinitarian expression of God’s ‘how-ness’ (*kayfiyya*) is totally implausible. He relates that the Christians claim that God’s ‘how-ness’ lies in the birthing of the Son and the bringing forth of the Spirit

Wa-qaḍ ḥālafnā fi iṭlāq al-kayfiyya ‘aliyhi al-Naṣārā wa-l-mušābiha min ahl kull al-milal. Fa-ammā al-Naṣārā fa-za‘amū anna kayfiyyatahu anna al-Ibn wūlida wal-Rūḥ taḥarraḡa, haḍīhi ‘indahum.

And we disagreed with the Christians concerning the application of ‘how-ness’ to [God] and with the anthropomorphists from all religious sects. The Christians claim that [God’s] how-ness lies in the birthing of the Son and the bringing forth of the Spirit; thus it is for them.<sup>31</sup>

<sup>27</sup> Stroumsa, *Twenty Chapters*, 9.11, pp. 200-1.

<sup>28</sup> Stroumsa, *Twenty Chapters*, 9.14, p. 203; 9.17, p. 207.

<sup>29</sup> Stroumsa, *Twenty Chapters*, 9.21, p. 211: *Wa-ammā al-Naṣrāniyya fa-lā tu ḡīzu lanā an yakūn Allāh ḥayyun bi-lā ḥayāt ‘ālimun bi-lā ‘ilm, a nī annahu ḥayyun bi-naṣībi ‘ālimun bi-naṣībi lā bi-ḡayri ḍālīka* (“And it is Christianity who forbids us to say that God to be living without a life and knowing without a knowledge; I mean that He is living by Himself and knowing by Himself and nothing else”).

<sup>30</sup> Stroumsa, *Twenty Chapters*, 9.25-26, p. 215.

<sup>31</sup> Stroumsa, *Twenty Chapters*, 10.3, p. 225.

To this, al-Muqammaṣ responds by pointing to the limits of the analogical language and the Christians' consistency in paying attention to it. He says that the Christians claim that the Son is eternally born from the Father, without 'before' and 'after' and without 'beginning' (*bidāya*) or 'end' (*nihāya*): *lam yazal mawlūd min al-Ab (...) wa-lā yazāl mawlūd minhu* ("He has eternally born from the Father [...] and is eternally born from Him"). At the same time, the Christians refuse to concede any movement or local change related to God's existence (*mutaḥarrik bi-ḥarakat intiḡāl*) because, for them, movement and local change designate the existence of bodies (*aḡsām*), and God is not a body. In this, al-Muqammaṣ sees contradiction and inconsistency in using analogy: the action of birthing is also typical of bodies, and it should not be used to speak about God's existence, since 'movement', which is characteristic of bodies, is inapplicable to the non-bodily being of God. Either one applies a bodily feature to God analogically, thus conceding that God (like bodies) is moving and changing as birth-making, or one sticks to God's non-corporeal nature and abstains from the analogy of birthing, just as one already abstained from the analogy of movement.

To this response, according to al-Muqammaṣ, the Christians react by claiming that the Son is begotten or birthed from the Father as the word is birthed in the soul and as the sunlight is birthed from the sun or the fruit is birthed from the tree: *inna al-ibn mawlūd min al-Ab ka-tawallūd al-kalima min al-naḡs wa-ka-tawallud nūr al-šams min al-šams wa-ka-tawallud al-ṡamara min al-šaḡara*.<sup>32</sup> To this, al-Muqammaṣ attends from the viewpoint of the relation of the accidents (*ʿarād*) to the essence (*ḡawhar*). In his opinion, the word is related to the soul wherein it is born as an accident is related to an essence. It manifests, that is, an additional thing related to the essence, as something that is different from it. While this applies to 'word' and 'soul' in human situation, al-Muqammaṣ suggests, it does not apply analogically to God. For, when the Christians use this analogy to speak about God, they suggest that the Son to the Father is like an accident to an essence. The Trinity for them, al-Muqammaṣ concludes, consists in three accidents related to God's *ousia*. 'Birthing' here over-projects the relation of accident to essence on God Himself. This is a mistaken implementation of the analogy, concludes al-Muqammaṣ, because assuming a co-existence of accidents and essence in God makes God's oneness and simplicity redundant. Such redundancy is not going to be solved by making the Son an essence (*ḡawhar*) like the Father who gave birth to Him, for this will mean that there are many essences in God; thus we have two originators rather than one. This is absurd (*bāṡil*), al-Muqammaṣ retorts.<sup>33</sup> The Christians' analogical description of God's existence in terms of a Father giving birth to a Son is absurd, no matter from what perspective one approaches it.

Fa-l-nanzur hal yaṡluḡ lahum mā bihi qāsū wa-ʿalihi banū. naqūl: in zaʿama anna al-Ibn al-mutawallid min al-Ab ḡawhar, kamā anna al-Ab ḡawhar, baṡula fi qiyāsihi bi-mā laysa huwa ḡawhar, aʿnī bi-l-kalima fi l-naḡs allatī lam yazʿum aḡad annahā ḡawhar. wa-in qāla inna al-Ibn ʿaraḡ lam yazal huwa aṡluḡ fi annahu uqnūm wa-inna al-ḡawhar yaʿummuhu, lazimahu idā kāna al-Ibn ʿaraḡ ann yakūn al-Ab ʿaraḡ, li-annahu fi qiyās al-ʿaql al-Ibnu miṡlu Abihi.

So, let us ponder if what they used as analogy and built upon is adequate for them. We say: if he [i.e. the Christian] claims that the Son who is birthed from the Father is 'essence', as the Father is 'essence', his analogy [which he uses to speak] about it by means of what is not an essence will be absurd – I mean [by means of speaking about] the word in the soul, which no one claimed to be an essence. And, if he said that the Son is an accident, which is always the origin of [the Son's] being a hypostasis, and that the

<sup>32</sup> Stroumsa, *Twenty Chapters*, 10.5, p. 227.

<sup>33</sup> Stroumsa, *Twenty Chapters*, 10.7-10, p. 229.

essence includes it, this compels [the Christian], if the Son is accident, to make the Father an accident [too], for in the analogy of reason, the Son is like His Father.<sup>34</sup>

Be that as it may, al-Muqammaṣ concludes, the Christians are mistaken in speaking analogically about the ‘Father-Son’ relation in terms of ‘birthing-birthed’. If their Trinitarian faith entails to say that the Father and the Son (and for that matter the Spirit) are co-eternal, they should then formulate their claim in a language which does not imply that the Son was not eternally with the Father, as if the Father was not ‘Father’ at one point of His existence. The ‘Birthing-birthed’ analogy obscures the fact that ‘God is eternally the Father of the Son and He is His Father from eternity to eternity’.<sup>35</sup>

### III. Which Christian Trinitarian Kalām?

When one reads al-Muqammaṣ’s chapters, especially those on the Trinity, and considers his treatment of the claims of Christian *mutakallims* about it, one cannot but inquire who are these Christians whom al-Muqammaṣ refers to, and which *mutakallims*’ discourses on the Trinity he could be familiar with and implicitly criticizing. There are hints in al-Muqammaṣ’s writ that can pave the way for answering this question. In Chapter Eight, he invokes claims on the Trinity which he deems to be expressive of the *Kalām* of the Jacobites (monophysites/*al-Ya’qūbiyya*) and others of the Melkites (Chalcedonians/*al-Malakiyya*).<sup>36</sup> Al-Muqammaṣ does not mention names of individual *mutakallims* from these two Christian groups. Yet, given that he lived in the 9<sup>th</sup> century, and considering what we know of the Christian *Kalām* of the time, one can wonder if the Jacobites and the Melkites meant here are *mutakallims* like Theodore Abū Qurra (a Melkite) and Nonnus of Nisibis and Ḥabīb b. Ḥidma Abū Rā’iṭa at-Takrītī (two Jacobites). In the ensuing sections, I am going to explore this possibility by highlighting some common elements from these three *mutakallims*’ discourses on the Trinity, which al-Muqammaṣ could have been familiar with.

#### III.1. A Melkite Kalām?

I begin with the Melkite *Kalām* because al-Muqammaṣ seems to be less engaged with it in comparison with that of the Jacobites. In the *Twenty Chapters*, he refers to the Melkite Christians by name when he says:

Fa-in qālū inna al-ṭalaṭ aqānim ġayr al-ġawhar al-wāḥid al-‘ām laḥā, wa-dālika qawl al-Malakiyya, yuqālu lahum...

So, if they say that the three hypostases (aqānim) are other than one essence (*ġawhar*) which pervades them, and this is the *kalām* of the Melkites, then the reply to them is (...).<sup>37</sup>

Who among the Melkite *mutakallims* of the 9<sup>th</sup> century says that the essence is other than the three hypostases? The first candidate is the famous Melkite-Chalcedonian *mutakallim*, *faylasūf* and *nāqil-mufassir* of the early 9<sup>th</sup> century, Theodore Abū Qurra. He was a Christian *mutakallim* well known to Muslims during the early Abbasid era, and his *Kalām* treatises, written in Arabic,

<sup>34</sup> Stroumsa, *Twenty Chapters*, 10.13-14, p. 231.

<sup>35</sup> Stroumsa, *Twenty Chapters*, 10.18, p. 235: *Allāh lā yazal wālid al-ibn wa-lā yazal wālid lahu.*

<sup>36</sup> Stroumsa, *Twenty Chapters*, 8.47, p. 177; 8.55, p. 185.

<sup>37</sup> Stroumsa, *Twenty Chapters*, 8.55, p. 185.

were read and seriously discussed as well. Even more significant is that we have historiographical reports of a *muḡādala* (debate) between the person who was probably al-Muqammaṣ's teacher and who converted him to Christianity, Nonnus of Nisibis, and Abū Qurra. The debate occurred at the Armenian royal court. It is quite possible that al-Muqammaṣ heard about it (or about something very similar) from Nonnus, and that he built therefrom a notion of the Melkites' doctrine on the Trinity.

The question remains, nevertheless, if the Melkites really distinguished the essence from the three hypostases in their Trinitarian theology, and if they did, where in their *Kalām* texts of the 9<sup>th</sup> century one can read this claim. When one reads the Arabic extant *Kalām* treatises authored by Abū Qurra – texts that are extant, and were influential and popular – one finds a totally different approach to the relation between the one essence and the three hypostases. If one reads his Orthodox confession of faith, one never finds there any suggestion that the one essence is other than the three hypostases.<sup>38</sup> On the other hand, in his Arabic *Maymar on the Trinity*,<sup>39</sup> Abū Qurra refuses the existence of any otherness in the Godhead between the hypostases, or between the latter and the essence. He claims that there is no division or any logical sense of 'otherness' between the fire and its heat, so that, even when we say 'the fire burned me' or 'the heat of the fire burned me', we are not talking about two separate things that are connected in any sense of otherness to each other. The fire is its heat, for it does not burn except by its heat. The same logic, Abū Qurra concludes, analogically applies to the Trinity.

Wa-lā narā anna al-ḥarāra (...) ašadd ittišālan bi-l-nār min al-Ibn al-Ab wa-in kāna kullu wāḥid minhumā uqnūman, li-anna al-ṭabī'a al-ilāhiyya lā taqbalu tarkīban kamā taqbaluhu al-aḡṣād. Wa-lā (...) tūḡadu batta al-ḡayriyya fi dāt uqnūm wāḥidin minhā, bal mawqī' al-Ibn min al-Ab huwa ka-mawqī' ḥarārat al-nār min al-nār wa-ka-mawqī' al-šū'ā' min al-šams wa-l-kalima min al-'aql (...).

And we do not opine that the heat (...) is more connected to fire than the Son [is connected] to the Father, even if each one of them was hypostasis, for the divine nature does not accede to composition as bodies accede to it, and (...) otherness never exists within any one hypostasis among them. The position of the Son in relation to the Father, instead, is like the position of the heat of fire in relation to fire and the position of sunray to the sun and of the word in relation to the mind (...).<sup>40</sup>

Abū Qurra proceeds in his *maymar* by insisting that there is no otherness in the divine Godhead because nothing therein is to be deemed 'additional' to any other: the hypostases are not "added as others" to the essence. They together are the one divine Godhead.<sup>41</sup> This is why, Abū Qurra explains, the Church does not say that "the essence" created the world, but that "God 'the Creator' created

<sup>38</sup> See this *Confession* in Arabic text and French translation in I. Dick, "Deux écrits inédits de Théodore Abuqurra", *Le Muséon* 72 (1959), pp. 53-67. Cf. also A.M. Butts, "Theodoros Abū Qurra" in S.P. Brock - A.M. Butts - G.A. Kiraz - L. Van Rompay (eds.), *Gorgias Encyclopedic Dictionary of the Syriac Heritage With Contributions by seventy-six scholars*, Beth Mardutho: The Syriac Institute, Gorgias Press, Piscataway 2011, pp. 403-5.

<sup>39</sup> Theodore Abū Qurra, *Maymar yuḥaqqiq annahu lā yalzam al-Našārā an yaqūlū T alāṭat Aliha id yaqūlūn al-Ab Ilāh wa-l-Ibn ilāh wa-l-Rūḥ al-Qudus wa-anna al-Ab wa-l-Ibn wa-l-Rūḥ al-Qudus Ilāh wa-law kāna kull wāḥid minhum tāmm 'alā ḥidatibi* (*Maymar affirming that the Christians are not obliged to say of three gods when they say the Father is God, the Son is God and the Holy Spirit. And that the Father, Son and Holy Spirit are God even if each of them is perfect in Himself*), in *Mayāmīr T ā wudūrus Abī Qurra, usqf Harrān, aqdam tālif Arabī Našrānī* (*Treatises of Theodore Abū Qurrah, Bishop of Harran, the Oldest Christian Arabic Text*), ed. C. Bacha, Maṭba'at al-Fawā'id, Beirut 1904, pp. 23-47.

<sup>40</sup> Abū Qurra, *T alāṭat Aliha*, p. 39 Bacha.

<sup>41</sup> Abū Qurra, *T alāṭat Aliha*, pp. 40-41 Bacha.

the world'. Also, the Church does not say "the Father, Son and Spirit; they created the world", but "the Father, Son and Spirit, He created the world".<sup>42</sup> The divine essence is not other than the three hypostases, so the divine nature of each one of them includes the other two's automatically: *ṭabī'at al-Ibn al-ilāhiyya hiya ṭabī'at al-Ab wa-l-rūḥ* (*The Son's divine nature is the nature of the Father and the Spirit*).<sup>43</sup> Abū Qurra agrees, in fact, with al-Muqammaṣ's emphasis that the divine nature does not concede composition, otherness or addition within it, because the divine essence is absolutely simple.<sup>44</sup>

Reading Abū Qurra's *Maymar on the Trinity* demonstrates that al-Muqammaṣ could not glean from it his conclusion that the Melkites claim that the essence is other than the three hypostases. Is it possible that al-Muqammaṣ had in mind ideas from other *mayāmirs* by Abū Qurra? Well, in his *Maymar on the Existence of God and the Right Religion*, Abū Qurra touches briefly upon the Trinity. He speaks there about the Trinitarian doctrine and on God's living and knowing, as well as about that on the Son's 'begetting' and the Spirit's 'proceeding'. He suggests a logical analogy related to human existence and being, deeming it plausible, though imperfect, in relation to the divine Being of God.<sup>45</sup> I did already unpack al-Muqammaṣ's criticism of these two Trinitarian discourses in the previous section: God cannot be said to have a life or to have knowledge other than Himself. This analogy is inappropriate, he argues, to account for the Trinitarian understanding of God.<sup>46</sup> Al-Muqammaṣ is also, as we have seen before, against speaking about God's 'how-ness' in a Trinitarian language like *al-ibn wūlida wa-l-rūḥ taḥruḡu* ("the Son was begotten and the Spirit proceeds").<sup>47</sup>

A probing reading of the elaborations on these two matters in Christian Trinitarian *Kalām*, which al-Muqammaṣ invokes and grapples with in his text, reveals views and a logic that one can find also in Abū Qurra's *Kalām*. So, it might be the case that al-Muqammaṣ read Abū Qurra's *Maymar on the Existence of God and the Right Religion*. He could have found a copy of it in the libraries of either Nonnus of Nisibis, or even Abū Rā'iṭa, since he probably knew and related to the two antagonists of Abū Qurra. This said, the latter never suggests in this *maymar*, or in any other writing of his, that the divine essence is 'other than' the three hypostases. So, if al-Muqammaṣ is referring to something he read in a Melkite *Kalām* text on the Trinity, such text did not come from the pen of the author who wrote the extant Arabic *Kalām* that we attribute to Theodore Abū Qurra. One can presume here that either al-Muqammaṣ manifests his misunderstanding of the Melkite *Kalām* on the Trinity as we have it – for instance, in Abū Qurra's legacy – or that he is referring to a Melkite Trinitarian text that we do not have today, or again to a Trinitarian doctrine he heard about (personally or in mediation), like one of the claims on the Trinity that some Melkites present when they defend this

<sup>42</sup> Abū Qurra, *Ṭalāṭat Aliha*, p. 41 Bacha.

<sup>43</sup> Abū Qurra, *Ṭalāṭat Aliha*, p. 43 Bacha.

<sup>44</sup> Abū Qurra, *Ṭalāṭat Aliha*, p. 44 Bacha: *Wa-i lam anna al-ṭabī' a al-ilāhiyya lā taqbal al-tarkīb batta kamā qulnā aw ḡayriyya yū ḡad lahā aṭar fī uqnūmin wāḥidin minhā, bal hiya mabsūta 'alā ṭaraf al-inbisāt wa-maḥḍ ḥaqīqatibi wa-laysa yaqbalu uqnūmun ilāhī an yuḍāfa lahu ayy ṣay'in lahu aṭarun minhu* ("And know that the divine nature does not concede composition at all, as we stated, or otherness that has a trace in one of its hypostases. It is, rather, simple according to the truth of absolute simplicity, and no divine hypostasis concedes any addition of something to it which has no [original] traces within it already").

<sup>45</sup> Theodore Abū Qurra, *Maymar fī wuḡūd al-Hāliq wa-l-dīn al-qawim* (*Treatise on the Existence of the Creator and the Right Religion*), ed. I. Dick, Librairie St. Paul, Jounieh - Pontificio Istituto Orientale, Rome 1982, 9.A. 14-19 (pp. 222-3); 9.B.24-35 (pp. 224-7).

<sup>46</sup> Stroumsa, *Twenty Chapters*, 9.11-17, pp. 200-7; 9.21-22, p. 211; 25-26, p. 215.

<sup>47</sup> Stroumsa, *Twenty Chapters*, 10.3-18, pp. 225-35.

doctrine. If the latter is the case, the source of al-Muqammaṣ's knowledge of the Melkite Trinitarian alleged belief that "the essence is other than the three hypostases" remains an open question.<sup>48</sup>

### III.2. Jacobite *Kalām*

The ambiguity in regard of the sources of al-Muqammaṣ's knowledge of the Melkite *Kalām* disappears, and the investigation becomes much easier, in relation to the sources of his knowledge of the Jacobite *Kalām*. It is known that Nonnus of Nisibis was detained in jail during the rule of the Caliph al-Mutawakkil, sometimes around 856 A.D. We know this from a manuscript of a Syriac text that Nonnus wrote while in prison, where he personally testifies to his imprisonment. The relevance of this to our topic is that in the same manuscript we find also an apologetic treatise in Syriac on the Trinity and the Incarnation.<sup>49</sup>

In 1991, Sidney Griffith offered a valuable summary and study of Nonnus's *Kalām* on the Trinity in the treatise mentioned above. Griffith relates that Nonnus wrote this text from the prison, in response to an anonymous inquirer who wanted him to explain "how do Christians show that God

---

<sup>48</sup> One of the possible answers could be indirectly suggested by J. Tannous, *The Making of the Medieval Middle East: Religion, Society and Simple Believers*, Princeton U.P., Princeton - Oxford 2018, who proposes in his recent monograph that an accurate picture of the Christian society in the 8<sup>th</sup>-9<sup>th</sup> centuries shows that it consisted predominantly of uneducated, mostly illiterate and evidently 'simple believers', who did not have any sophisticated knowledge of the Christian theology, and who were not versed at all in its pedagogical preciseness. "Perhaps what we have (...) is only a manifestation of the consequences of weak or nonexistent catechesis and poorly trained [believers] (...) rather than reading to find evidence of new/old species dwelling in a doctrinal Jurassic Park populated with creatures from late antiquity heresiographies, it is much easier – though possibly less exciting – to point out that we are dealing with a world of simple believers" (p. 251). To take Tannous's proposal into consideration, one can suggest that al-Muqammaṣ's knowledge of the Chalcedonian-Melkite theological claims might be derived from such 'simple' Chalcedonian-Melkite believers, who are not versed in Melkite *Kalām* enough to convey its claims in any theologically reliable preciseness. But, if this is the case, why is this not seemingly the case with al-Muqammaṣ's account of the Jacobite *Kalām*? The latter seems to be more accurate than his account of the Melkite one. Why would he rely on public simple believers' ideas in the case of Melkite *Kalām* only, and not do the same in relation to the Jacobite one? One can say here that either there were Melkite *mutakallims* who did say that "the three hypostases (*aqānīm*) are other than one essence (*ḡawhar*)" – but their writings are not extant today – or al-Muqammaṣ was biased toward the Jacobite *Kalām* and followed its authors' in degrading and undermining the Melkite-Chalcedonian theology. While he will attack the latter by means of recalling ideas, allegedly from their *Kalām*, which he derives from the public slogans and "untuned Christian belief" of the simple, public followers of the Melkite Christianity, he will avoid this when presenting the theological doctrines of the Jacobites, to whose belief-system he personally belonged one day and which he studied under its *mutakallims*, like Nonnus and Abū Rā'īṭa. In my conversations with Sarah Stroumsa on this matter, she shared with me yet another worth pondering explanation. Stroumsa first acknowledges that Tannous's study is very important. Yet, she also maintains that whoever al-Muqammaṣ's teachers were, it is clear that he did not get his Christian education from the mass of uneducated Christians in the street, or from occasional simple Christian neighbors, but rather during systematic prolonged studies in a centre of learning, in Nisibis and perhaps also elsewhere. Alternatively, Stroumsa thinks of another possibility, even more likely: al-Muqammaṣ had much more knowledge of Christian theology than most non-Christians. But, as the *mutakallims* often do, he sometimes knowingly distorts the position of his opponent in order to attack it more easily (this is much more blunt in his other polemical work). By the same token, it is possible that the distortion was done already by his Jacobite teachers, and that he took it from them. Therefore, in order to identify his sources we do not need necessarily to find an accurate quotation or fair rendering.

<sup>49</sup> See the extensive study of this work, accompanied by Latin translation, by A. Van Roey, *Nonnus de Nisibis, Traité apologetique. Étude, texte et traduction*, Bibliothèque du Muséon, Louvain 1948, p. 21. Cf. also M.P. Penn, "Nonnos of Nisibis", in Brock -Butts -Kiraz -Van Rompay (eds.), *Gorgias Encyclopedic Dictionary of the Syriac Heritage* (above, n. 38), p. 313.

is one; [and] how do they show that the one God is also three”.<sup>50</sup> Nonnus dedicates the rest of his treatise to respond to the first inquiry on God’s oneness in the Christian faith. To be more precise, he takes the Christian belief in God’s oneness, Griffith states, as “a premise to which he will return as the treatise progresses. The premise is one which all the participants in the Muslim/Christian dialogue can immediately accept”, namely that “the notion of many gods is really therefore an impossible one because it could not fulfill the agreed definition of God”.<sup>51</sup>

From this brief affirmation of oneness, Griffith proceeds, Nonnus elaborates on how this one God (*ḥad Allôhō*) is three *qnômê* (hypostases). Nonnus explains this by stating that the three *qnômê* are equal in *ousia* (Nonnus transliterates the Greek term into Syriac letters without translating it) and they refer to God Himself as ‘triple substance’ (*thlîthô’îth mqayyam*).<sup>52</sup> At one point, Nonnus states the Trinitarian faith in these terms:

The fact that [God] is also one in number is established for us. Just as Peter, of and for himself, is one man, and he together with Paul and John and all the rest are one man altogether, first by the *qnômô*, then by the nature (*kyônô*), so each one of the holy *qnômê* is God and Lord, and *ousia* (...) a perfect Trinity of three perfect ones.<sup>53</sup>

Noticeable here is Nonnus’s use of the analogy of three men with three different characters designated by names (Peter, Paul, and John) and one nature (humanity), an analogy attested in numerous Christian *Kalâm* discourses from the 9<sup>th</sup> century and earlier. Noticeable also is Nonnus’s use of the Greek term *ousia* in Syriac transliteration to speak about the divine essence and of the Syriac term *kyanê* to speak about the human nature of ‘Peter, Paul, and John’, but not about God’s essence. The same analogy and transliteration strategy are also detected in al-Muqammaṣ’s refutation of the Trinity. As I showed earlier, al-Muqammaṣ states that the Christians use the analogy of three hypostases with one nature with the same human nature of *Sa’îd wa-Yazîd wa-Halaf* to explain how God is *ḡawhar wâḥid, ṭalâtat aqânîm* (one essence, three hypostases).<sup>54</sup> The only difference lies in al-Muqammaṣ’s use of three Arabic names instead of Nonnus’s three Greek names. On the other hand, al-Muqammaṣ seems to be following Nonnus’s transliteration of *ousia*, except that while Nonnus transliterates it in Syriac, al-Muqammaṣ transliterates it in Arabic: *أو سببية / ūsiyya*.<sup>55</sup> Otherwise, nevertheless, one finds no serious reliance on Nonnus’s treatise on the Trinity in al-Muqammaṣ’s account of the Christian *Kalâm* on the Trinity.

In her introduction to the *Twenty Chapters*, Sarah Stroumsa refers to al-Qirqisānī’s saying that ‘Nāna’ was the Christian *mutakallim* who was personally responsible of converting al-Muqammaṣ to Christianity, and accepts as plausible George Vajda’s identification of ‘Nāna’ with Nonnus of Nisibis.<sup>56</sup> Such a relation suggests that al-Muqammaṣ was intimately knowledgeable of the theological mind of his master/convertor. One might imagine finding elements from Nonnus’s Trinitarian thought in his apologetic treatise on the Trinity. This is far from being exactly the case, because al-Muqammaṣ

<sup>50</sup> S. Griffith, “The Apologetic Treatise of Nonnus of Nisibis”, *ARAM Periodical* 3 (1991), pp. 115-38, in part. pp. 118-9 (repr. in Id., *The Beginning of Christian Theology in Arabic. Muslim-Christian Encounters in the Early Islamic Period*, Ashgate - Variorum, Aldershot, UK/ Burlington, USA 2002, IV, same pagination).

<sup>51</sup> Griffith, “The Apologetic Treatise of Nonnus of Nisibis,” p. 121.

<sup>52</sup> Griffith, “The Apologetic Treatise of Nonnus of Nisibis,” p. 122.

<sup>53</sup> Griffith, “The Apologetic Treatise of Nonnus of Nisibis”, p. 123.

<sup>54</sup> Stroumsa, *Twenty Chapters*, 8.46, p. 177.

<sup>55</sup> Stroumsa, *Twenty Chapters*, 8.48, p. 179; 8.51, p. 181.

<sup>56</sup> Stroumsa, “Introduction”, in *Twenty Chapters*, pp. xv-xvi.

seems to be arguing against the Trinitarian claims in a version that is not found in the treatise on the Trinity and Incarnation that Nonnus wrote from prison. The explanation of this can be either one of these three possibilities, or even all of them simultaneously: 1) al-Muqammaṣ did not want to expose the rational weakness of the theology of the *mutakallim* who once was his own teacher and theological ‘hero’. He, rather, uses Nonnus’s Trinitarian terms upon confidence in the reliability of his ex-teacher’s choices (e.g. in transliterating *ousia*). 2) al-Muqammaṣ does not think that Nonnus’s explanation of the Trinity in his prison-treatise is wrong or implausible. He, rather, deems it rationally tenable, and he is not referring to it because it will challenge his own criticism of the Christian *Kalām* on the Trinity. This will not serve well the purpose of arguing against the Trinity. If so, this would imply that al-Muqammaṣ is controverting with selective theological teachings from the *kalām* on the Trinity, and not with the Trinity in all its interpretations. Finally, 3) al-Muqammaṣ could have relied on his recollection of Trinitarian claims he could have heard from Nonnus, when he was orally explaining it to him at the time when they were in touch. He, then, does not mention Nonnus by name, nor he says that he reads it in any Monophysite text because he relies fully on memory.

The first two possibilities stand on the personal relation of al-Muqammaṣ to Nonnus and his rather protective stance towards the Trinitarian *Kalām* of his former teacher. There is in the *Twenty Chapters* a hint at al-Muqammaṣ’s readiness to expose any Christian Trinitarian *Kalām* he is familiar with and to frankly refute some aspects in it. In Chapter Nine, point 11, al-Muqammaṣ points to the Christians, relating that they make God know by means of a knowing that is called “the Word/Son”. As I showed earlier, al-Muqammaṣ criticizes this Trinitarian relation between the Father and the Son and its account by means of the analogy of a mind acquiring knowledge through its ‘word’.<sup>57</sup> One of the Christians whom al-Muqammaṣ could have in mind as to be saying this could be Nonnus of Nisibis. In his commentary on the Gospel of John, Nonnus explains John 1:1 using the analogy of the ‘mind’ and the ‘word’, relating thereby the following:

Just as our speech is born from the mind and becomes perceptible to hearing through the word, and our listeners remain inseparable and indivisible in the mind (...) [and] just as we know the mind through a word, and we indicate the desires of the mind through a word, in a similar way we recognize the Father and His wishes through the Son. You heard the Word, recognize also the mind of the Word. You saw the Son; recognize also the majesty of the Father testified by the Lord.<sup>58</sup>

In the *Twenty Chapters*, al-Muqammaṣ may well be echoing the teaching of Nonnus as reflected in this commentary: it is a fair guess that al-Muqammaṣ was familiar with Nonnus’s commentary on the Gospel of John.<sup>59</sup> More intriguingly still, al-Muqammaṣ’s refutation of such analogical understanding of God/Father-Word/Son relation in terms of ‘mind-word’ demonstrates his determination to reject the doctrine of the Trinity in all its diverse expressions in the Christian *Kalām*, including that of a Christian *mutakallim* like Nonnus of Nisibis. We have in al-Muqammaṣ’s *Twenty Chapters* an

<sup>57</sup> Stroumsa, *Twenty Chapters*, 9.11-18, pp. 201-7.

<sup>58</sup> See the translation from Armenian of Nonnus’s commentary (that was probably written originally in Arabic) in R.W. Thomson, *Nonnus of Nisibis, Commentary on the Gospel of John: Translation of the Armenian Text with Introduction and Commentary*, SBL Press, Atlanta 2014, I.1.1a, p. 10. See also D.D. Bundy, “The Commentary of Nonnus of Nisibis on the Prologue of John”, in S.Kh. Samir (ed.), *Actes du Premier Congrès International d’Études Arabes Chrétiennes*, Pontificium Institutum Studiorum Orientalium, Roma 1982 (*Orientalia Christiana Analecta*, 218), pp. 123-33.

<sup>59</sup> Thus Bundy, “The Commentary of Nonnus of Nisibis”, p. 124. Bundy relies in this on the opinion of the editor of the Armenian version of this commentary: Kh.H. Ćrakhean, *Commentary on the Gospel of John by Nonnus, Vardapet of Syria*, Treasure of Armenian Literature, Ancient and Modern, Venezia 1920, p. 6.

author who seems to have broken with the Christian faith, and is going to expose the falsehood of its *Kalām* as comprehensively and inclusively as he can: no Christian *mutakallim* is exempted from this.

The other Jacobite *mutakallim* al-Muqammaṣ could have also been familiar with is Ḥabīb ibn Ḥidma Abū Rā'īṭa al-Takrītī. One can presume such familiarity with this latter's Trinitarian *Kalām* on the basis of the relationship of Abū Rā'īṭa to the Christian 'melpōnō' and archdeacon, Nonnus of Nisibis, who was his nephew. It is also believed that Abū Rā'īṭa was in his turn 'melpōnō' or 'vardapet' ('didaskalos'), like Nonnus. This could mean that the uncle, like his nephew, was responsible of teaching the Christian faith to the new converts and to be a missionary who proselytized people to Christianity.<sup>60</sup> Be that as it may, it is not unlikely that al-Muqammaṣ either read Abū Rā'īṭa's *Kalām* personally, or was exposed to it by Nonnus, who used the *Kalām* of his uncle, the *vardapet/melpōnō*, to educate the new convert about the Christian faith.

One of the characteristics of the *Kalām* style we find in al-Muqammaṣ's chapters is his use of a 'thesis-antithesis' expression: *in qāla qā'il (...) fa-naqūlu/qulnā* (if a speaker said [...] we then say/we say). This style of *Kalām* was already common in 9<sup>th</sup>-10<sup>th</sup> centuries as a style of theological communication that crossed the religious boundaries. One of the Christian *Kalām* texts that features the same 'thesis-antithesis' style is Abū Rā'īṭa's *Risāla (Epistle) On the Verification of the Religion of Christianity and the Verification of the Holy Trinity*. Here Abū Rā'īṭa uses the 'thesis-antithesis' style of argument to defend the Christians' analogical language of the Trinity.<sup>61</sup>

Another arguing strategy one can also find common between Abū Rā'īṭa's *Verification of the Holy Trinity* and al-Muqammaṣ's *Kalām* against the Trinity in the *Twenty Chapters* is their careful attention to, and appraisal of, the Trinitarian analogical stance on the Christians' reliance on analogy (*qiyās*) to defend the belief in the logical tenability of the Trinity as a valid expression of God's nature (howness) as One Being. He mainly argues that an analogical application of the modes of existence of the human creatures to God's oneness is inaccurate and risky, because it imposes on the essence of the One God, that is simple, predicates that are only applicable to composite, accidental, and contingent beings. It is my conviction that al-Muqammaṣ opts for developing such a criticism because he is implicitly responding to what he knows to be a pro-Trinitarian analogy like the one made by Abū Rā'īṭa.

In his *Verification of the Holy Trinity*, Abū Rā'īṭa defends the use of analogy as an appropriate means for grasping the Trinity.<sup>62</sup> He starts his argument by dividing the antagonists of the Trinitarian doctrine into two groups: 1) those who do not know anything of the Jacobite's thought on faith: *lam ya'rif madhhaba qawlinā wa-ḡaraḍa nihlatinā*. 2) those who have un-attentive and far from precise knowledge of his own faith: *awḍaḥū bi-l-farq bi-'ilmin wa-mā rifatin min-ḡayri iktirāt wa-lā ḡaraḡ*.<sup>63</sup> Then, Abū Rā'īṭa proceeds by saying that the Christians use analogy very carefully, without forgetting that no single analogical expression derived either from spiritual or bodily entities (*arwāḥ wa-aḡsām*) can sufficiently apply to the reality of the unique reality standing above every analogical perception, God: *inna al-mutalammas labu qiyāsan ya'lū alā kull miqyāsin mawḡūdin min al-mā qūl wa-l-maḡsūs* ("the one for whom we seek analogy is above every existing analogy from the

<sup>60</sup> S. Toenis Keating, *Defending the 'People of Truth' in the Early Islamic Period: the Christian Apologies of Abū Rā'īṭah*, Brill, Leiden - Boston 2006 (History of Christian-Muslim Relations, 4), pp. 35-48. On the title 'vardapet' see R.W. Thomson, "Vardapet in the Early Armenian Church", *Le Muséon* 75 (1962), pp. 367-82; on 'melpōnō' see R. Payne Smith et al. (eds.), *Thesaurus Syriacus. Tomus I*, Georg Olms Verlag, Hildesheim - New York 1981, p. 214.

<sup>61</sup> Abū Rā'īṭa, *Risāla fī Itbāt dīn al-Naṣrāniyya wa-itbāt al-Tālūt al-muqaddas (Epistle on the Verification of the Religion of Christianity and the Verification of the Holy Trinity)*, in Toenis Keating, *Defending 'The People of the Truth' in the Early Islamic Period*, pp. 83-144.

<sup>62</sup> Abū Rā'īṭa, *Risāla fī Itbāt dīn al-Naṣrāniyya*, 16-25, pp. 102-16 Toenis Keating.

<sup>63</sup> Abū Rā'īṭa, *Risāla fī Itbāt dīn al-Naṣrāniyya*, 16, p. 102 Toenis Keating.

intelligible and the perceptible”).<sup>64</sup> Thus, Abū Rā’iṭa concludes, one can still speak analogically about God by using numerous metaphors that connote different meanings and aspects from the realm of the intelligible and perceptible, and apply them simultaneously to the realm of the divine. None of these metaphors would be fully applicable to the transcendent (*al-mutā’ālī*) alone or be exhaustively expressive of the divine Being of God. However, a careful combination of more than one analogy, without forgetting their limitation, can convey some persuasive analogy (*qiyās muqni’*) about God. This logic makes Abū Rā’iṭa state that the analogies of “three lamps shining forth one light” and “men with different names and one human essence” offer together a persuasive analogy to God’s oneness in some of their aspects and to God’s Trinity in other aspects.<sup>65</sup>

Such use of analogy, like Abū Rā’iṭa’s, is what al-Muqammaṣ is pointing to in his attack on the doctrine of the Trinity, not only in his *Twenty Chapters*, but also in another book of his he alludes to in Chapter Eight.<sup>66</sup> This is why al-Muqammaṣ endeavors to demonstrate the inaccuracy of explaining the Trinity by applying the analogy of “men with different names and one humanity” and the analogy “the sun and the sunlight”.<sup>67</sup> The analogical elaborations on the Trinity of Christian *mutakallims* like Abū Rā’iṭa, al-Muqammaṣ affirms, are totally inappropriate to serve the purpose of proving the logical tenability of the Trinity. They are over-stretched and twisted to convey their logical implications within the realm of bodies. What they denote, thus, is an absurd *Kalām* that is contrary to any plausible understanding of the One God.

Finally, it is worth pausing at Abū Rā’iṭa’s claim that the Creator exists as a living Being by means of an eternal life and as a speaking Being by means of an essential state of speaking: *al-hāliq al-ṣāni’* (...) *bi-wuḡūdihī ḥayyan nāṭiqan bi-ḥayāt azaliyya wa-nuṭqin ḡawhariyy. Nuṭquhu mawlūdun minhu azaliyy mundu lam yazal wa-ḥayātuhu munbatīqa minhu bi-lā zamān* (“the Creator-Maker [...] by His existence as a living and speaking [Being] by means of an eternal living and an essential state of speaking. His state of speaking is begotten eternally from Him since He ever was and is and His life comes forth from His without time”).<sup>68</sup>

It is not hard to spot in al-Muqammaṣ’s *Twenty Chapters* his argumentative refutation of the claim that God is a living Being because He exists by means of a state of living other than God’s essence: *wa-huwa al-ḥayy alladī lā yahyā bi-ḥayā* (“and He is the living [Being] who does not live by means of a [state of] living”).<sup>69</sup> As I showed earlier, al-Muqammaṣ considers the Christians the primary example of frank associationism (*širk šarih*),<sup>70</sup> because they use this logic to make God live by means of a state of living called ‘Holy Spirit’ and know by means of a state of knowing called ‘the Word/Son’, who are (as al-Muqammaṣ interprets this Trinitarian language) other than God’s simple and one essence.<sup>71</sup>

<sup>64</sup> Abū Rā’iṭa, *Risāla fī Itbāt dīn al-Naṣrāniyya*, 17, p. 104 Toenis Keating.

<sup>65</sup> Abū Rā’iṭa, *Risāla fī Itbāt dīn al-Naṣrāniyya*, 18-20, pp. 104-8 Toenis Keating.

<sup>66</sup> Stroumsa, *Twenty Chapters*, 8.27, pp. 158-9: *Ataynā ‘alā naqd hādā al-mā nā ‘alā al-Naṣrāniyya fī kitābinā alladī afradnāhu ‘alayhim min ṭariq al-qiyās, wa-naḥnu zāidūn fī āḥir kitābinā hādā ‘alayhim ḥuḡḡāḡan ayḍan wa-hiya fī l-maqālāt allatī naṣibhā fī hādā l-kitāb* (“We have refuted this content against the Christians in the text of ours which we dedicated against them by way a logical argumentation, and we are adding also arguments at the end of this text or ours; and they are in the articles which we constructed in this text”).

<sup>67</sup> Stroumsa, *Twenty Chapters*, 10.5, p. 227; 10.17, p. 233.

<sup>68</sup> Abū Rā’iṭa, *Risāla fī Itbāt dīn al-Naṣrāniyya*, 24, p. 112 Toenis Keating.

<sup>69</sup> Stroumsa, *Twenty Chapters*, 9.4, p. 191.

<sup>70</sup> Stroumsa, *Twenty Chapters*, 9.11, pp. 200-1.

<sup>71</sup> Stroumsa, *Twenty Chapters*, 9.8-14, pp. 195-203.

If Al-Muqammaṣ's possible familiarity with, or derivation from, Abū Rā'īṭa's *Kalām* is tenable, it seems to exceed his knowledge of the latter's discourse in the *Verification of the Holy Trinity*. One can find also reasons to suspect al-Muqammaṣ's familiarity with the Trinitarian *Kalām* in Abū Rā'īṭa's *Epistle on the Holy Trinity*.<sup>72</sup> In this text, Abū Rā'īṭa develops an interesting argument on the various connotations of the notion of 'oneness' and the belief that 'God is One'. He relates that the Muslim *mutakallims* (*ahl al-tayman*, 'the people of the South' in his words<sup>73</sup>) do claim that they and the Christians alike believe that 'One' is said in three meanings: one in nature (*ḡins*), one in kind (*naw'*) and one in number (*'adad*).<sup>74</sup> Abū Rā'īṭa questions this claim by demonstrating that none of these three senses applies to the oneness of God and the Christians do not call God 'one' after any of them.<sup>75</sup> Against this threefold meaning of 'One', Abū Rā'īṭa proposes a fourth sense of oneness, deeming it the meaning of 'One' that the Christians have in mind when they say 'God is One'. This fourth sense is 'God is One in essence': *wāḥid fī l-ḡawhar*:

Ammā waṣfunā iyyā wāḥidan fī l-ḡawhar fa-li-'tilā'ihī 'an ḡamī' ḥalqihī wa-baryatihī, maḥsūsa kānat amm ma'qūla, lam yuṣbihuhu ṣay'un wa-lam yaḥtaliḡ bihī ḡayruhu, baṣīḡ ḡayr kaṭīf, rūḥānī ḡayr ḡismānī, ya'tī 'alā kullin bi-qurbi ḡawharihī min ḡayri imtizāḡ wa-lā iḡtilāḡ

We describe Him One in essence due to His transcendence above all His creatures and Creation, whether perceptible or intellectually comprehended; none is like Him and no other thing is mixed with Him, simple not dense, spiritual not corporeal, close to everything by the proximity of His essence, without blending or mixing.<sup>76</sup>

For Abū Rā'īṭa, this not only preserves God's simple and principal oneness from any mixing, composition or finitude; it also permits to say that 'oneness' means God's essence and it does not militate against the Threeness, for this latter does not number the essence, rather the forms of description one can use to describe (*yaṣīf*) this one essence.

It is noteworthy that in his Chapter Eight al-Muqammaṣ similarly describes the various meanings of 'one'. Like Abū Rā'īṭa, he states that 'one' can be said in the senses of chapter, kind and number, before he suggests three additional senses: 'one' in composition (*tarkīb*), 'one' in simplicity (*basāṭa*) and 'one' of a kind or one in individuation (*lā maṭīla labu*).<sup>77</sup> Intriguingly enough, al-Muqammaṣ concurs, though in more elaborative and detailed manner, with Abū Rā'īṭa's objection against using 'one' in the senses of nature, kind, and number to speak about God's oneness. He adds a detailed argument on the mistake of deeming God 'one' in the sense of composition or 'one-of-a-kind'. He adamantly affirms that the only accurate sense of 'one' that is applicable to God is 'one in simplicity':

<sup>72</sup> Abū Rā'īṭa, *al-Risāla al-ūlā fī l-T'ālūt al-muqaddas* (*The First Epistle on the Holy Trinity*), in Toenis Keating, *Defending the 'People of Truth' in the Early Islamic Period* (above, n. 60), pp. 164-215.

<sup>73</sup> Abū Rā'īṭa, *al-Risāla al-ūlā*, 4, p. 168 Toenis Keating. On the possible meanings of *ahl al-tayman*, Sandra Toenis Keating suggests that they are "likely the Arabs, who saw themselves as bringers of the message of the Qur'an to the Mediterranean world": *Defending the 'People of Truth' in the Early Islamic Period* (above, n. 60), pp. 151-3, in part. p. 152. See also B. Holmberg, "Ahl/Fariq at-Tayman – ein rätesvolles Epitheton", *Oriens Christianus* 78 (1994), pp. 83-103; S. Griffith, "The Prophet Mohammad, His Scripture, and His Message according to Christian Apologies in Arabic and Syriac from the First Abbasid Century," in T. Fahd (ed.), *La Vie du Prophète Mohamet: Colloque de Strasbourg 1980*, Presses Universitaires de France, Strasbourg 1983, pp. 103-27.

<sup>74</sup> Abū Rā'īṭa, *al-Risāla al-ūlā*, 7, p. 172 Toenis Keating.

<sup>75</sup> Abū Rā'īṭa, *al-Risāla al-ūlā*, 8-10, pp. 172-6 Toenis Keating.

<sup>76</sup> Abū Rā'īṭa, *al-Risāla al-ūlā*, 10, p. 176 Toenis Keating.

<sup>77</sup> Stroumsa, *Twenty Chapters*, 8.33, p. 165.

God is One as simple, not composite, not mixed with others, non-corporeal, imperceptible and unintelligible like the created things.<sup>78</sup>

It is interesting here that al-Muqammaṣ concurs with Abū Rāʾiṭa's understanding of 'one'. His 'one in simplicity' echoes Abū Rāʾiṭa's 'one in essence'. The different terminology between them does not imply any substantial difference between the two *mutakallims*. The connotations that Abū Rāʾiṭa reads in 'one in essence' give an Aristotelian ring, which al-Muqammaṣ also uses (and sometimes avoids) to unpack the meaning of 'one in simplicity'. My guess is that al-Muqammaṣ avoids the term 'essence' (*ḡawhar*) here because he knows that Abū Rāʾiṭa uses it to argue for the plausibility of speaking about the attributes (*ṣifāt*) of this one essence in a triadic perspective. Indeed, immediately after presenting the six-fold sense of 'one', al-Muqammaṣ embarks in a refutation of this triadic logic.<sup>79</sup>

It is noteworthy that al-Muqammaṣ uses a *Kalām* on the 'one' which he knows that Christian *mutakallims* also use (it is also used by Muslim authors like al-Kindī, for instance). He is not just relying on his previous Christian education to construct an argument. He follows his *Kalām* logic in challenging an Islamic claim on oneness. When it comes to the understanding of oneness, al-Muqammaṣ seems to be at home in relation to a Christian *Kalām* on the 'one' like the one of Abū Rāʾiṭa. When, nevertheless, the Christians use their discourse on the 'one' in the service of their theology of the Trinity, al-Muqammaṣ frankly distances himself from their *Kalām*. This is exactly what he does when it comes to how the Christians use 'one-in-three' to elaborate on the relation between the essence and its attributes. This is, for example, what he does in his refusal to say that God is a living Being by means of a state of living (*ḥayy bi-ḥayāt*) or that God is a knowing Being by means of a state of knowing (*ʿālim bi-ʿilm*).<sup>80</sup> When we read the *First Epistle on the Holy Trinity*, we spot a Christian *Kalām* text, of the kind which al-Muqammaṣ seems to have in mind, and probably relies on, in his discussion. There, Abū Rāʾiṭa states the following:

Fa-l-ʿālim ālimun bi-ʿilm wa-l-ʿilm ʿilm ʿālim, wa-l-ḥakīm hakīmun bi-ḥikmatin wa-l-ḥikma ḥikmatu ḥakīm (...) fa-īn qultum fī-mā waṣaftumūhu bihi min ḥayyin wa-ʿālimin wa ḥakimin annahu innamā iṣtuqqat lahu iṣtiqāqan wa-stawḡabahā ka-mā istawḡaba ḡamī mā summiya bihi man akmalā fī lahu laḥā. Hākaḍā fa-l-yaḡuz, idān ann yuqāla qad kāna Allāh wa-lā ḥayāt lahu wa-lā ʿilm wa-lā ḥikma ḥattā ṣārat al-ḥayāt wa-l-ʿilm wa-l-ḥikma allāḍī mawḡūda. Wa-hāḍā muḥālīfun min al-kalām ann yakūn Allāh subḥānahu ḥulwan ṭirfat ʿaynin min ḥayāt wa-ʿilm.

For the knower is knowing by means of knowledge and knowledge is the knowing of a knower. And the sage is wise by means of wisdom and wisdom is the wisdom of a sage (...) so, if you said in what you describe [God] as living, knower and wise that these [epithets] were given to Him derivatively and He merited them as someone who fulfilled all his actions merited all what he was named with (...) let it thus be evenly permitted to say that God had no life or knowledge or wisdom till life, knowledge and wisdom come into existence in Him. This is a contravening discourse that makes God, be praised, lack life and knowledge, even for a blink of an eye.<sup>81</sup>

This logic seems to be echoed in al-Muqammaṣ's *Kalām* too. He nonetheless uses Abū Rāʾiṭa's argument to achieve a different goal. Abū Rāʾiṭa uses this logic in the service of his argument that

<sup>78</sup> Stroumsa, *Twenty Chapters*, 8.34-45, pp. 167-75.

<sup>79</sup> Stroumsa, *Twenty Chapters*, 8.46-60, pp. 177-87.

<sup>80</sup> Stroumsa, *Twenty Chapters*, 9.11-17, pp. 199-207.

<sup>81</sup> Abū Rāʾiṭa, *al-Risāla al-ūlā*, 12, p. 178 Toenis Keating.

the three in the one God do not name extra attributes that God would have acquired at one point while lacking of them before. The three name, rather, attributes in God that are His one essence *per se*.<sup>82</sup> What al-Muqammaṣ seems to be doing is to argue that such Christian *mutakallims* (as we saw primarily in Abū Rāʾiṭa), adopt a meaning of ‘one’ that is accurate and tenable in itself, but incongruent with what the Trinity means and implies in relation to God. The Christians, that is, are mistaken in their implementation of the notion of ‘one’. To use it to ensure foundation to the Trinity is a failed strategy, al-Muqammaṣ opines. Not only they fail to demonstrate the plausibility of speaking about God in a triadic logic; more problematically, this threatens the coherence, and twists the basic meaning, of the notion of ‘one’. If this is what al-Muqammaṣ is doing, then he is not developing a totally offensive or polemic position against Christianity as such. He is, rather, opting for a selective, critical and corrective stance in its Trinitarian *Kalām*.

#### IV. Concluding Remarks: Which Dynamic of Interaction?

In his analysis of the dissemination and reception of Greek philosophy in the intellectual circles of Baghdad during the 9<sup>th</sup>-10<sup>th</sup> centuries, Gerhard Endress says:

Inside [the circles of emerging Islamic institutions] the Arabic manuscript tradition of some of the most important works of Aristotle provides impressive documentary evidence of philosophy reading in a coherent teaching tradition.<sup>83</sup>

According to Endress, there was a context of reading and avid readership that fostered the transmission of philosophy from one generation to the next, thus paving the way to the ability of the members of different learning circles to follow up on the philosophical discussions and knowledge that was developed within other circles of learning.

The questions here is: would it be tenable to apply the same reading habitus to the context of *Kalām* as well? Can a similar context of reading and readership dynamic be detected between the Christian, Muslim and Jewish *mutakallims*, who were also able to experience an avid learning-via-reading situation due to their ability to read what other religion’s *mutakallims* were writing? Can we speak of a ‘*Kalām* reading’ as Endress speaks of a ‘philosophy reading’ situation? And if so, can we apply on the *Kalām* Endress’s description of a “teaching tradition based on the book” and a “market of books as well as market of ideas”,<sup>84</sup> that in this case would not be confined to the circles of Muslim intellectuals, but would also extend to the Christian-Muslim and Christian-Jewish intellectual interactions as well?

The above are inquiries on the ways and means of collecting information that one could extract from the inter-*Kalām* dynamics in the early Abbasid era. In his introduction of the *kalām* of Abū ʿĪsā al-Warrāq against the Trinity, David Thomas touches upon this issue, investigating

---

<sup>82</sup> Abū Rāʾiṭah, *al-Risāla al-ūlā*, 15-20 (pp. 180-188 Toenis Keating). Abū Rāʾiṭah expresses this when he relates that the three attributes are perfect of a perfect essence (*kāmila min kāmīl*) (15 [p. 182]) and the three are united and distinguished simultaneously (*muttaṣila muftariqa ḡamiʿan maʿan*) (16 [p. 182]), and there is unity in essence and distinction in hypotheses (*bi-ittiṣālīn fi l-ḡawhar wa-tabāyūn fi l-aṣḥās ayy al-aqānīm*) (18 [p. 184]).

<sup>83</sup> G. Endress, ‘Reading Avicenna in the *Madrasa*: Intellectual Genealogies and Chains of Transmission of Philosophy and the Sciences in the Islamic East’, in J.E. Montgomery (ed.), *Arabic Theology, Arabic Philosophy. From Many to the One: Essays in Celebration of Richard N. Frank*, Peeters, Leuven - Paris 2006 (Orientalia Lovaniensia Analecta, 152), pp. 371-422, in part. p. 376.

<sup>84</sup> Endress, ‘Reading Avicenna in the *Madrasa*’ (above, n. 83), p. 378.

the potential information sources of al-Warrāq's knowledge of the Christian doctrines. Thomas points to two kinds of sources. The first is oral, as al-Warrāq could have easily heard the Christians verbalize their own *Kalām* in his face-to-face interlocution with them. Or, he could have heard some Muslims uttering claims and ideas the Christian *mutakallims* used to repeat before Muslim audiences. The second source, Thomas proceeds, are written materials, such as texts and books on religious questions or information on the Christian sects or theological teachings. Al-Warrāq could have been informed on the contents of these text either via personal reading, if they were in Arabic, or if they were in Syriac or Greek via translations or summaries of their contents provided by Christian associates.<sup>85</sup> Thomas comes to the conclusion that "the evidence of these multiple resources (...) gives a strong indication that Abū 'Īsā approached his task with great seriousness and after a considerable amount of preparation. Indeed, his application seems to have exceeded the immediate needs of polemic, for he possesses a curiosity about Christian teachings purely for their own sake".<sup>86</sup>

It is my conviction that the same information-collection dynamics is applicable to the *Kalām* of al-Muqammaṣ on the Trinity in his *Twenty Articles*. He could have easily gleaned his knowledge of the Christian doctrine of the Trinity from both hearing this *Kalām* verbalized before him by Christians, whether in *muḡādalāt* settings, in teaching-learning circles, or in casual conversations. Al-Muqammaṣ could also easily be someone who personally read texts of the Christian *Kalām*, be they by Nonnus of Nisibis, or Abū Rā'īṭa, or of other non-Jacobite *mutakallims*, like Theodore Abū Qurra, which he could have found in the private books-collections of his Christian Jacobite teachers.

Even more important is David Thomas's appraisal of al-Warrāq's personal interest in the Christian *Kalām*. I believe that someone like al-Muqammaṣ, who was exposed to the Christian *Kalām* first-hand, and who personally embraced it to the extent of religious affiliation, can also represent a *mutakallim* who, like al-Warrāq, had appreciation of the Christian *Kalām* and was interested in it for its own sake, invoking its claims "with great seriousness and after considerable amount of preparation". His critical engagement with the topic of the Trinity exceeds any easily presumed obsession with polemics, and invites us to question seriously the hasty, if not anachronistic, tendency to read the religious *Kalām* literature as a mere manifestation of inter-religious *Sitz im Leben* haunted by religious polemical and antagonistic divisiveness, self-protectionism and pretension to primacy.

There are strong historiographical data on the post-Chalcedonian intra-Christian and inter-confessional dynamics that demonstrate that the dividing confessional and denominational lines between Christian groups were much more loose than we are willing today to imagine. On this, Jack Tannous says in his recent monography:

We have indication that putative sectarian boundaries apparently did not impede [the people] from switching allegiance between different churches (...) people were moving back and forth between different church groups. And this was not just going on in rural areas and far away from the centers of

<sup>85</sup> D. Thomas (ed. and trans.), *Anti-Christian Polemic in Early Islam: Abū 'Īsā al-Warrāq's 'Against the Trinity'*, Cambridge U.P., Cambridge - New York 1992, pp. 57-58. See also S.H. Griffith, "From Patriarch Timothy I to Hunayn ibn Ishāq: Philosophy and Christian Apology in Abbasid Times; Reason, Ethics and Public Policy", in M. Tamke (ed.), *Christians and Muslims in Dialogue in the Islamic Orient of the Middle Ages. II. Theology in Dialogue with Islam*, Orient-Institut, Beirut - Würzburg 2007, pp. 75-98. I am most grateful to the referee for directing me to this study.

<sup>86</sup> Thomas, *Anti-Christian Polemic in Early Islam* (above, n. 85), p. 58.

doctrinal power. There was confessional shape-shifting going on under the noses and in the company of the most elite theological elements of society.<sup>87</sup>

The examination of Dawūd b. Marwān al-Muqammaṣ, the Jew who shifted confessionally into Christianity, and then back to Judaism again, invites us to detect tangible traces of the confessional shape-shifting and looseness of divisive sectarian boundaries also in the 9<sup>th</sup> century Abbasid *Sitz im Leben*; not just on the *ad intra* Christian level, but also on the *ad extra* Christian-Muslim-Jewish as well. Even more significantly, al-Muqammaṣ's *Kalām* invites us to further consider a 'back-and-forth', boundaries-free movement between the various discourses of *Kalām* that were produced by Muslim, Jewish and Christian authors. *Mutakallims* allowed themselves to frankly read, learn from and even use methods of reasoning, theological hermeneutics and linguistic styles of demonstration from each other's discourses and texts, disregarding whether or not the other *mutakallims* did belong to their own religious, confessional or sectarian group.

In al-Muqammaṣ's *Twenty Chapters* we find a Jewish *mutakallim* who frankly begs to differ from and to rationally refute what he deems an inaccurate and implausible *Kalām*, regardless to the religious identity of the latter. But, we also have an example of a *mutakallim* who is equally bluntly ready to concur with, even to rely on, any teaching he construes as logical and rationally tenable in any other available *Kalām* discourse he heard of, read, or read about, also regardless to this source's religious background. This invites us to carefully re-read and re-examine the historical nature, purpose and role of Christian, Jewish and Muslim *Kalām* in the early Islamic centuries. Was *Kalām* only pure polemic practice in the service of religious monopolization, protectionism and public prevalence? Or, was it also a practice of inter-learning, inter-connectedness and inter-active knowledge-seeking? Could it be the case that the *mutakallims* were occupied with finding reliable interpretations of religious truth by means of seriously engaging all the available intellectual attempts at finding it, rather than being obsessed with defending one religion's superiority and intellectual hegemony over the others? Al-Muqammaṣ's *Kalām* invites us to seriously consider this option.

---

<sup>87</sup> Tannous, *The Making of the Medieval Middle East*, pp. 96-7. The Christian apologetics was indeed read by Muslims, as documented by S.H. Griffith, "Answering the Call of the Minaret: Christian Apologetics in the World of Islam", in J.J. Van Ginkel - H.L. Murre-van den Berg - T.M. van Lint (eds.), *Redefining Christian Identity. Cultural Interaction in the Middle East since the Rise of Islam*, Peeters - Department Oosterse Studies, Leuven 2005 (*Orientalia Lovaniensia Analecta*, 134), Leuven 2005, pp. 91-126. My sincere thanks go the referee for this reference.

# *The Syro-Persian Reinvention of Aristotelianism: Paul the Persian's Treatise on the Scopes of Aristotle's Works between Sergius of Rēš'aynā, Alexandria, and Baghdad*

Matthias Perkams\*

## *Abstract*

This article discusses anew the sources of the treatise by Paul the Persian on the scopes of the writings of Aristotle, transmitted by Miskawayh. A whole row of different sources can be identified: The Syriac Long commentary on the *Categories* by Sergius' of Rēš'aynā as well as different Greek works, including obviously Philoponus' commentary on the *Physics*, a commentary on the *Analytica priora* similar to David and Elias and an introduction into logics which resembles a passage in Boethius. Paul knew Greek and spent time in a Greek context, where he could collect so many different works. Paul arranged his material in an original way and supplemented points left open by Greek authors. Formally, he introduces a very consequent binary division of entities and treatises absent from the extant Greek sources. It is possibly influenced by East Syrian scholastic culture. Regarding the content, he was the first to explain all five types of syllogism. Especially the understanding of the Greek  $\mu\theta\omega\delta\epsilon\zeta$ , as a description of the poetical syllogism, as "imagined", which is probably due to him, paved the way for the Arabic theories on poetical syllogisms. By writing this treatise, Paul fulfils a never executed promise of Sergius of Rēš'aynā, namely explaining the aim(s) of all writings of Aristotle. Thus, he gives the first sketch of a purely Aristotelian curriculum of philosophy in late Antiquity, which is introduced by Sergius' magnificent image of Aristotle as the master of all sciences. The reception of Paul's treatise by al-Fārābī and Miskawayh leads to the diffusion of the Aristotelian curriculum, as developed by the two Syro-Persian masters, in Arabic philosophical texts.

## *I. Introduction*

It is well known that the late ancient Neoplatonism had a deep impact upon early Arabic philosophy; the teachings of Plotinus, Proclus and other Platonists shaped thoroughly many important Arabic philosophical theories.<sup>1</sup> In the face of this influence, it is remarkable that already for early Arab thinkers not Plato – as it had been in late Antiquity –, but Aristotle was the philosopher *tout court*, and that he retained this role for centuries, in classical Arabic philosophy as well as in the Western Middle Ages. Recent studies have pointed to the role played by Syriac

---

\* This article would not have been possible without the generous help of Dimitri Gutas, who provided me with the two editions of the text. Further thanks go to the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft for funding partly the necessary research, to the Forschungsbibliothek Gotha for giving me access to their precious manuscript, to the anonymous reviewer for important remarks and, last not least, to the peer-reviewers and editors of *Studia graeco-arabica* for their patience with me.

<sup>1</sup> Cf. e.g. C. D'Ancona, "La filosofia della tarda antichità e la formazione della *falsafa*", in C. D'Ancona (ed.), *Storia della filosofia nell'Islam medievale*, Einaudi, Torino 2005 (Piccola Biblioteca Einaudi 285-286), vol. 1, pp. 5-47.

enthusiasts of philosophy regarding this re-emergence of an “Aristotelianism”,<sup>2</sup> but still the details of this process and its influence upon the Arabic sources remain in part enigmatic.

One text utterly neglected in recent studies is a treatise on the scopes of all works of Aristotle transmitted in Miskawayh’s *The Order of Happiness* (*Tartīb al-sā’āda*) and ascribed to the 6<sup>th</sup> century author Paul the Persian. Already some decades ago Shlomo Pines highlighted the remarkable praise of Aristotle at its beginning, without, however, being able to assign a source for it.<sup>3</sup> Somewhat later, the text has been labelled by Dimitri Gutas a “milestone” between Alexandria and Baghdad.<sup>4</sup> Gutas argues, that ‘Paul’ – I use for the moment the inverted commas to designate the text, in order to analyze it without prejudices about its authorship – 1) relies largely upon an Alexandrian source and 2) that it is a source for al-Fārābī’s *Catalogue of Sciences* (*Iḥṣā’ al-‘ulūm*).<sup>5</sup> According to Gutas, its main source is a text similar to Elias’ introduction to his commentary on the *Categories*: 8 of the 15 paragraphs, into which Gutas divides the work, are close to this Greek text, even if the similarity is in part rather weak, as is indicated by Gutas with “cf.”. 8 further paragraphs (including 15 subsections) are similar to the *Iḥṣā’ al-‘ulūm*, and 2 paragraphs show neither a connection with the Greek texts nor with al-Fārābī.<sup>6</sup> Furthermore, ‘Paul’ contains some comments upon 10<sup>th</sup>-century Arabic translations of Aristotle, which must be due to an Arabic redactor, most probably the translator of our treatise. He is identified by Gutas as a Christian Aristotelian from the generation of al-Fārābī’s teachers.<sup>7</sup> Gutas does not discuss the question whether or not he might be responsible for further additions and changes to his model.

Gutas’s hypothesis has been challenged by Deborah Black. She observes that ‘Paul’ and the *Iḥṣā’ al-‘ulūm* are the first texts which explain the epistemological weakness of the poetic syllogisms by their alleged dependence upon imagination – a theory, which we do not find in any extant Greek text, whereas it is widespread among Arabic authors. Black concludes that it is more probable that ‘Paul’ has borrowed this theory from an Arabic source, most probably the *Iḥṣā’ al-‘ulūm*.<sup>8</sup> However, she has neither a clear argument for this opinion, nor does she respond to Gutas’s

---

<sup>2</sup> Important studies include for example S. Brock, “The Syriac Commentary Tradition”, in Ch. Burnett (ed.), *Glosses and Commentaries on Aristotelian Logical Texts*, Warburg Institute, London 1993, pp. 3-18; 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); J.W. Watt “From Sergius to Mattā: Aristotle and Pseudo-Dionysius in the Syriac Tradition”, in J. Lössl – J.W. Watt (eds.), *Interpreting the Bible and Aristotle in Late Antiquity. The Alexandrian Commentary Tradition between Rome and Baghdad*, Ashgate, Farnham - Burlington 2011, pp. 239-57; E. Fiori, “Un intellectuel alexandrin en Mésopotamie. Essai d’une interprétation d’ensemble de l’œuvre de Sergius de Reš‘aynā”, in E. Coda - C. Martini Bonadeo (eds.), *De l’Antiquité tardive au Moyen Age. Études de logique aristotélicienne et de philosophie grecque, syriaque, arabe et latine offertes à H. Hugonnard-Roche*, Vrin, Paris 2014 (Études Musulmanes, 43), pp. 59-90; D. King, *The Earliest Syriac Translation of the Categories. Text, Translation, and Commentary*, Brill, Leiden - Boston 2010 (Aristoteles Semitico-Latinus, 21), pp. 1-95; D. King, “Logic in the Service of Ancient Eastern Christianity. An Exploration of Motives”, *Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie* 97 (2015), pp. 1-33; S. Aydin, *Sergius of Reshaina, Introduction to Aristotle and his Categories, addressed to Philotheos. Syriac Text, with Introduction, Translation, and Commentary*, Brill, Leiden - Boston 2016 (Aristoteles Semitico-Latinus, 24), pp. 1-90.

<sup>3</sup> S. Pines, “Aḥmad Miskawayh and Paul the Persian”, *Irān – Shināsi* 2 (1971), pp. 121-9 [= Sh. Pines, *Studies in the History of Arabic Philosophy*, Magnes Press, Jerusalem 1996, pp. 208-16].

<sup>4</sup> D. Gutas, “Paul the Persian on the Classification of the Parts of Aristotle’s Philosophy: A Milestone between Alexandria and Baḡdād”, *Der Islam* 60 (1983), pp. 231-67.

<sup>5</sup> Pines, “Aḥmad Miskawayh and Paul the Persian” (above, n. 3); Gutas, “Paul the Persian” (above, n. 4), p. 251 states that Miskawayh quotes verbally from the annotated Arabic translation of that text.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. the scheme in Gutas, “Paul the Persian” (above, n. 4), p. 237.

<sup>7</sup> Gutas, “Paul the Persian” (above, n. 4), pp. 250-5.

<sup>8</sup> D.L. Black, *Logic and Aristotle’s Rhetorics and Poetics in Medieval Arabic Philosophy*, Brill, Leiden - New York 1990

arguments in favour of the opposite position. These hypotheses can be checked today against the background of some new evidence. Not only are some Syriac philosophical texts of the same period better known and Gutas's "Elias" has been restituted recently with strong arguments to his fellow David – hence I will call him in what follows "David/Elias",<sup>9</sup> because the debate on the authorship is still open –, but also a second edition of Paul's treatise, not yet used in Gutas's 1983 article, is available.

I shall undertake in what follows a new analysis of 'Paul', its structure, its sources, and its relationship with al-Fārābī. Principally, I will confirm Gutas's findings. However, by supplying the source for its first paragraph and by reevaluating those of the other sections, I will argue that the text combines elements from diverse contemporary Syriac and Greek philosophical sources with some personal ideas by al-Fārābī. It will become clear that especially this combination could have inspired, via al-Fārābī, the Aristotelianisms of the subsequent centuries. I shall start with some philological observations (II.), before discussing the structure and the single sections of the texts in detail (III.-IV.). I will then collect my results in a conclusion (V.).

## II. The editorial situation

Our only extant source for 'Paul' is Miskawayh's *Tartīb al-sa'āda*. We have good reasons for assuming that Miskawayh transmitted the entire treatise, because a preface ascribed to 'Paul' is immediately followed by sections which describe, in the way of a catalogue, the different works of Aristotle and their scopes.

It is not clear whether 'Paul' was translated from Syriac or from Middle Persian.<sup>10</sup> Given Paul's Christian faith (which does not play any role in our treatise) and the dedication of the work to Ḥusraw Anūšīrwān, there are reasons for both assumptions. The dedication to Ḥusraw is not crucial in this regard, because different usages at his court seem possible. For example, the treatise may have been translated orally for the king, as it is attested for king Manfred of Sicily,<sup>11</sup> or maybe the king himself read Syriac, one of the main languages of his kingdom. The problem does not only concern 'Paul', but also other texts connected with Ḥusraw: the treatise by Paul on Aristotelian logics, the *Solutions of the Questions of King Chosroes* by Priscianus of Lydia, the original of which was probably written in Greek,<sup>12</sup> and also a lost *Mēmra* of John of Beth Rabban, one of the

---

(Islamic Philosophy and Theology, 7), pp. 44f. With this claim, she returns to the theory by Pines, "Aḥmad Miskawayh and Paul the Persian" (above, n. 3), pp. 122f, which had been criticized by Gutas. The link between poetic syllogisms and imagination is not mentioned by al-Kindī, *Fi kammiyat kutub 'Aristūṭālīs*, in *Rasā'il al-Kindī al-falsafiyya* ed. M.'A. Abū Ridā, Dār al-fikr al-'arabī, I-II, Cairo 1950-1953, vol. I, pp. 362-384, in part. p. 368 (Engl. trans. P. Adamson - P. Porrmann, *The Philosophical Works of al-Kindī*, Oxford 2012, p. 283). Cf. Black, *Logic and Aristotle's Rhetorics and Poetics*, p. 2.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. Ch. Helmig, "Die jeweiligen Eigenheiten der Neuplatoniker David und Elias und die umstrittene Autorschaft des Kommentars zur Kategorienschrift", in B. Strobel (ed.), *Die Kunst der philosophischen Exegese bei den spätantiken Platons- und Aristoteles-Kommentatoren*. Akten der 15. Tagung der Karl und Gertrud Abel-Stiftung vom 4. bis 6. Oktober 2012 in Trier, W. de Gruyter, Berlin - Boston 2018, pp. 277-314.

<sup>10</sup> Two further treatises by Paul are transmitted in Syriac, but there are arguments for assuming that they go back to Pahlavi originals. Cf. Hugonnard-Roche, *La logique d'Aristote du grec au syriaque* (above, n. 2), pp. 234f.; Id., "Paul le Perse", in R. Goulet (ed.), *Dictionnaire des philosophes antiques* [henceforth: *DPhA*], Va, CNRS-Éditions, Paris 2012, pp. 183-7, in part. p. 185; Id., "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. 37-73.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. the quotation of the letter by R.A. Gauthier, "Notes sur les débuts du premier 'averroïsme'", *Revue des sciences philosophiques et théologiques* 66 (1982), pp. 321-74, in part. pp. 327f.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. M. Perkams, "Priscien de Lydie", in Goulet (ed.), *DPhA*, Vb, CNRS-Éditions, Paris 2015, pp. 1514-21, in part. p. 1516.

directors of the School of Nisibis, which has been transmitted orally at the court of Ḥusraw.<sup>13</sup> The treatise of Miskawayh has been published several times, sometimes in editions of other works; there is a partial French translation of ‘Paul’ by Mohammed Arkoun.<sup>14</sup> For the present paper, I could rely upon three sources, representing two different branches of the transmission, which I will call C and T:

1) C (= the Cairo tradition) is attested by the edition of ‘Alī al-Ṭūbġī in 1335 h./1917.<sup>15</sup> Luckily, Dimitri Gutas provided me with a copy of his collations with ms. Cairo, Dār al-kutub, *Hikma* 6 M, ff. 210r-217r. A further witness of this tradition is ms. Gotha, Pertsch 1158, ff. 163r-166v, which I collated myself for § I-XIII. All three witnesses are close to each other; the Ṭūbġī edition shows correspondences to each manuscript, such that it has probably not been made directly from the Dār al-kutub codex,<sup>16</sup> which is by far the best of these three sources.

2) T (= the Teheran tradition) is represented by the edition of Abūlqasīm Emāmī from 2000.<sup>17</sup> It is based, according to its introduction, upon ms. Teheran, Maġlis-i Šūrā-i Islāmī, 7001 (7551?), and the texts which have been included in the margins of 1) the *Makarem ol-ablaq* and 2) the *Mabda’ u-ma’adi Molla Sadra*, both printed in Teheran 1314 h.š./1935.<sup>18</sup> Emāmī indicates (all?) variants of these three witnesses, but he does not give a stemma, nor does he assign the date of the manuscript.

T and C are totally independent, non contaminated traditions of the same text. They show sensible discrepancies (*Trennfehler*), but none, which would point to different redactions of the original text. In the relative short text of § I-XIII, T contains three important passages of 2-3 lines, which are missing in C due to *homoioteleuton*. C, in turn, supplies two omissions of T<sup>19</sup> and has some clearly superior readings. In my quotations, I chose always the reading that seems most convincing to me.

### III. The structure of Paul’s treatise

‘Paul’ is a structured list of most of Aristotle’s writings, which explains, for each of them, what has been Aristotle’s aim in writing it. To begin with, I give a schematic overview, which shows what I think to be the identifiable sources for or at least close parallels to the 15 paragraphs listed by Gutas:<sup>20</sup>

<sup>13</sup> Cf. Barḥaḍbšabbā, *Cause of the Foundation of Schools / Causa foundationis scholarum*, p. 388.10 Scher.

<sup>14</sup> M. Arkoun, *L’humanisme arabe au IV<sup>e</sup>/X<sup>e</sup> siècle. Miskawayh philosophe et historien*, Vrin, Paris 1982<sup>2</sup> (Études musulmanes, 12), pp. 71f., pp. 226-33.

<sup>15</sup> *Kitāb al-sā’ādā li-Ibn Miskawayh fī falsafat al-aḥlāq* [...] li-ṣāḥib ‘A. al-Ṭūbġī al-Suyūṭī, al-Madrassa al-Ḍā’īya al-Ilāhīya, Cairo 1335h./1917.

<sup>16</sup> Given the correspondences between the Gotha ms. and the al-Ṭūbġī ed., it seems probable that both do not belong to the descendants of Cairo ms. Also Arkoun’s translation seems to belong to C.

<sup>17</sup> Abū ‘Alī Miskawayh, *Tartīb al-sā’ādāt wa-manāzil al-‘ulūm*, ed. A. Emāmī, in ‘A. Owjābi (ed.), *Ganjine-ye Bahārestan* (A collection of 18 treatises in logic, philosophy, theology and mysticism) 1, Teheran 1379h./2000, pp. 101-27.

<sup>18</sup> The Mullā Šadrā edition is probably the same, which is mentioned by Gutas, “Paul the Persian” (above, n. 4), p. 231, n. 1, but is obviously more recent than the Ṭūbġī edition, because the year indicated is that of the Persian solar calendar, whereas Gutas understands it according to the Islamic lunar calendar. The *Makarem ol-ablaq* is not mentioned by Gutas. Emāmī mentions in a footnote also the second edition of Ṭūbġī, al-Qāhira 1928, which is also described by Arkoun, *L’humanisme arabe* (above, n. 14), pp. 107f.

<sup>19</sup> The place of these omissions is indicated in scheme 1 by curly brackets. In § VII, the Gotha and Cairo manuscripts retain in p. 123.6 Emāmī (§ VII) after “*al-aqāwīl al-murakabā*” the words “*allati tadillu ‘alā l-mā’ qūlāti l-murakkabati*”, which are missing in both editions.

<sup>20</sup> The scheme has to be compared with Gutas, “Paul the Persian” (above, n. 4), pp. 233-7.

Paragraph number according to Guais	Miskawayh ed. Emān	Miskawayh ed. Tūbḡī	Topic	Parallels in ancient sources
<b>A. Introductory Paragraph</b>				
I	117.6-10	58.11-17	Introduction	Sergius of Res'ayma, <i>In Cat. ad Timotheum</i> , prooem.
<b>B. Enumeration of all Beings</b>				
II	117.11-17	58.17-59.9	Theoretical and Practical Philosophy; basic bipartite division of all beings	cf. Simpl., <i>In Phys.</i> 1.14-2.2; Elias, <i>Procl.</i> 27.28f.; 27.36-28.5; David, <i>Procl.</i> 58.1-12
III	118.1-9	59.9-60.2	bipartite division of the natural beings	Philop., <i>In Phys.</i> 1.16-22 (cf. also XI)
<b>C. Introduction to Logics</b>				
IV	118.11-119.4	60.2-61.2 {om. 118.13-15 Emānī}	Logics is the art, by which man knows, in which cases he may err and in which not, such that it is a precondition for acquiring true knowledge	cf. principally Boeth., <i>In Isag.</i> , Ed. 2, p. 139.14-18 Brandt; very vague parallels: Philop., <i>In Cat.</i> 10.9-28; David/Elias, <i>In Cat.</i> 117.9-14; Paul, <i>Logica</i> , f. 56r beneath.
V	119.6-19	61.2-62.1	A comparison of logics with grammar and rhetoric	cf. Boeth., <i>In Isag.</i> , Ed. 1, p. 10.19-11.1 Brandt
VI	119.19-120.16	62.1-63.4	The two aims of logics: to be convinced by plausible statements, and to reject implausible ones	cf. Boeth., <i>In Isag.</i> , Ed. 2, p. 138.10-139.18 Brandt
<b>D. The Parts of Logics</b>				
VII	120.17-121.2 {om. 63.10-12 Tūbḡī}	63.4-15	"Analytic" enumeration of the parts of logics, part I: the five species of syllogism, without giving the names of the book	David, <i>In Anal. pr.</i> , lectio I, § 3 (p. 34.1-10 Topchyān); Elias, <i>In Anal. pr.</i> 139.5-12 Wessierink.
VIII	121.4-123.2 [122.4-10:19E] {om. 121.5-7 Emānī}	63.15-66.10 {om. 121.5-7 Emānī} [65.2-12:66.3-5]	a) longer explanation of the five books, in which Aristotle treats the species of syllogism b) longer explanation of the five books, in which Aristotle treats the species of syllogism (the passages in brackets regard Arabic translations and cannot be part of the original treatise)	a) no parallels found
IX	123.3-18	66.10-67.15	b) continuation of the enumeration of logical topics: Conclusions have to be studied after phrases, and phrases after words (without names of books)	b) Ammonius, <i>In Cat.</i> 5.9-13; Ammonius, <i>In Peri Hermeneias</i> 1.24-2.4
X	124.1-13 a) 124.1-2 b) 124.3-6 c) 124.6-12	67.15-68.14 a) # b) 67.15-68.4 c) 68.4-14	"synthetic" explanation of the eight books of logics in the order in which they have to be studied (including the titles of all the eight books)	David/Elias, <i>In Cat.</i> 116.31-117.9; David, <i>In Anal. pr.</i> , lectio II, § 2 (p. 40.17-42.9)
XI	124.11-18 125.4 125.5-8 [125.8E]	68.14-69.17 {om. 124.23-125.2 Emānī}	a) Introduction: why we have to approach the beings without matter starting from physical beings b) The books of natural philosophy c) The books <i>On the Soul</i> and the <i>Metaphysics</i>	b) David/Elias, <i>In Cat.</i> 116.29-117.8; cf. also Philop., <i>In Cat.</i> 5.8-14. a) and c) no exact parallels in Greek sources
XII	125.10-17 [125.15-17]	69.17-70.10 [70.8-10]	bipartite division of the parts of practical philosophy, to be divided in specific (ethics) and outward relations (politics, economics)	1) Ascl., <i>In Metaph.</i> 1.8-14 2) Philop., <i>In Phys.</i> 1.22-2.6; cf. also Simpl., <i>in Phys.</i> (2.27-3.12; Simpl., <i>In Cael.</i> 2.16-3.8; David/Elias, <i>In Cat.</i> 115.21-116.11 3) Simpl./Prisc., <i>In De An.</i> 2.29-3.6
XIII	125.18-21 [125.19E]	70.10-15 [70.12E]	including a note on Arabic translations The letters and further writings of Aristotle (including remarks of the Arabic translator)	cf. Elias, <i>Procl.</i> 34.3f.; David/Elias, <i>In Cat.</i> , 116.15-28 (much longer than in Paul); extant in many versions in Greek literature. cf. Philop., <i>In Cat.</i> 3.8-4.22; cf. David/Elias, <i>In Cat.</i> 113.24-34.
<b>E. The Student and the Aim of Philosophy</b>				
XIV	126.2-13	70.15-71.14	The education of the wise man, the conditions for it and its length	Usually, the preconditions and the order of the writings is discussed in the introductions to the <i>Categories</i> , but in a much shorter way.
XV	126.14-127.12	71.14-73.4	The aim of Aristotle's philosophy: The unification with the object of intellect	According to Philop., <i>In Cat.</i> 5.34-6.2; David/Elias, <i>In Cat.</i> 119.30-31: to demonstrate the first cause

As can be seen in the right column, ‘Paul’ does not rely upon one Alexandrian source, but upon a wide diversity of texts; however, some parts, especially in § V, VIII and X, practically have no parallels at all and could be independent developments by Paul the Persian.

As can be seen further, ‘Paul’ has a clear tripartite structure. After an introduction (A.) follows a list of books and subjects (B.-E.) and a philosophical curriculum (F.). The substructure of the second part is rather complicated in detail. The division of the entities themselves (B.: § II-III) is separated from the list of books treating them (§ XI) by the rather long sections on logics (C./D.). However, the division of all beings in B. corresponds closely to the division of the physical and metaphysical books in § XI, whereas § XII and § XIII do not deal with these entities. The subdivision of the logical part will be discussed below.

#### IV. The individual sections and their sources

Let’s now take a closer look into the individual paragraphs:

Section A: § I is inspired by the beginning of Sergius of Rēš‘aynā’s long commentary on the *Categories* to Theodorus:<sup>21</sup>

Sergius of Rēš‘aynā, <i>Commentary for Theodore on the Categories</i> , Prologue <sup>21</sup>	‘Paul’, p. 58.12-17 Ṭūbḡī = p. 117.6-10 Emāmī (bold words indicate direct borrowings from Sergius)
<p><b>Aristotle was the beginning</b> and the cause of any education. [...]</p> <p><b>Until the time</b>, when nature brought <b>this</b> man into the abode of <b>human beings</b>, all the parts of philosophy and education, <b>like simple medicaments, were dispersed</b> and cast in confusion and without knowledge, among all the writers. Then he alone, like a wise doctor, <b>collected</b> all these works, which were dispersed, and he put them together, in the way of an art and a science, and from them he prepared one <b>perfect remedy</b> of his teaching, in order to uproot and put an end to the grave <b>maladies of ignorance from the souls</b> of those who carefully approach his writings. <b>In the same way</b> as those who make a statue forge each single one of the parts of the <b>image</b> in itself, for itself and by itself, and then put them together one after another, as the order of workmanship demands, to a complete statue, thus also he <b>put together, ordered, and arranged all single</b> parts of philosophy in the order that nature demands, and forged them in all his writings one perfect and wonderful form of the knowledge of all beings.</p>	<p>“It is the wise <b>Aristotle</b> who <b>ordered</b> and classified wisdom and made it a path leading from the beginning to the end, as is mentioned in what he wrote to Anūširwān. He says:</p> <p>“<b>Wisdom was dispersed before this</b> sage, like the dispersion of the other useful things, which God has created, and the use of which has been trusted to the talent of <b>the human beings</b> and to all ability, which he had given to them; <b>like the medicaments</b>, which can be found <b>dispersed</b> in the countries and mountains, but from which, if they are collected and united, results a useful <b>remedy</b>. And <b>in the same way, Aristotle collected anything of wisdom which was dispersed, and put together all single</b> things to their <b>form</b>, and he <b>arranged</b> them at their place, such that a <b>perfect remedy</b> results out of them, <b>by which the souls are cured from the maladies of ignorance</b>”.</p>

<sup>21</sup> The text has been constituted and translated from mss. Birmingham, *Mingana* 606, f. 52rv and Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, *syr.* 354, f. 2r-v; cf. the French translation by H. Hugonnard-Roche, *La logique d’Aristote du grec au syriaque*, pp. 168-70.



Section B: § II runs as follows:

The theoretical (part of wisdom) is either about things which are in matter, or about things which are not in matter. And each of these two parts consists also of two parts: for to the things which are in matter, belong some which are subject to generation and corruption, and some which are not subject to generation and corruption. And to the things which are not in matter, belong some which are separated from matter, and their being is in the mind (*wahm*), and they have no being outside [the mind], and some which are not separated from matter, but have essential being outside the mind. And these are the four primary parts, in which the theoretical part is divided.

The three Greek parallels mentioned in our scheme are also divisions of all beings, but they distinguish, contrary to the quadripartition (or better: double bipartition) in the quotation, only three types of being: one which is totally inside matter, one which is totally outside matter, and one which is in one respect inside and in another respect outside matter. This division corresponds to the three parts of theoretical philosophy according to Aristotle, i. e. physics, mathematics, and metaphysics (e.g. *Metaphysics* VI 1, 1026 a 18f.), which is mentioned in these sources, but is lacking in ‘Paul’. Paul the Persian in his *Handbook of Logics* presents also the tripartition (“To the theory belongs something on intellectivity, and something on sensitivity, and something on what is between them”<sup>25</sup>), but he mentions only mathematics by name, whereas for metaphysics and physics he limits himself to describing their contents. The change from three to four subdivisions and towards a binary classification of all beings must have been a conscious deviation from the tradition for the present context.

A double bipartition of all beings can indeed be found in Barḥaḍbšabbā’s *Cause of the Foundation of Schools*, an important witness for the practices used in the school of Nisibis:

Everything what is, is either a generated being (*hāwya*) or an ungenerated one (*lā hāwya*). And as in the case of what is generated, that what was is prior to that what is – and it is the cause of it –, likewise in the case of that what is ungenerated, that what is an eternal being is prior to that what is, and it is the cause of that what is.<sup>26</sup>

This passage, while being different in many respects, is close to ‘Paul’ not only in its binary structure, but also because of including the difference between “generated” and “ungenerated” beings. This is noteworthy because of the historical vicinity of the two texts: *The Cause of the Foundation of Schools* has been written ca. 30 years after the death of Ḥusraw Anūšīrwān, in that East Syrian school context,<sup>27</sup> to which Paul the Persian, as an East Syrian Christian in Persia, probably was affiliated. Both texts are further connected by quoting at an early date the same text of Sergius of Reš‘aynā (§ I of ‘Paul’) and by a general interest in philosophy, especially logic. Thus, one has to assume some sort of connection between them, which, however, cannot be specified for the moment: Barḥaḍbšabbā could have elaborated upon ‘Paul’ or a similar source for his own purposes (as he does with Sergius

<sup>25</sup> Paulus Persa, *Al matānūtā mliltā d-’Aristūtālis filosofā/De opere logico Aristotelis philosophi*, ed. J. P. N. Land, Brill, Leiden 1875 (Anecdota Syriaca, 4), pp. 1-30 (lat.), pp. 1-32 (syr.), in part. pp. 5.2-12 Land (syr.).

<sup>26</sup> Barḥaḍbšabbā, *Cause of the Foundations of Schools*, p. 334.8-11 Scher. For the translation cf. especially Scher’s translation at the same page. Scher, however, thinks that the passage deals with words. The translation in Becker, *Sources for the History of the School of Nisibis* (see below, n. 27), p. 102, misunderstands the syntactic structure.

<sup>27</sup> Cf. A.H. Becker, *Sources for the History of the School of Nisibis*, Translated with an introduction and notes, Liverpool U.P., Liverpool 2008, p. 86.

of Rēš'aynā),<sup>28</sup> or the structure of our text may have been influenced by East Syrian School practices. Thus, the parallel is an argument for Paul the Persian being really the author of 'Paul'.

Section B: § III, a further division of the physical beings will be treated below together with § XIIb).

Section C.: This section does not contain any close parallel to the extant Greek commentaries on Aristotle. Obviously, the Greek commentators felt no need to explain at length the utility of logic. Their introductions into that subject, which can be found regularly at the beginning of their commentaries on the *Analytica priora*, treat always only the different parts of logic, which 'Paul' treats in section D., and the well-known question, if logic is an instrument or a part of philosophy,<sup>29</sup> which 'Paul' omits. It is plausible that a Christian philosopher in the Persian empire, like Paul the Persian, recommended the study of logic at some length, because of the necessity to convince his auditors of its utility. Indeed, we find a similar recommendation in Paul's *Handbook of Logic*, where he stresses the necessity of distinguishing true from false statements.<sup>30</sup> This argumentation shows, however, as far as I can see, no clear parallels, neither with Greek material nor with 'Paul'.

There is, however, a contemporary parallel for 'Paul's § IV and probably § VI far away from Persia, in the introduction to Boethius' *second commentary* on the *Eisagoge*:

While inquiring into those things, there is necessarily very much which leads astray, during the progression, the researching mind from the right way. [...] For not everything which the course of language has invented, is also fixed by nature. For that reason, it was necessary that those people were deceived who inquired into the nature of things without paying attention to the science of argumentation. If one has not reached first the science (1) about which reasoning holds the true path of disputation, (2) which one is the probable path, and has not understood, which one is reliable and (3) which one may be suspected, the unhampered truth about the things may not be grasped by arguing. Thus, the ancients often concluded on the basis of many errors something false and contrary to each other in argumentation [...] and it was unclear which was the argumentation one should believe. Therefore it seemed right to look first into the true and unhampered nature of argumentation itself. As soon as it has been understood, one can also comprehend, if that which has been found by argumentation, could be accepted as truth. From there on, the experience of the discipline of logic took its start, which prepares the modes of argumentations and the reasoning itself as roads of distinction, in order to understand, (1) which reasoning is sometimes false, sometimes true, (2) which is always false, and (3) which never is false.<sup>31</sup>

Confer this passage with the following extracts from § IV and VI of 'Paul':

[IV] And it became necessary – because one has spent much effort on rectifying the opinions (*ārā*) about all of these things, and on establishing certainty (*al-yaqīn*) and the sufficient persuasions about them and on being safe from error and fault regarding those intelligibles – to study the degrees of persuasions (*marātib al-iqnā'āt*) and to look (1) into those things about which it is totally impossible for a human

<sup>28</sup> Cf. on all these points Perkams, "Sergius de Rēš'aynā" (above, n. 22).

<sup>29</sup> Cf. P. Hadot, "La logique, partie ou instrument de la philosophie?", in Simplicius, *Commentaire sur les Catégories*. Traduction commentée sous la direction de I. Hadot, *Fascicule I: Introduction, Première partie* (p. 1-9, 3 Kalbfleisch), Brill, Leiden [etc.] 1990 (*Philosophia Antiqua*, 50), pp. 183-8.

<sup>30</sup> Paulus Persa, *Logica*, p. 1.9-3.6; 5.17-20 Land.

<sup>31</sup> Boethius, *Commentum in Isagogen. Editio secunda*, § 2: Anicii Manlii Severini Boethii *In Isagogen Porphyrii commenta*, ed. Schepss- F. Tempsky - G. Freytag - S. Brandt, Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, Wien - Leipzig, 1906 (CSEL 48), pp. 132-248, in part., *prooem.*, § 2, pp. 138.10-12; 138.23-139.18.

being to err: what are they? And (2) into those things about which the souls can be quiet, even if they are not of the degree mentioned before: what are they? And (3) into those things, about which it is possible to err without noticing that one falls into deception them, if one thinks that something is true: what are they? And one has systematized also this degree, and one has created an art and rules for it, by which one informs about the degrees of those things and about the ranks of certainty or of its defect. Thus, the human being shall be directed towards the path of correctness regarding every problem. And if not, he goes astray in his judgements, on the way of the friends of the estimations (*maḍāhib*) because of imagination (*taḥyīl*) and arbitrariness. Those people sometimes erred and did not remark it, and sometimes they remarked it and moved from opinion to opinion. [...] And this is the art of logic. [...] [VI] Some people accept some things without conviction, and repudiate some things without comprehension, and get right on some things without knowing on which grounds approve them, and do not believe in what they accept today, such that reject it tomorrow [...] And once an opinion seems right to somebody, he will accept it; and once she finds it doubtful, he rejects it.<sup>32</sup>

Both texts explain why logic has been invented, and they do so in similar ways. The obvious problems in grasping the things themselves made it necessary to establish first the rules of argumentation. By knowing those rules, one may be confident in distinguishing reliable from problematic conclusions, whereas, without logic, we cannot trust our own judgments. By the help of logic, we can distinguish three modes of apprehension: one in which we cannot fail, one in which we fail, and one in which we sometimes fail.

In the light of all these parallels in two authors of different languages, who cannot have been in any direct contact, we must assume that both elaborate upon the same, presumably Greek tradition. Unfortunately, we do not know much about Boethius's sources, so that it is difficult to specify the tradition in question. Usually, one assumes that he draws here on earlier materials than his contemporary Alexandrian scholarship, for example on Porphyry.<sup>33</sup> This is, of course, possible also for 'Paul', but he may have found these ideas also in more recent Greek sources which we do not know any longer.

The texts quoted can also be compared with al-Fārābī's treatment of the same issue in the *Catalogue of sciences*:

And the **art of logic** generally gives **rules**, which aim at correcting the intellect and guiding the human being towards the correct method and towards truth in all intelligibles, about which one may err. [...] For among **the intelligibles** there are some about which **it is totally impossible to err** [...] and other **things about which one may err** and deviate from truth to what is not truth.<sup>34</sup>

This quotation confirms Gutas's observation that some passages in the *Iḥṣā' al-'ulūm* are abbreviated and stylistically improved borrowings from 'Paul' with many verbal correspondences (in bold letters). In the present case, al-Fārābī names only two of the three degrees of certainty in 'Paul'

<sup>32</sup> 'Paul', p. 60.2-12; 61.2; 62.4-6. 12-14 Ṭūbḡī = p. 118.11-19; 119.3f.; 120.2f. 9f. Emāmī. The omission of C (cf. the scheme) renders the series of the three "what are they"-questions unintelligible (cf. e.g. the translation by Arkoun); T omits "and some things he repudiates without comprehension".

<sup>33</sup> Cf. St. Ebbesen, "The Aristotelian Commentator", in J. Marenbon (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Boethius*, Cambridge U.P., Cambridge 2009, pp. 34-55, in part. pp. 44-9.

<sup>34</sup> This treatment is to be found, *pace* Gutas, at Abū Naṣr al-Fārābī, *Iḥṣā' al-'ulūm*, ed. A. González Palencia, Madrid - Granada 1953, p. 21.12-23.9 = al-Fārābī, *Iḥṣā' al-'ulūm*, ed. U. Amine, Cairo 31968, pp. 67.5-68.3 (quotation p. 21.12-22.12 González Palencia = 67.5-68.1 Amine).

and Boethius, omitting the middle degree, which may be either true or false. On the other hand, he provides examples for the two steps mentioned, which are lacking in both earlier authors (and are also omitted in my quotations). The correspondences with Boethius against al-Fārābī confirm that 'Paul' precedes the latter and transmits earlier materials of a Greek origin.

For § V of 'Paul' I did not find any ancient parallel. Boethius states similarities between logic on the one hand and grammar and rhetoric on the other hand,<sup>35</sup> so that 'Paul' might have replaced the rhetoric, which he will treat afterwards as a part of logic, by prosody.

Section D. is, from a historical point of view, a very important passage, because it transmits the five types of syllogisms to al-Fārābī and introduces the idea that poetic syllogism is about premises taken from imagination. I shall first outline the general composition of and the available parallels with of its and then discuss the crucial points by selected quotations.

Most sections are very close to Alexandrian materials: § VII, a list of the five types of syllogism, without mentioning the respective books, is very close to David's commentary on the *Analytica priora* and to Elias's fragment on the same book. There is also a rather loose parallel in a Syriac scholion, which names five types of statements which are either openly or in a hidden way true and false, adding some examples.<sup>36</sup> § VIII b), which continues this list, has literary parallels only in Ammonius. § IX, which explains the order of the eight books of the *Organon*, is again close to David's *In Analytica priora*, even if 'Paul's' account is somewhat more structured. There is also a much shorter parallel section in the Syriac scholion mentioned above, which names, however, only the first five books of the *Organon*. § Xb), describing the respective roles of the eight books of the *Organon* – three are preceding the *Analytica posteriora*, four are following it – is very close to a further passage in David/Elias *On Categories*, which elaborates in turn upon a text in John Philoponus (cf. scheme 1). These passages contain the doctrine that there are five types of syllogism in the form that we find in Greek only in David and Elias.

§ VIII a), however, – a detailed list of the five types of syllogism, as they are supposed to be contained in *Analytica posteriora*, *Poetics*, *Topics*, *Sophistici Elenchi*, and *Rhetorics* – as well as § Xa) and c) – are unparalleled in Greek texts:

– § VIII a) supplies an explanation for the five syllogisms mentioning also the names of the Aristotelian writings treating them, which lack in David and Elias and also in the Anonymus Heiberg from around 1000 A.D. (cf. below). David and Elias enumerate the five syllogisms and the respective books, but they continue by stating that one could speak equally of only three types of syllogism (apodeictic, dialectic, sophistic). By proceeding like this, they refer to the teaching of Ammonius, who abstained deliberately from acknowledging the *Rhetoric* and the *Poetics* as syllogistic treatises;<sup>37</sup> but their own assumption that there are five types of syllogism remains without explanation. As a result, their texts give the impression of an uncomplete, hybrid theory. Paul's § VIII a), to the contrary, closes this gap by an unprecedented explanation of the specific nature of the five syllogisms.

- Xa) and c) are less spectacular, because their explanation of the crucial role of Aristotle's *Kitāb al-burhān/Analytica posteriora* is more extended than its Greek parallel, but does not contain new ideas, which would be helpful for our discussion.

<sup>35</sup> Boethius, *Commentum in Isagogen, Editio prima*, § 2, p. 10.19-25 Brandt.

<sup>36</sup> Unfortunately, I could inspect only the French translation of this scholion in Hugonnard-Roche, *La logique d'Aristote* (above, n. 2), p. 122. Hugonnard-Roche notes the parallel with 'Paul' *ibid.*, p. 109.

<sup>37</sup> Cf. Black, *Logic and Aristotle's Rhetorics and Poetics* (above, n. 8), pp. 31-44.

It is highly improbable that § VIIIa) was taken from a lost Greek source. First, Paul the Persian could hardly have used Greek material which left no traces in David and Elias, because the three of them were contemporaries: Ḥusraw Anūšīrwan, the dedicatee of ‘Paul’, died in 579, and David/Elias were students of Olympiodorus, who died around 565.<sup>38</sup> Second, David, Elias and the Anonymus Heiberg would surely have given an explanation of the five syllogisms, if they had known one, so that probably there was no good explication for them available in Greek sources of the early and middle Byzantine times. Consequently, § VIIIa) must be a product either by Paul the Persian in the 6<sup>th</sup> or by the Arabic translator in the 10<sup>th</sup> century.

Let us therefore look somewhat more closely at those passages which contain the idea that the *Poetics* is about “imagination”. They can be found in § VIIIa), where a Greek source is improbable, and in § IX, which is close to several roughly contemporary texts. To begin with, I will therefore quote text which we can compare with Greek and Armenian parallels:

And the eighth (book of logic, that is the *Poetic*, is) a book, in which Aristotle mentions the rules of the fancied expressions (*al-alfāz al-muḥayyala*), and the outmost of all (*aqṣā’ ḡamī’*), what is perfect on it, is this art; and he divided it into its genera and its species, and he called it *Poetics*, that is *šī’r*.<sup>39</sup>

The parallel passages in David/Elias, in Elias’s and David’s commentaries on the *Analytica priora* and in the Anonymus Heiberg are the following:

Elias: “Either the premises are always true, and an apodeictic (syllogism) is produced; or they are totally false and fictitious (ψευθεῖς καὶ μυθώδεις), and a poetic one is produced”.<sup>40</sup>

David/Elias: “The premises, from which the syllogisms can be taken, are five: for either the premises are totally true and produce the apodeictic syllogism, or they are totally false and they produce the poetic one, the fictitious (τὸν ποιητικὸν τὸν μυθώδη)”.<sup>41</sup>

David: “And one should know that there are five species of syllogism, the demonstrative, the dialectical, the rhetorical, the sophistical and the poetical, which is also fictitious”.<sup>42</sup>

Anonymus Heiberg: “The (syllogisms) from totally false (premises) are totally false, and they have been called poetic and fictitious (ποιητικοὶ καὶ μυθώδεις) (syllogisms)”.<sup>43</sup>

In these texts, the poetic syllogism is always characterized by the Greek μυθώδης, which may have referred initially to a certain genus of poetry.<sup>44</sup> The word itself, however, does not mean simply *mythical*, but it has in late ancient texts regularly the meaning *fictitious*, *fabulous* with the connotation of being unsubstantiated or, in other words, *imagined*, *fancied*. I bring only

<sup>38</sup> Cf. L.G. Westerink, “The Alexandrian Commentators and the Introductions to their Commentaries”, in R. Sorabji (ed.), *Aristotle Transformed*, Duckworth, London 1990, pp. 325-48, in part. 328-39.

<sup>39</sup> ‘Paul’, p. 67.15 Tūbḡi = p. 123.1f. Emāmī. The quotation follows C, which correctly retains *ḡamī’* (omitted in T).

<sup>40</sup> Elias, *In Analytica priora* frg., ed. L.G. Westerink, “Elias on the *Prior Analytics*”, *Mnemosyne* 4 (1961), pp. 126-39, in part. p. 139.6-8.

<sup>41</sup> David/Elias, *In Categorias*, ed. *sub titulo* Eliae (*olim* Davidis) *In Aristotelis Categorias Commentarium*, ed. A. Busse, Reimer, Berlin 1900 (*CAG* XVIII.1), pp. 105-255, in part. p. 117.1-4.

<sup>42</sup> David, *In Analytica priora*, ed. by A. Topchyan: cf. David the Invincible, *Commentary on Aristotle’s Prior Analytics*. Old Armenian Text with an English Translation, Introduction, and Notes, Brill, Leiden - Boston 2010 (*Philosophia Antiqua*, 122), in part. ch. 1, § 3, p. 34.2f.

<sup>43</sup> Anonymus Heiberg, i.e. Anonymi *Logica et quadrvium, cum scholiis antiquis*, ed. J.L. Heiberg, Hoest, København 1929, lib. I, § 64, p. 48.10f.

<sup>44</sup> Cf. F. Montanari, *The Brill Dictionary of Ancient Greek*, Brill, Leiden - Boston 2015, col. 1368c.

two examples: the Christian Gregory of Nyssa calls “the mythical/fancied fictions and the false tricks” (τὰ μυθώδη πλάσματα καὶ τὰ ψευδῆ τερατεύματα) as equally mistaken productions of human creativity (ἐπίνοια).<sup>45</sup> Even earlier, the pagan Plutarch described the interpretation of the myth of Isis and Osiris as “neither irrational nor mythical” (οὐδὲ ἄλογον οὐδὲ μυθώδες), as it could be explained in an allegoric way.<sup>46</sup> Given this pejorative connotation of μυθώδης, one may suspect that the characterization of the *Poetics* with this word reflects a – rather un-Aristotelian – understanding of poetry as imaginative fiction unrelated to the truth.<sup>47</sup> *Mutahayyal* is, then, an understandable translation of a Greek expression describing, rather inadequately, Aristotle's *Poetics*, which has not to be explained by Arabic influences. Probably, also the Syriac or Pahlavi original of ‘Paul’ contained an expression of that meaning.

Let's now look into § VIIIa), where the corresponding passage runs as follows:

Regarding the syllogism, which is always false, it is (*fa-*) what is imagined (*yuhayyal*) about something, that it is of a certain form (*šūra*), whereas in reality it is not of it (= this form), similar to what happens to the eye while seeing. Indeed, to the soul in seeing the intelligible happens what happens to the eye while seeing the sensible, and sometimes the human being imagines about something a corruptible imagination. Then, he hurries to reach this, such that his acts become wicked and ugly. And Aristotle composed about this also a book about the aspects (*wuḡūh*) of these imaginations (*tahayyulāt*): From where do they come about and how do they come about? And he called it ‘Book of Poetry’ (*Kitāb al-šī'r*) or ‘Book of the poetic art’ (*Kitāb al-šimā'a al-šī'riya*).<sup>48</sup>

This looks like a free explanation of intellectual errors, which combines some conventional parallels between sense-perception and reasoning somehow with imagination. This has not much to do with Aristotle's *Poetics*, such that we have no reason to suspect that the author had access to that work, which was obviously rarely studied in late Antiquity, but translated apparently in the 9<sup>th</sup> century into Syriac and in the 10<sup>th</sup> into Arabic.<sup>49</sup>

The same holds true for al-Fārābī, whose much more elaborated account shows clear similarities to our text, as can be seen from a short extract of his rather long elaboration on poetic syllogisms:

And the poetic expressions are those which are composed from things for which it is the case that they are imagined from something. [...] And it **happens** to us, while being concerned with the poetic expressions from imagination, [...] something similar in our **souls** to **what happens while** we are **seeing something** that is similar to what we contest – and it is imagined by us immediately about that thing that it is something which we contest.<sup>50</sup>

<sup>45</sup> Gregory of Nyssa, *Contra Eunomium*, I-II, ed. W. Jaeger, Gregorii Nysseni *Opera* 1, Weidmann, Berlin, 1921, lib. II, § 187, p. 278.27 Jaeger. Cf. also Elias, *Prolegomena in philosophiam*, ed. A. Busse, Reimer, Berlin 1900 (CAG XVIII.1), pp. 1-104, in part. p. 12.1f. Busse.

<sup>46</sup> Plutarch, *De Iside et Osiride*, ed. W. Sieveking, in Plutarchi *Moralia* II, edd. W. Nachstädt - W. Sieveking - J.B. Titchener, Teubner, Leipzig 1953, fasc. 3, in part. § 8, p. 7.4 (= p. 353E Stephanus).

<sup>47</sup> At least according to A. Schmitt, cf. *Aristoteles. Poetik. Übersetzt und erläutert*, Akademie-Verlag, Berlin 2008, p. 56.

<sup>48</sup> ‘Paul’, p. 131.10-15 Emāmi = p. 64.1-9 Ṭübġi.

<sup>49</sup> Cf. R. Goulet, “Aristote de Stagire. La *Poétique*”, in Goulet (éd.), *DPhA*, I, pp. 448-51, in part. p. 449; Schmitt, *Aristoteles. Poetik*, p. xvii.

<sup>50</sup> Al-Fārābī, *Ihṣā' al-'ulūm*, § II, p. 83.4-9 Amine = p. 43.1-9 González Palencia. The whole passage goes from p. 83.4-85.8 Amine = p. 43.1-45.3 González Palencia.

One can see from this extract once more both the points demonstrated by Gutas for other passages: al-Fārābī uses some formulations from ‘Paul’, but he integrates them in a larger and more complex theoretical framework – such that his treatment is obviously later than that to be found in ‘Paul’. The same holds true for the praise of the *Analytica posteriora* in Xb), which is much more elaborated in al-Fārābī.<sup>51</sup> The order of the syllogistic books in ‘Paul’s § VIIIa) corresponds to § IX, but differs from that in al-Fārābī, such that the unity of ‘Paul’ is plausible also in this regard. ‘Paul’ is consequently the earliest extant text in which we find the link between imagination and poetic syllogism, and probably the word originated as a translation of the Greek  $\mu\upsilon\theta\omega\delta\epsilon\varsigma$ .

Should we assume, then, that Paul the Persian wrote § VIIIa) and c), or are they rather additions of the Arabic translator? The explanation of the five types of syllogism fills an evident gap left open by the Greek commentators, so that any intelligent person working on this topic will have felt the need to explain the five types of syllogism. As for Paul the Persian, his original mind and his interest in the  $\sigma\kappa\omicron\pi\omicron\iota$  of the Aristotelian logical treatises was demonstrated convincingly by Henri Hugonnard-Roche.<sup>52</sup> Thus, Paul the Persian is a totally plausible candidate for having supplied the explanation of the five syllogisms. There are no reasons for coming to another conclusion regarding § Xa) and c), given that ‘Paul’s remarks here do not go significantly beyond the statements of David/Elias. Consequently, such remarks do not need to be a product of the 10<sup>th</sup> enthusiasts of the *Analytica posteriora* like al-Fārābī.<sup>53</sup>

Section E. is a relatively short explanation of Aristotle’s other treatises.

In its part b), which enumerates the books on natural philosophy, the text of T is much more complete than C, as it mentions Aristotle’s *Meteorology* and *De Metallis* (= *Meteorology* 4) – thus covering a lacuna in C which had been suspected by Gutas. T mentions both Arabic titles of Aristotle’s *Physics*, whereas *sam’ al-kiyān* is missing in C. This title, which is based upon the Syriac *kyānā* = nature, may be read as a further indication for a Syriac original behind ‘Paul’.<sup>54</sup>

For this part, at least four Greek parallels are extant: at the beginning of Philoponus’ and Simplicius’ commentaries on the *Physics*, and also in the commentary on the *De Caelo* by the latter, and in David’s/Elias’s *Categories* commentary. However, David/Elias is particularly far away from ‘Paul’, because only this text offers a tripartition of Aristotle’s works,<sup>55</sup> whereas “Paul” follows the bipartition which is also used in the other three parallels. Especially Philoponus’ text is very close to ‘Paul’:

<sup>51</sup> Cf. e.g. al-Fārābī, *Iḥṣā’ al-‘ulūm* II, p. 89.6-12 Amine = pp. 50.10-51.4 González Palencia.

<sup>52</sup> Hugonnard-Roche, *La logique d’Aristote* (above, n. 2), pp. 233-73; Id., “Sur la lecture tardo-antique du *Peri hermeneias* d’Aristote” (above, n. 10), pp. 40-45.

<sup>53</sup> As reported by al-Fārābī himself in Ibn Abī Uṣaybi’a, *‘Uyūn al-anbā’ fi ṭabaqāt al-aṭibbā’*, ed. I. Ibn al-Ṭaḥḥān (=A. Müller), Cairo - Königsberg, 1882-1884 (repr. F. Sezgin, Frankfurt a. M. 1995, *Islamic Medicine*, vol. 1-2), p. 559.3f.

<sup>54</sup> Cf. P. Kraus, “Zu Ibn al-Muqaffa”, *Rivista degli studi orientali* 14 (1933), pp. 1-20 (= Id., *Alchemie, Ketzerei, Apokryphen im frühen Islam. Gesammelte Aufsätze*, herausgegeben und eingeleitet von R. Brague, Olms, Hildesheim et al. 1994, pp. 89-109), in part. p. 7, n. 2. On the rendering of Aristotle’s *Physics* by *Sam’ al-kiyān* and its Syriac background see Y. Arzhanov - R. Arnzen, “Die Glossen in Ms. Leyden or. 583 und die syrische Rezeption der aristotelischen *Physik*”, in Coda - Martini Bonadeo (eds.), *De l’Antiquité tardive au Moyen Age* (above, n. 2), pp. 415-64, esp. pp. 425-9.

<sup>55</sup> David/Elias, *In Cat.*, p. 115.27-33 Busse (*CAG* XVIII.1); cf. the scheme in Gutas, “Paul the Persian” (above, n. 4), p. 262.

<p>'Paul', pp. 118.1-5; 124.19-125.4 Emāmī = 59.9-14; 69.3-8 Ṭūbġī</p>	<p>Philoponus, <i>In Phys.</i>, p. 1.12f.; 16-18; 22-26 Vitelli (trans. by C.Osborne, Bloomsbury, London [etc.] 2006, p. 23)</p>
<p>III: Now, from the things, which are in matter, there is something, which is common to all of them, and there is something which is specific for some of them. And from what is specific for some of them, there is something which is specific for the eternal things among them, and there is something specific for the generated things. And from what is specific for the generated things, <u>there is something, which is common to all of them, and something, which is specific for some of them.</u> And from that which is specific for some, there is something which is specific for those which are above the earth, and something which is specific for those which are on the earth. [...]</p> <p>XI, b): He [Aristotle] composed a book, in which he names those aspects, which are common to all the natural things, those subjected to generation and corruption, and those not subjected to generation and corruption, and he called it: <i>Kitāb al-samā' al-ṭabī'i</i> and <i>sam' al-kiyān</i> [i.e. the <i>Physics</i>]. And he composed a book on what is specific for the things not subjected to generation and corruption, and he called it <i>Heaven and Earth</i>. Then he divided the things subjected to generation and corruption, and he made on this a book on that which is common to all things of generation, and he called it <i>Book on Generation and Corruption</i>.</p>	<p>In order to illustrate this it would be a good thing if we made a list of the adjuncts that accompany natural things [...]. Some adjuncts are common to all things; others accompany some in particular. Of the ones that accompany some in particular, some belong to eternal things in particular, others to those involved in generation and corruption. Of those belonging to things involved in generation and corruption, some belong in particular to things above the ground, others to things on the ground [...].</p> <p>Aristotle, then, wrote about things that belong to all natural things in common, namely in the work before us; about those that belong to eternal things in particular in the <i>De Caelo</i>; and about adjuncts that universally accompany all things involved in generation and corruption in the <i>De Generatione et Corruptione</i> [...].</p>

'Paul' and Philoponus share two points: a) Formally, the natural books and their subjects are arranged in a binary system of partition, and the whole enumeration of the natural beings precedes in both texts the entire enumeration of Aristotle's books. Simplicius and David/Elias, on the contrary, give always the title of the book immediately after describing its topic. b) As for the content, the two lists are, apart from small terminological items, totally identical, with two exceptions: 'Paul' mentions explicitly the underlined bipartition tacitly implied by Philoponus, and Philoponus adds a more detailed division, not quoted here, of the zoological writings.<sup>56</sup> Thus, we must assume that Philoponus or a very similar text – this means: probably a reportation of Ammonius's lecture course on the *Physics* from the beginning of the 6<sup>th</sup> century – is 'Paul's' source in this paragraph.

For parts a) and c) of § XI, there are parallels in two Greek commentaries on the *De Anima* and on *Metaphysics*, as indicated in the scheme. In studying philosophy, we have to start from material beings, because they are familiar to us, in order to reach the immaterial beings, whereas our soul, which is treated in *De Anima*, is in the middle between these two realms. One may discuss if this scheme is in line with the division of beings in section B./§ II. There 'Paul' divides immaterial entities

<sup>56</sup> The details for Philoponus are: *In Aristotelis Physicorum libros tres priores commentaria*, ed. G. Vitelli, Reimer, Berlin, 1887 (*CAG XVI*), p. 1.16-22 (division of physical beings), pp. 1.22-2.6 (equivalent list of writings on natural philosophy), p. 2.6-13 (additional division of the books on animals). The schemes in Simplicius are similar for the content, but contain some personal reflections by the author.

in some which are totally free from matter, and others which exist in *wahm*, a word which, thanks to its closeness to *φαντασία*, fits better mathematical beings than the soul; in this regard, the parallelism of the two parts is not complete.

For § XII, the division of Aristotle's works on practical philosophy, there are many Greek parallels, but 'Paul' has a special structure: First, he divides practical philosophy into two parts (ethics and the rest), and then he divides the rest into economics and politics. Again, we find a double bipartition, where all Greek parallels known to me offer a tripartition.

Thus, the tendency to arrange all parts of philosophy in a strictly binary scheme can be seen as an important stylistic feature of 'Paul'. This tendency may be due to East Syrian school practices or with Syriac forms of philosophical works in general. At least we know that divisions of philosophical subjects have been widespread and popular in Syriac circles interested in philosophy, for example in connection with the Syriac scholion on logic mentioned above (p. 125) and in the *Cause of the Foundation of Schools*.<sup>57</sup>

§ XIII mentions shortly the other writings of the Aristotelian corpus, which are usually mentioned in the Alexandrian commentaries.

I omit here § XIV and XV, because these sections exceed the lists of Aristotelian works, which can easily be compared with Greek material. These paragraphs would require a separate study. Instead, I go on to formulate my conclusions.

## VI. Conclusion

First, one may safely confirm the authorship of Paul the Persian for most of the treatise on the works of Aristotle transmitted under his name. The treatise relies upon one Syriac and a whole row of Greek sources, among them Sergius' of Rēš'aynā's long commentary on the *Categories* as well as texts with close similarities to Philoponus' commentary on the *Physics* and to a commentary on the *Analytica priora* close to David and Elias and to the recommendation of logics in Boethius. Thus, the author combines sources from the first third of the 6<sup>th</sup> century (Ammonius/Philoponus/Sergius), from the middle third (Olympiodorus/David/Elias) and a probably earlier introduction on logic, different from what can be found in Alexandrian commentaries. This wide range of sources may well have been available to a Syro-Persian philosopher of the 6<sup>th</sup> century like Paul the Persian, so that there is no reason to doubt Miskawayh's attribution.

From this authorship we can conclude some points, which have been tentatively formulated by Henri Hugonnard-Roche:<sup>58</sup> Paul had obviously a sound knowledge of Greek and spent some time in a Greek scholarly environment. For all of his sources can hardly have existed in the mid 6<sup>th</sup> century in Syriac or Pahlavi translations – we do not even know of Syriac Aristotelica before 550 other than Sergius's commentaries on the *Categories*!<sup>59</sup> Probably, Paul spent some time in Alexandria, where he had access to the material used in his treatise. We have other testimonies for similar travels.<sup>60</sup>

<sup>57</sup> Hugonnard-Roche, *La logique d'Aristote* (above, n. 2), pp. 101-22; Becker, *Sources for the History of the School of Nisibis* (above, n. 27), pp. 172-80.

<sup>58</sup> Hugonnard-Roche, "Sur la lecture tardo-antique du *Peri hermeneias*" (above, n. 10), p. 39.

<sup>59</sup> This should roughly be the time of the first Syriac translation of the *Categories*, which comes after Sergius's work: King, *The Earliest Syriac Translation* (above, n. 2), pp. 30-5.

<sup>60</sup> For example, the famous Mār Ābā/Patricius according to *Vita Mār Ābae*, ed. F. Jullien, Peeters, Leuven 2015 (CSCO Syr. 254/55), § 7, p. 9f. (syr.), 10f. (fr.).

Some points in our text, especially the quotation of Sergius and the predilection for the rather scholastic strict bipartition of topics in the text, support the idea that 'Paul' had also contacts in the East Syrian schools, where we find similar texts and phenomena. From this point of view, Paul's identity with other East Syrian namesakes, for whom travels to the Roman empire are well attested, should be discussed anew.<sup>61</sup> The question of whether or not he wrote this treatise in Syriac cannot be decided with all certainty, but there are at least noteworthy indications in this direction and no unequivocal arguments for a Pahlavi original.

Paul's authorship is especially well established for those passages, for which direct Syriac and Greek antecedents can be identified. But also for parts without identifiable sources, especially the explanation of the five syllogistic books in VIIIa) and the praise of the *Analytica posteriora* in Xb), Paul the Persian is a totally plausible author: His treatise *On the scope of the Peri Hermeneias* shows his interest in the subjects of the Aristotelian writings on logic, as well as his ability to invent new solutions in comparison with the Greek ones. Thus, it is plausible that he invented the description of the poetic syllogism by its dependence from imagined premises. In fact, the Arabic *mutahayyal* goes probably back to a translation of a well-known late antique meaning of  $\mu\omega\theta\tilde{\omega}\delta\epsilon\varsigma$  into a Syriac or Pahlavi word for "imagined", which was later on translated into Arabic. By this translation, the fifth syllogism got connotations which inspired an intense reflection on the topic in the subsequent centuries.

However, Paul's importance is even greater than this detail. His text takes up a promise given, but not fulfilled, by Sergius of Rēš'aynā, namely an explanation of the scope(s) of all of Aristotle's works. The presence of § I, a *de facto*-quotation of Sergius' magnificent praise of Aristotle as the master of all sciences, shows that this is no coincidence. Obviously, Paul shares Sergius's conviction that Aristotle, and not Plato, is the master of all philosophical sciences. This common strategy must be regarded as an intentional reshaping of philosophy by the two Syro-Persian authors. Both declare that it is sufficient to study the works of Aristotle for reaching the perfection made possible by philosophy. Paul is in this respect even more explicit than Sergius, who combines Aristotelian philosophy with a Christian mystic inspired by Evagrius Ponticus:<sup>62</sup> the Persian author claims straightly that the study of the branches of the Aristotelian books is in itself sufficient for reaching this goal, leaving aside both Plato and Christianity. This may be called indeed a reinvention of Aristotelianism in philosophy.

<sup>61</sup> Gutas, "Paul the Persian" (above, n. 4), pp. 238f., n. 14.

<sup>62</sup> Fiori, "Un intellectuel alexandrin en Mésopotamie" (above, n. 2).



# *The Cross-Cultural Spread of Greek Philosophy (and Indian Moral Tales) to 6<sup>th</sup> Century Persian and Syriac*

Richard Sorabji

## *Abstract*

Pagan Greek philosophy spread to the Persian king Khushru I, a Zoroastrian, in the 6<sup>th</sup> 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,<sup>1</sup> have now reached the point in 2019 at which we can better trace the 6<sup>th</sup> 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'),<sup>2</sup> who ruled Persia from 531 to 579, and in whose court Syriac as well as Middle Persian was spoken.<sup>3</sup> 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*.<sup>4</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> 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 100<sup>th</sup> volume in 2012.

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

<sup>3</sup> I take this information on language from J.P.N. Land, *Anecdota 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.

<sup>4</sup> 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 17<sup>th</sup> 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<sup>5</sup> 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 9<sup>th</sup> century CE Constantinople.<sup>6</sup> 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

<sup>5</sup> 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-Nazzām on the atomic leap”, *Mnemosyne* 72 (2019), pp. 585-620, at 609-11. I mention only some of Marcotte’s extensive evidence.

<sup>6</sup> 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<sup>7</sup> 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 6<sup>th</sup> 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 13<sup>th</sup> 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,<sup>8</sup> 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,<sup>9</sup> 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.<sup>10</sup>

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

---

<sup>7</sup> 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).

<sup>8</sup> F. de Blois, *Burzōy's Voyage to India and the Origin of the Book of Kalilah 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.

<sup>9</sup> 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.

<sup>10</sup> 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 IV<sup>e</sup> 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*<sup>11</sup> and a story about the Buddha's interpretation of a king's eight dreams as foretelling degenerate times.<sup>12</sup> A translation from Burzōye's Middle Persian into Syriac, was made by the Christian priest Bōd, who is said to have lived around 570 CE.<sup>13</sup> Burzōye's text was expanded with further moral tales<sup>14</sup> in Arabic translations from the Middle Persian, starting as early as around 750 CE with the Arabic version drawn by Ibn al-Muqaffa' (who died about 757 CE) from the Middle Persian, under the title *Kalila 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 *Kalila and Dimna* date from centuries later than Ibn al-Muqaffa', so it is hard to be sure whether the stories the Arabic manuscripts contain had all been selected already by Ibn al-Muqaffa' himself, or whether Ibn al-Muqaffa' 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-Muqaffa' 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 Kalila 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-Muqaffa' 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-Muqaffa' 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-Muqaffa' executed as well. I do not know whether Ibn al-Muqaffa' 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.

*Kalila 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 13-14<sup>th</sup> century *Gesta Romanorum*,

---

<sup>11</sup> *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.

<sup>12</sup> 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.

<sup>13</sup> De Blois, *Burzōy's Voyage to India*, p. 2.

<sup>14</sup> There is a more comprehensive French translation of *Kalila and Dimna* by André Miquel: Ibn al-Muqaffa', *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 12<sup>th</sup> 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 *Kalila and Dimna*. Porphyry, however, the 3<sup>rd</sup> century CE Neoplatonist commentator on Aristotle, claimed to have reared a partridge in Carthage who really spoke to him in Greek.<sup>15</sup> 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 2<sup>nd</sup> 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.<sup>16</sup>

### 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.<sup>17</sup>

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

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

<sup>16</sup> 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 (*SF* 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).

<sup>17</sup> 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.<sup>18</sup> 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.<sup>19</sup> 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<sup>20</sup> 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 Biṣr 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 19<sup>th</sup> century Latin translation by J.P.N Land.<sup>21</sup> Land, in *Anecdota Syriaca*, vol. 4, argues in Latin in his section *Scholium 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.<sup>22</sup> 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.<sup>23</sup>

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.<sup>24</sup> 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

---

<sup>18</sup> 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.

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

<sup>20</sup> M. Arkoun, *L'humanisme arabe au IX<sup>e</sup>-X<sup>e</sup> siècle. Miskawayh, philosophe et historien*, Seconde édition revue, Vrin, Paris 1970 (Études musulmanes, 121), pp. 228-33.

<sup>21</sup> Land, *Anecdota Syriaca* (above, n. 3).

<sup>22</sup> So S. Brock, "From Antagonism to Assimilation: Syriac Attitudes to Greek Learning", in N. Garsoian - 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 in spite of his being a Persian, *Histories*, 2.28.

<sup>23</sup> Agathias, *Histories*, 2. 28.

<sup>24</sup> 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.<sup>25</sup>

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 5<sup>th</sup> to 6<sup>th</sup> 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.<sup>26</sup>

The preface to Ammonius' commentary on Porphyry included an introduction to Philosophy, giving no fewer than six definitions of Philosophy,<sup>27</sup> an enumeration of the parts of Philosophy,<sup>28</sup> and a survey of features of Porphyry's earlier *Introduction* to be commented on before reading it.<sup>29</sup> 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,<sup>30</sup> 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.<sup>31</sup> These introductions and the definitions of Philosophy helped in the diffusion of Aristotelian philosophy to other cultures,<sup>32</sup> 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.

---

<sup>25</sup> I thank Wilfrid Hodges for first telling me of Paul of Persia's treatment of syllogism and of the subsequent interest of Ibn al-Muqaffā' in 8<sup>th</sup> century CE in Paul's treatment of logic.

<sup>26</sup> 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).

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 2, line 16 to p. 9, line 24.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 9.25-16.20.

<sup>29</sup> *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.

<sup>30</sup> 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.

<sup>31</sup> 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?

<sup>32</sup> 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,<sup>33</sup> but Ammonius explains that the political philosopher imitates God's providence by taking an interest in human law,<sup>34</sup> as well as imitating him by knowing, as in the first two definitions).<sup>35</sup>

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 15<sup>th</sup> century Florence.<sup>36</sup>

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".<sup>37</sup>

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 4<sup>th</sup> century BCE Aristotle had praised those who spoke of the soul as the place of forms (*εἶδη*), 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,<sup>38</sup> although the latter was not the view Socrates was represented as endorsing.

<sup>33</sup> Plat., *Theaet.* 176 B 1.

<sup>34</sup> Ammonius, *Interpretation of Porphyry's Introduction* (above, n. 26), p. 3.11-19.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibidem.*

<sup>36</sup> 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.

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

<sup>38</sup> Arist., *De Anima* 429 a 27-28; Plat., *Meno* 80 D - 86 C; *Parm.* 132 B.

The founder of Neoplatonism, Plotinus, in the 3<sup>rd</sup> 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).”<sup>39</sup> 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,<sup>40</sup> 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,<sup>41</sup> 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

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

<sup>40</sup> 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.

<sup>41</sup> 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 Ishāq 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.<sup>42</sup> 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),<sup>43</sup> 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*),

<sup>42</sup> 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).

<sup>43</sup> 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,<sup>44</sup> 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.

---

<sup>44</sup> 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*,<sup>45</sup> 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.<sup>46</sup> 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.<sup>47</sup> 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.<sup>48</sup>

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

<sup>46</sup> 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).

<sup>47</sup> The two interpretations are explained by P. Kraus, "Zu Ibn al-Muqaffa'", *Rivista degli studi orientali* 14 (1934), pp. 1-20 at pp. 14-20.

<sup>48</sup> 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, Ouranios. 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 Ouranios 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 8<sup>th</sup> century CE by Ibn al-Muqaffa', of *Kalīla and Dimna*, and in all non-mutilated Arabic manuscripts of that.<sup>49</sup> 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-Muqaffa' 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,<sup>50</sup> 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.<sup>51</sup> 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,

---

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

<sup>49</sup> De Blois, *Burzōy's Voyage to India* (above, n. 8), pp. 24-5, 27.

<sup>50</sup> Kraus, "Zu Ibn al-Muqaffa'" (above, n. 47), pp. 15, 19.

<sup>51</sup> 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<sup>52</sup> 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.<sup>53</sup>

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 Anūshirwān 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.<sup>54</sup> But this does not mean that he converted to Christianity, or that he could have afforded to convert.<sup>55</sup> 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.<sup>56</sup> Moreover, Anūshirwān 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's 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.

---

<sup>52</sup> 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.

<sup>53</sup> 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.

<sup>54</sup> *Histoire Nestorienne (Chronique de Séert)*, in *PO*, Vol. VII, fascicle 2, p. 147.

<sup>55</sup> 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.

<sup>56</sup> 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<sup>57</sup> 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.<sup>58</sup>

### Preface

To Anushirwān (the Immortal),<sup>59</sup> 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"<sup>60</sup> 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".<sup>61</sup> 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,

---

<sup>57</sup> 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).

<sup>58</sup> 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.

<sup>59</sup> I thank Matthias Perkams for explaining the name to me.

<sup>60</sup> Proverbs of Solomon 8.19.

<sup>61</sup> 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*).<sup>62</sup> 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).<sup>63</sup> 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>)<sup>64</sup>, 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<sup>65</sup> 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*),<sup>66</sup> a view through which and from which philosophers have discovered philosophy, which is understanding (*scientia*) of [B]: (everything as it <really> is).

<sup>62</sup> Also in Philoponus.

<sup>63</sup> Epistle 1 of Paul to the Corinthians, 13:12. Also in Philoponus.

<sup>64</sup> Sebastian Brock tells me there is a probable corruption in the Syriac. Angels are also cited in this context by Philoponus.

<sup>65</sup> I take this expression, more vivid than Land's, from Salam Rassi.

<sup>66</sup> 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*),<sup>67</sup> 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”.<sup>68</sup> 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,<sup>69</sup> 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.<sup>70</sup> For God knows (*cognoscere*) and acts and philosophers also in the image of God, have knowledge and act in their own diminished way.

---

<sup>67</sup> Salam Rassi pointed out to me *ousia*, as well as *theôria*, as Syriac uses of loan words from Greek.

<sup>68</sup> 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  $\tau\acute{\iota} \ \acute{\epsilon}\sigma\tau\epsilon\iota$ ) of men and horses, which explains the next point that it is not concerned with the number of humans or horses.

<sup>69</sup> 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  $\text{o}\acute{\upsilon}\sigma\acute{\iota}\alpha$ , p. 3.25ff.)

<sup>70</sup> A phrase applied to justice by Plat., *Theaet.* 176 B 1.



# *“L’espressione ‘apoteosi’ suona male alle orecchie dei musulmani” Al-Bīrūnī tra falsafa e comparazione religiosa*

Andrea Pintimalli

## *Abstract*

This article is devoted to the third chapter of the *Tahqīq mā li-l-Hind* by Abū Rayḥān al-Bīrūnī (973-1048) from the viewpoint of his vision of the history of religions and their relationship with the issue of human languages. The opinions held by the inhabitants of the Hind about the *intelligibilia* and *sensibilia* form the focus of the chapter, and as an introduction to these opinions al-Bīrūnī embarks on a complex series of comparisons involving texts and concepts of the classical Greece, the sufi tradition, as well as of the Hebrew, Christian, and Manichean doctrines. Such comparisons attest not only al-Bīrūnī’s linguistic skills and broad knowledge of multifarious religious traditions, but also his endeavour to include elements of the Sanscrit heritage in the intellectual context of the Islam of his age.

## *1. Il metodo comparativo di al-Bīrūnī*

Abū l-Rayḥān Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad al-Bīrūnī nacque nel 973 in Ḥwārizm e morì presumibilmente nel 1048<sup>1</sup> a Ġazna. Benché non abbia fatto parte di una particolare scuola filosofica e per questo, secondo Hossein Nasr,<sup>2</sup> non sia stato considerato dagli autori classici come un *ḥakīm*, egli appartenne al contesto intellettuale della *falsafa* medievale, nel quale si formò e al quale contribuì in modo significativo. I contributi di al-Bīrūnī nel campo delle scienze naturali sono notevoli e sono stati più volte evidenziati, come si dirà di seguito. Quanto ai suoi contributi in campi attinenti alle scienze umane, essi, pur significativi, si prestano a differenti interpretazioni, dal momento che non siamo in possesso di alcun suo testo teorico o filosofico. Questo articolo si concentra sulla sua visione della storia delle religioni in relazione al tema delle differenti lingue umane, ed avanza alcune ipotesi riguardo alla metodologia da lui adottata.

Gotthard Strohmaier, che ha curato nel 2002 un’antologia contenente brani da 8 delle principali opere di al-Bīrūnī e preceduta da una accurata e completa biografia, sostiene che il contributo alle scienze naturali di al-Bīrūnī fosse ben più originale di molte altre opere arabe che furono tradotte nell’Europa medievale.<sup>3</sup> Sulla base dei temi dei suoi lavori, al-Bīrūnī è ricordato come astronomo/astrologo, matematico, storico, letterato e, più recentemente e con un certo anacronismo, come

---

<sup>1</sup> Questa data di morte, seppure frequentemente citata negli studi, non è certa, cf. Y. Karamati - M. Melvin-Koushki, “al-Bīrūnī”, in W. Madelung - F. Daftary (eds.), *Encyclopaedia Islamica*, Brill Online 2016.

<sup>2</sup> H. Nasr, “Al-Bīrūnī as Philosopher”, in M. Noury-Esfandiary - V. Courtois (eds.), *Al-Bīrūnī Commemoration Volume*, Iran Society, Calcutta 1951 (Arabic Collection), pp. 400-6, in part. p. 400.

<sup>3</sup> Al-Bīrūnī, *In den Gärten der Wissenschaft. Ausgewählte Texte aus den Werken des muslimischen Universalgelehrten*, ed. G. Strohmaier, Reclam Verlag, Leipzig 2002, p. 9.

“antropologo”<sup>4</sup> o “storico delle religioni”.<sup>5</sup> George Sarton, padre della moderna storia della scienza su scala globale, definì la prima metà del secolo XI “l’epoca di al-Bīrūnī”.<sup>6</sup> Le sue scoperte nel campo delle scienze naturali vanno dal calcolo pressoché esatto della circonferenza terrestre all’ipotesi della presenza di un continente emerso là dove si trovano appunto le Americhe, dall’ipotesi della rotazione terrestre intorno al sole – da lui ritenuta la piú probabile ma non sufficientemente dimostrabile – fino al calcolo della distanza tra la terra e la luna. Sebbene egli non si sia occupato solo di temi propri delle scienze della natura, ma anche di temi che oggi classificheremmo quali oggetto delle scienze umane (tradizioni religiose, letteratura e descrizioni di altre culture), non ci è giunta, invece, alcuna sua opera di carattere propriamente filosofico. Al-Bīrūnī stesso nella propria bibliografia, da lui compilata, annovera 138 opere che suddivide in 16 categorie, nessuna delle quali direttamente riconducibile alla riflessione filosofica.<sup>7</sup> Jacques Boilot, che nel 1955 ha pubblicato una bibliografia completa delle sue opere, comprendente anche quelle che mancano nella versione dello stesso al-Bīrūnī, propone una classificazione in 7 categorie, una delle quali definita *philosophie*, nella quale include sette titoli.<sup>8</sup> Dei sette testi proposti da Boilot per questa categoria, tutti perduti per noi, cinque sono scritti da altri a suo nome, uno è un testo menzionato dallo stesso al-Bīrūnī in un’altra opera e dedicata agli incantesimi (*‘azā’im*), agli amuleti (*nīran ḡāt*) e ai talismani (*tilasmāt*).<sup>9</sup> Solo uno scritto sembra di argomento filosofico: *Riyādat al-fīkr wa-l-‘aql* (*L’esercizio del pensiero e dell’intelletto*).<sup>10</sup> Così, se rispetto alla produzione bīrūniana nel campo delle scienze della natura conosciamo le sue convinzioni metodologiche, che egli espresse in piú opere e discusse nel noto scambio epistolare con Avicenna,<sup>11</sup> per quanto attiene alle opere che trattano di temi che oggi chiameremmo ‘umanistici’ non abbiamo formulazioni teoriche generali. Ciò lascia spazio a molteplici interpretazioni per alcuni suoi significativi lavori. Tra questi, due in particolare hanno una relazione diretta con la storia delle religioni, ed è proprio a partire da questi che alla fine del XIX sec. è sorto un nuovo interesse per al-Bīrūnī in Europa. Eduard Sachau tradusse due grandi opere: *al-Ātār al-bāqīya ‘an al-qurūn al-hāliya* (*Le vestigia rimanenti dei secoli passati*), pubblicato con il titolo *The Chronology of Ancient Nations*, e il *K. taḥqīq mā li-l-Hind min maqūla maqbūla fī l-‘aql aw marḍūla* (*Rapporto su ciò che dell’India è accettabile dall’intelletto o da rifiutarsi*), pubblicato con il titolo *India*. La prima, *al-Ātār al-bāqīya*, è uno studio dedicato ad 11 sistemi di datazione, che vengono comparati tra loro con il fine pratico di costruire tabelle di conversione delle date da un calendario ad un altro. La seconda, il *Taḥqīq mā li-l-Hind*, è un lavoro imponente, suddiviso in 80 capitoli, riconducibili, grosso modo, a un ambito intermedio tra religione e cultura generale da una parte, ed astronomia dall’altra. Da piú parti è stato sottolineato come il rigore scientifico, che ha fatto di al-Bīrūnī un pioniere nel campo delle scienze naturali, sia

<sup>4</sup> A.S. Akbar, “Al-Beruni, the First Anthropologist”, *RAIN - Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland* 60 (1984), pp. 9-10.

<sup>5</sup> A. Schimmel, *Islam: An Introduction*, SUNY Press, G-Reference, Albany, New York 1992 (Information and Interdisciplinary Subjects Series).

<sup>6</sup> G. Sarton, *Introduction to the History of Science*, Krieger Pub., Huntington, New York 1975, p. 707.

<sup>7</sup> D.J. Boilot, “L’œuvre d’al-Beruni. Essai bibliographique”, *Mélanges de l’Institut dominicain d’études orientales* 2 (1955), pp. 161-256, in part. pp. 254-5.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, *Kitāb al-‘aḡā’ib al-ṭabī‘īyya wa-l-ḡarā’ib al-ṣinā’īyya*, testo n. 153 della bibliografia di Boilot, “L’œuvre d’al-Beruni” (cit. n. 7), p. 229.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, testo n. 170 della bibliografia di Boilot, “L’œuvre d’al-Beruni” (cit. n. 7), p. 237.

<sup>11</sup> Per una panoramica relativa alla metodologia esplicitata da al-Bīrūnī nelle sue opere, si veda M. Kozah, *The Birth of Indology as an Islamic Science. Al-Bīrūnī’s Treatise on Yoga Psychology*, Brill, Leiden - Boston 2016 (Islamic Philosophy Theology and Science, Texts and Studies, 97), pp. 11-32.

rintracciabile anche nelle sue opere nel campo delle scienze umane, come dimostra anche l'approccio descrittivo – non apologetico né polemico – delle sue varie opere sulle tradizioni religiose.<sup>12</sup> Due delle più importanti raccolte di studi su al-Bīrūnī degli ultimi decenni sono state prodotte in occasione di millenari: nel 1951, in occasione dei mille anni dalla nascita secondo il calendario dell'Egira, fu pubblicato *Al-Bīrūnī Commemoration Volume* e, per la stessa ricorrenza secondo il calendario gregoriano, nel 1973 vennero prodotti una serie di studi confluiti nel *Bīrūnī Symposium* del 1976. In entrambe le raccolte troviamo contributi volti a definire il contributo di al-Bīrūnī alla comparazione tra religioni. Nel volume del 1951 Arthur Jeffery pubblica "Al-Bīrūnī's Contribution to Comparative Religion", un elenco dei contributi alla disciplina ricavabili da *The Chronology of Ancient Nations* e da *India* soprattutto in termini di testimonianza storica. Nel *Bīrūnī Symposium* del 1976 compare lo studio di Bruce B. Lawrence "Al-Bīrūnī's Approach to the Comparative Study of Indian Culture", che fornisce una valutazione complessiva dell'opera di al-Bīrūnī: ne individua caratteri salienti, delinea la struttura, i principi organizzativi e di analisi, ed infine ne elenca i maggiori meriti e limiti. Secondo Lawrence, alla base dell'approccio comparativo di al-Bīrūnī sta il principio generale di unicità di ogni elevata civilizzazione umana.<sup>13</sup> Inoltre, Lawrence sottolinea "la sua passione per il contare", riguardo alla quale cita un passo di apertura del capitolo 15 di *India* che evidenzia molto chiaramente il valore epistemologico attribuito a questa capacità dell'intelletto:

التعديد منطبع في الإنسان والشيء يصير معلوم المقدار إذا أضيف إلى الذي يسمى من جنسه  
واحدًا بالوضع وبذلك<sup>14</sup> يصير فضل ما بينه وبين آخر يجانسه معلومًا

Counting is innate to man. The measure of a thing becomes knowable in comparison with another thing which belongs to the same species and is assumed as a unit by general consent (trad. Sachau).<sup>15</sup>

Ciò che Lawrence chiama "passione per il contare" si riferisce alla catalogazione, così frequente nelle opere di al-Bīrūnī. Molti dei suoi testi hanno la forma di elenchi e anche quando tratta della cultura dello Hind si ha l'impressione che egli fornisca elenchi dei suoi elementi costitutivi. Sempre secondo Lawrence, è proprio questo approccio alla catalogazione che determina in al-Bīrūnī la scelta dei testi filosofici sanscriti di riferimento, come il *Sāmkhya*, caratterizzato appunto da una cosmologia descritta per cataloghi di elementi primari e secondari del creato, come si vedrà anche più avanti a proposito dei 25 *tattvas*. Infine, secondo Lawrence, è sempre questa predilezione per la catalogazione che potrebbe aver precluso ad al-Bīrūnī l'elaborazione di concezioni di più ampio respiro, concezioni universalistiche che balenano a volte, come quando nel cap. 9 di *India* troviamo l'affermazione secondo cui una particolare casta o credo non rappresenta automaticamente né un veicolo, né una barriera per la liberazione.

Nel 1981 Wilhelm Halbfass dedica quasi un intero capitolo del suo *India and Europe* alla figura di al-Bīrūnī nel quadro degli studi indologici. Halbfass sintetizza le sue considerazioni sull'opera di al-Bīrūnī sull'India affermando che il testo di basa su uno studio sistematico delle fonti e su una

<sup>12</sup> Cf. B.B. Lawrence, "Al-Bīrūnī's Approach to the Comparative Study of Indian Culture", in E. Yarshater - D. Bishop (eds.), *Al-Bīrūnī Symposium*, Iran Center - Columbia U.P., New York 1976 (Persian Studies, 7), pp. 13-32.

<sup>13</sup> *Alberuni's India. An Account of the Religion, Philosophy, Literature, Chronology, Astronomy, Customs, Laws and Astrology of India about A.D. 1030*, ed. E. Sachau, Vol. I-II, Kegan Paul, Rench, Trübner & Co. Ltd, London 1910 (Trübner's Oriental Series, 1<sup>st</sup> ed. 1887), Reprint of the Edition London 1887, Institute for the History of Arabic-Islamic Science at the Johann Wolfgang Goethe University Frankfurt am Main 1993 (Islamic Geography), Vol. I, p. 13.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 76.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. *Alberuni's India* (cit. n. 13), p. 160, trad. Sachau.

fondamentale consapevolezza delle difficoltà ermeneutiche che il compito che si è prefisso presenta. Secondo Halbfass, l'opera riflette lo spirito e gli orizzonti di una specifica religione, ma non per questo manca di obiettività, né si tratta di un'operazione con intenti missionari o sincretistici.<sup>16</sup> Anche in questo studio si incontra una comparazione più o meno diretta con standard scientifici moderni, fatto che tende a formare l'immagine di un al-Bīrūnī come figura *sui generis*, estranea al proprio contesto culturale.

Altri studi riguardano singole opere o aspetti specifici del lavoro di al-Bīrūnī, dedicati ad esempio alla sua conoscenza del sanscrito e dei testi delle tradizioni religiose del sub-continente indiano. Si tratta di studi di impostazione fondamentalmente storico-testuale, come quello di Arvind Sharma, *Studies on Al-Bīrūnī's India* (1983), che indaga le fonti sanscrite citate da al-Bīrūnī. Altre opere, volte ad esaminare gli aspetti più concettuali delle opere di al-Bīrūnī come *An Introduction to Islamic Cosmological Doctrines* di Seyyed Hossein Nasr,<sup>17</sup> al contrario, non affrontano il tema della comparazione con altre tradizioni religiose.

Come si è visto fin qui, la produzione di al-Bīrūnī è vasta e la letteratura secondaria che lo riguarda ricca, la quantità dei temi di cui si è occupato, notevole; eppure la sua figura rimane per diversi aspetti un mistero. Il tentativo di inquadrare la figura di al-Bīrūnī attraverso la sua appartenenza confessionale risulta inefficace. Al-Bīrūnī si descrive genericamente come cercatore della verità, *al-ḥaqq*, e da essa guidato. Molte delle sue affermazioni sembrano indicare un approccio alla tradizione religiosa razionale e sfumato,<sup>18</sup> capace di leggere in modo simbolico il dettato coranico, come nel caso in cui discute della possibilità che esistano o meno creature invisibili, riporta affermazioni secondo le quali per il credente sincero non è una necessità assoluta volgersi verso la *qibla* nella preghiera, o come quando afferma che potrebbero esserci stati tanti 'Adamo' ed 'Eva' quante razze umane.<sup>19</sup> Al-Bīrūnī mostra inusuale flessibilità nel trattare di altre tradizioni religiose, cita il Vangelo quale fonte autorevole,<sup>20</sup> mostra ammirazione per diversi passaggi della *Bhagavad Gita*. C'è stato perciò chi, come Franz Rosenthal, ha voluto leggere nel suo lavoro il credo in una unità originaria di tutte le civiltà superiori,<sup>21</sup> e chi come Hossein Nasr ha letto nell'apertura mentale di al-Bīrūnī la sua adesione alla "tradizione esoterica".<sup>22</sup> Così Kozah, nel suo studio su al-Bīrūnī e la "psicologia dello yoga", dopo

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.* p. 28.

<sup>17</sup> S.H. Nasr, *Introduction to Islamic Cosmological Doctrines*, Thames and Hudson, Rev. Ed., London 1978, pp. 105-74.

<sup>18</sup> L'atteggiamento razionalista di al-Bīrūnī verso le dottrine religiose e il suo interesse per il pensiero di al-Rāzī, alla correzione di alcuni errori del quale dedicò un trattato e di cui redasse la bibliografia, hanno portato diversi studiosi ad accostare i due pensatori, ma non è ancora stato condotto uno studio comparativo sistematico tra le loro opere. Al-Bīrūnī, redigendo la bibliografia di al-Rāzī, *Fi fihrist kutub Muḥammad ibn Zakariyyā al-Rāzī* (Al-Bīrūnī, *Épître de Beruni contenant le répertoire des ouvrages de Muhammad ibn Zakariya al-Razi*, ed. P. Kraus, Impr. Orientaliste au Calam, Paris 1936) vi aggiunse anche la propria in appendice. Nell'opera al-Bīrūnī loda al-Rāzī, ma ne critica anche aspramente la miscela di dottrine manichee e islamiche (p. 4).

<sup>19</sup> A. Jeffery, "Al-Biruni's Contribution to Comparative Religion", in *Al-Bīrūnī Commemoration Volume*, Iran Society, Princeton U. P., Arabic Collection, Calcutta 1951, pp. 125-60.

<sup>20</sup> Un'attitudine affine si trova nelle *Epistole* degli Iḥwān al-Ṣafā', che citano frequentemente Torah e Vangelo. Cf. G. de Callatāy, *Ikhwan al-Safā'. A Brotherhood of Idealists on the Fringe of Orthodox Islam*, Oneworld Publications, Makers of the Muslim World, Oxford 2005). L'ipotesi che le *Epistole* possano essere tra le fonti di al-Bīrūnī non risulta ad oggi indagata; anzi Nasr, *Introduction to Islamic Cosmological Doctrines* (cit. n. 17) segnala numerose differenze tra le dottrine cosmologiche delle *Epistole* e quelle di al-Bīrūnī (cf. ad es. p. 107).

<sup>21</sup> F. Rosenthal, "Al-Biruni between Greece and India", in E. Yarshater - D. Bishop (eds.), *Al-Bīrūnī Symposium*, Iran Center - Columbia U.P., New York 1976 (Persian Studies, 7), pp. 1-12.

<sup>22</sup> Nasr, "Al-Bīrūnī as Philosopher" (cit. n. 2), pp. 400-6.

un'accurata analisi suggerisce un atteggiamento quasi mistico: al-Bīrūnī avrebbe visto nelle possibilità dell'unione con Dio il grande scopo della conoscenza, ma non si può non notare che Lawrence ha dimostrato come la conoscenza del misticismo sufi di al-Bīrūnī fosse piuttosto scarsa, costruita su pochi riferimenti.<sup>23</sup>

In definitiva, non troviamo nella letteratura scientifica su al-Bīrūnī fin qui prodotta un'analisi dell'approccio filosofico con cui al-Bīrūnī affronta la comparazione e la traduzione tra lingue e concezioni differenti. Una simile analisi va condotta nel quadro degli sviluppi della filosofia islamica medievale, che fornisce ad al-Bīrūnī gli strumenti concettuali con i quali operare.

## 2. *Il caso del terzo capitolo del Tahqīq mā li-l-Hind*

Un brano di al-Bīrūnī ne esemplifica il metodo comparativo e gli strumenti epistemologici che egli utilizza nell'analisi del pensiero dello Hind. Si tratta del terzo capitolo del *Tahqīq mā li-l-Hind min maqūla maqbūla fī l-'aql aw marḍūla*, dal titolo *fī dīkr i'tiqādihim fī l-mawḡūdāt al-'aqliyya wa-l-hissiyya* ("A proposito delle loro credenze riguardo le realtà intelligibili e sensibili").<sup>24</sup> In questo capitolo al-Bīrūnī compara elementi delle tradizioni greca antica, sufi, ebraica, manichea, cristiana e del subcontinente indiano e offre un articolato quadro di confronti e connessioni. Il capitolo inizia creando un'associazione concettuale tra antica Grecia e sufismo, cita fonti greche con lo scopo di giustificare gli aspetti politeistici di quei testi sanscriti agli occhi dei lettori musulmani; quindi la comparazione è attuata su usi cristiani ed un testo manicheo, per giungere infine a presentare parte del pensiero cosmologico della scuola *Sāmkhya*,<sup>25</sup> in particolare i 25 *tattva*, gli elementi costitutivi della creazione secondo quel sistema di pensiero. Il capitolo si chiude con una citazione dal sapore decisamente pluralistico, che potrebbe addirittura configurare un'apertura ad un dialogo interreligioso.

## 3. *L'opera sullo Hind di al-Bīrūnī nel contesto della falsafa*

Innanzitutto, ci si potrebbe domandare perché un capitolo dedicato a *sensibilia* (*hissiyya*) e *intelligibilia* (*'aqliyya*) presenti per la maggior parte del testo comparazioni relative al politeismo e all'idolatria. Per comprendere l'approccio di al-Bīrūnī occorre considerare il contesto culturale prodotto dalla *falsafa* nella quale egli si muove ed il pubblico a cui si rivolge. L'apertura del capitolo qui analizzato riguarda il principio di unità di tutto il creato, idea attribuita da al-Bīrūnī ai piú antichi saggi della Grecia, così come ai sufi e ai saggi dello Hind. Al-Bīrūnī è interessato a dimostrare che è possibile inserire nel contesto filosofico islamico elementi del pensiero dello Hind, così come era stato fatto per quello greco, e possiamo ipotizzare che egli avesse in mente il lavoro del "filosofo degli arabi", al-Kindī (m. 870 ca.), il primo ad aver reso disponibili alla cultura di lingua araba elementi ampi e importanti del pensiero filosofico greco. Nel contesto culturale in cui si iscrive l'opera di al-Kindī è infatti già presente una storiografia appositamente elaborata per giustificare l'utilizzo della filosofia greca all'interno del discorso islamico. Il testo di riferimento al riguardo per al-Kindī è la

<sup>23</sup> B. Lawrence, "Al-Bīrūnī and Islamic Mysticism", in Noury-Esfandiary - Courtois (eds.), *Al-Bīrūnī Commemoration Volume* (cit. *supra*, n. 2), pp. 362-79.

<sup>24</sup> E. Sachau traduce: "on the Hindu belief as to created things, both 'intelligibilia' and 'sensibilia'", Cf. *Alberuni's India* (cit. n. 13), p. 33.

<sup>25</sup> Tra i piú antichi sistemi filosofici del sub-continente indiano, è il pensiero di riferimento dei *Purāna*. Al-Bīrūnī aveva tradotto in arabo il testo fondativo di questa scuola di pensiero, il *Sāmkhyakārikā*, traduzione oggi perduta, di cui restano solo le citazioni che egli stesso ne fa all'interno del *Tahqīq mā li-l-Hind*.

*Dossografia* dello pseudo-Ammonio,<sup>26</sup> che presenta le scienze non-coraniche come insegnate dalla figura mitologica di Luqmān ai piú antichi filosofi greci, il cui sapere deriva quindi da Dio tanto quanto il Corano. Si tratta di un quadro storico particolarmente importante per la presente analisi, se si considera che al-Bīrūnī piú volte si esprime in favore dell'ipotesi che vi siano stati nell'antichità stretti contatti tra greci e abitanti dello Hind. Il progetto bīrūniano si iscrive nella cornice definita dalla prospettiva di al-Kindī: è possibile operare una distinzione tra la verità rivelata da Dio e la forma – o la lingua – in cui quella verità può esprimersi. Si tratta di una distinzione fondamentale per comprendere i termini della contrapposizione tra logica e grammatica sviluppatasi nel periodo compreso tra III/IX e IV/X secolo, della quale si dirà nel paragrafo 6. L'idea che al-Bīrūnī si proponesse di trasmettere contenuti del pensiero dello Hind all'interno della *falsafa* araba non è nuova: la troviamo già espressa da Franz Rosenthal,<sup>27</sup> secondo il quale nel suo ambiente molti dovettero essere consapevoli di una "sfida indiana". Rosenthal ritiene che egli sia rimasto sorpreso e preoccupato nello scoprire nell'India un rivale della Grecia<sup>28</sup>. Mario Kozah,<sup>29</sup> scrivendo del *Tahqīq mā li-l-Hind*, afferma: "The ultimate aim is to permit a selected Indian corpus and, by extension, the contributions of Indian science to be integrated into the worldview of Mediaeval Arabic philosophy".<sup>30</sup>

Nell'atto di presentare ai suoi lettori musulmani il pensiero dello Hind riguardo ai mondi sensibile e intellegibile, al-Bīrūnī deve fare i conti con quello che appare agli occhi dei suoi correligionari come un "odioso politeismo", ben piú insidioso di quello dei greci, ormai estinto da secoli. Nel terzo capitolo del suo *Tahqīq mā li-l-Hind* egli si serve delle sue competenze linguistiche, dando corpo tecnicamente a quella distinzione tra verità di Dio e forme attraverso le quali viene espressa che aveva costituito la convinzione di fondo dei sostenitori del valore della filosofia greca nel discorso filosofico arabo.

#### 4. Gli aspetti linguistici della comparazione di al-Bīrūnī

Gli studiosi che si sono occupati di al-Bīrūnī hanno spesso notato gli aspetti linguistici dei suoi studi. Senza che si sia mai riusciti a determinare con certezza la portata delle sue conoscenze, è possibile affermare che oltre al persiano, sua lingua madre, e all'arabo, lingua veicolare della cultura islamica, dovette possedere almeno alcune nozioni, se non una piena padronanza, di siriano, greco antico, ebraico e sanscrito. La quantità e varietà di idiomi fa pensare già di per sé che egli dovette aver

<sup>26</sup> Il testo è stato edito, tradotto in tedesco e analizzato da U. Rudolph, *Die Doxographie des pseudo-Ammonios. Ein Beitrag zur neuplatonischen Überlieferung im Islam*, Steiner, Stuttgart 1989 (Abhandlungen für die Kunde des Morgenlandes, 49). Rudolph considera l'opera una compilazione araba, benché basata su un testo greco: la *Refutatio omnium haeresium* di Ippolito di Roma (m. 235). La compilazione si data alla metà del IX secolo sulla base di due elementi: 1) l'affinità tra i contenuti del XXIV capitolo e il pensiero di Abū l-Hudayl e della prima fase della corrente teologica mu'tazilita, 2) la vicinanza tra il vocabolario del testo e quello di al-Kindī.

<sup>27</sup> Rosenthal, "Al-Biruni between Greece and India" (cit. n. 21), pp. 1-12.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 4-5: "We may well assume that at the time of al-Biruni, and in eastern Iran where he was at home, there were many people who were fully conscious of the Indian challenge, and among them there were no doubt quite a few insightful men who in their innermost being felt the tension which is the natural consequence of competing cultural cross-currents and were gravely disturbed by it [...]. It was a deep shock for al-Biruni to discover that in India there existed a rival to Greece. He was probably gradually prepared for that shock from his early years on. His growing familiarity with India made it increasingly more severe and painful to him".

<sup>29</sup> Kozah, *The Birth of Indology* (cit. n. 11), pp. 43-5. Il lavoro di Kozah si concentra soprattutto sulla traduzione interpretativa effettuata da al-Bīrūnī degli *Yoga-Sūtra* di Patañjali con il titolo *Tarğamat kitāb Bātanğal fi l-ḥalās min al-irtibāk* (*Traduzione del libro di Bātanjal riguardo la liberazione dall'aggraviamento*), mettendo in luce anche a proposito di quel testo l'opera di mediazione di al-Bīrūnī.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 43-4.

sviluppato una certa sensibilità linguistica, e questa deve mostrarsi nei suoi studi comparativi delle tradizioni religiose. Difatti il terzo capitolo del *Tahqīq mā li-l-Hind* offre un ricco esempio di analisi comparativa, nella quale abbondano le considerazioni linguistiche.

Si può supporre che all'origine di alcune delle imprese intellettuali più innovative di al-Bīrūnī dovette esserci l'idea di una profonda unità dei saperi prodotti dall'umanità. Se prendiamo in considerazione la sua opera sui calendari, *al-Ātār al-bāqīya 'an al-qurūn al-hāliya* (*Le tracce rimanenti dei secoli passati*), incontriamo un enorme sforzo di raccolta di dati, al fine di metterli in rapporto reciproco inserendoli in un unico quadro di riferimento. In quest'opera al-Bīrūnī tratta di undici sistemi di calendario e produce tavole di conversione tra le diverse date, creando per la prima volta i presupposti per una storia globale dell'umanità.<sup>31</sup>

Se si guarda al *Tahqīq mā li-l-Hind*, con la sua abbondanza di comparazioni tra tradizioni religiose, avremo di nuovo davanti a noi un quadro concettuale entro il quale tutte quelle tradizioni trovano un senso comune: al-Bīrūnī sembra creare anche qui delle "tavole di conversione", ma non per le date, bensì per i concetti. Ogni concetto viene presentato, in parallelo, nella sua forma greca, in quella ebraica, cristiana, manichea, sufi, sanscrita, di modo che il lettore possa operare una conversione dal proprio sistema di riferimenti ad un altro.

Si noterà ancora che l'ultima opera composta da al-Bīrūnī in tarda età era, in qualche modo, di questo stesso tipo. Il *Kitāb al-Ṣaydana* è un'opera di nomenclatura farmaceutica, nella quale sono classificati 1.116 piante farmaceutiche con i loro nomi in diverse lingue, in modo da creare tabelle comparative.

In quanto segue metterò in evidenza come al-Bīrūnī utilizzi categorie linguistiche per effettuare comparazioni tra diverse tradizioni: contenuti del pensiero dello Hind vengono presentati ad un pubblico musulmano, creando un quadro concettuale che possiamo definire storico-religioso.

Fin dall'apertura, questo capitolo inizia con un'osservazione sul termine *ṣūfiyya* ('sufismo'), che egli fa derivare da *ṣūf* come traslitterazione del greco σοφία. Nella derivazione etimologica presentata da al-Bīrūnī si trova quell'identificazione tra filosofia e *ḥikma* ('saggezza') con la quale si tentava forse di accreditare la filosofia greca come prettamente islamica.<sup>32</sup> La prima frase del capitolo è:

<sup>31</sup> È proprio in quest'opera che troviamo argomenti in difesa dell'unicità della razza umana, come quelli citati da Strohmaier nella sua antologia delle opere di al-Bīrūnī, *In den Gärten der Wissenschaft* (cit. n. 3), pp. 104-5, che lo studioso tedesco associa alle idee di Johann G. Herder. Occorre notare, d'altro canto, che mentre nel passo citato da Strohmaier (estratto da J. Fück, "Sechs Ergänzungen zu Sachaus Ausgabe von al-Biruni's Chronologie", *Documenta Islamica Inedita Richard Hartmann Festschrift*, Akademie Verlag, Berlin 1952, pp. 69-98, in part. 74.16-21), al-Bīrūnī sembra affermare che debba esserci stata un'unica coppia primordiale – Adamo ed Eva – per tutta l'umanità, invece nel capitolo VI dell'opera, p. 116 dell'edizione di Sachau del 1887 (cit. n. 14), al-Bīrūnī riporta senza commento l'opinione secondo cui potrebbero esserci stati tanti "Adamo ed Eva" quanti sono i paesi (*buq'a*) e questo sarebbe il motivo all'origine della differenza tra gli esseri umani.

<sup>32</sup> Gerhard Endress nota, a proposito della trasposizione di termini greci in arabo nel primo periodo delle traduzioni greco-arabe, che il termine *falsafa* venne naturalizzato senza essere sostituito da equivalenti arabi proprio per essere distinto dal più generale *ḥikma*: G. Endress, "Platonizing Aristotle: The Concept of 'Spiritual' (*rūḥānī*) as a Keyword of the Neoplatonic Strand in Early Arabic Aristotelianism", *Studia graeco-arabica* 2 (2012), pp. 265-79, in part. 266. A.-M. Goichon nella voce "*Ḥikma*", in P. Bearman - Th. Bianquis - C.E. Bosworth - E. van Donzel - W.P. Heinrichs (eds.), *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., Brill online ed. 2012, afferma che il termine sia traducibile come "wisdom, but also science and philosophy. The ancient usage of the word lent itself to this evolution, which was favoured by the meaning of the Greek σοφία", ma giunge alla conclusione: "*Ḥikma* appears as a lofty spiritual conception of the world, penetrating all knowledge within the grasp of man, and even attaining to faith in God in revelation. It goes beyond *falsafa*, which denotes only Hellenistic philosophy". In Avicenna, contemporaneo conterraneo e rivale di al-Bīrūnī, troviamo la sovrapposizione tra i termini *falsafa* e *ḥikma*, ad esempio nella *Risāla fī aqṣām al-'ulūm al-'aqliyya*, Ibn Sina, *Tiṣ' rasā'il fī l-ḥikma wa-l-ṭabī'iyyāt*, ed. H. 'Aṣī,

إن قدماء اليونانيين قبل نجوم الحكمة<sup>33</sup>

Before philosophy rose high among the Greeks (trad. Sachau, modif.)<sup>34</sup>

Che in questo passo *ḥikma* si riferisca alla filosofia è chiarito dal fatto che al-Bīrūnī la richiami poche righe dopo, questa volta con il termine *falsafa*. Al-Bīrūnī afferma che la filosofia fu sviluppata in Grecia dai “saggi” (*ḥukamā*) che ritenevano che tutte le cose fossero una; inoltre, che i sufi siano nell’Islam quei saggi che, avendo aderito a dottrine simili a quelle dei filosofi greci, hanno adottato un nome affine al loro.<sup>35</sup> I greci rappresentano, nella scrittura di al-Bīrūnī, il primo elemento che egli introduce per poi accostarlo alle altre tradizioni o culture, utilizzandolo in questo senso come elemento mediatore per i lettori musulmani rispetto ad altre tradizioni – fatto che ci fornisce un’indicazione del pubblico cui egli si rivolge: un pubblico colto, che conosce la *falsafa* sviluppata in quel periodo, e forse composto anche dall’élite amministrativa della corte gāznavide alle prese con la gestione dei territori del subcontinente indiano di recente conquista.<sup>36</sup> Così l’argomentazione presentata in questo capitolo del *Taḥqīq mā li-l-Hind*, dopo aver proposto un accostamento concettuale diretto tra elaborazioni greche e mondo islamico rappresentato dai sufi, sottolinea come il punto di contatto tra queste due linee di pensiero sia proprio il riconoscere un principio unico trascendente, concezione che si trova tanto nel pensiero filosofico greco quanto in quello mistico islamico. Secondo al-Bīrūnī sarebbe giunto a quest’ultimo dal primo, sebbene egli non si preoccupi di menzionare particolari fonti a cui i sufi avrebbero attinto.<sup>37</sup> Al-Bīrūnī, inoltre, anticipa qui una connessione con i testi sanscriti di cui si occuperà più avanti nel capitolo, a proposito del subcontinente indiano, affermando come sia in quei testi, sia presso i greci che presso i sufi si ritrova l’idea per cui è possibile liberarsi da legami e ostacoli terreni, unendosi direttamente con il principio primo.<sup>38</sup>

---

Dār Qābis, Damasco 1986, pp. 225-43. Shahab Ahmed sostiene che il termine *ḥikma* abbia gradualmente sostituito *falsafa* e riporta un passo di Avicenna da *al-Šifā*, 3 in cui la *ḥikma* viene definita come “vera filosofia”, *falsafa bi-l-ḥaqīqa* (*What is Islam? The Importance of Being Islamic*, Princeton U.P., Princeton - Oxford 2016, pp. 15-6). Mathieu Terrier nota a proposito dei filosofi šīiti Mīr Dāmād, Mullā Šadrā e Quṭb al-Dīn Aškevarī, che tutti e tre si riferiscono alla filosofia di Pitagora, Empedocle, Socrate, Platone, Aristotele e Diogene come *ḥikma*: M. Terrier, “La représentation de la sagesse grecque comme discours et mode de vie chez les philosophes šīites de l’Iran safavide (XI<sup>e</sup>/XVII<sup>e</sup> siècle)”, *Studia graeco-arabica* 5 (2015), pp. 299-320.

<sup>33</sup> Cf. *Alberuni’s India* (cit. n. 14), p. 14 ed. E. Sachau.

<sup>34</sup> Cf. *Alberuni’s India* (cit. n. 13), Vol. I, p. 33, trad. Sachau.

<sup>35</sup> Si noterà allora che al-Bīrūnī scrive *sūfiyya*, con iniziale *sīn* e non *šād*: infatti secondo lo studioso questa seconda pronuncia sarebbe derivata da un’interpretazione errata della prima (Cf. *Alberuni’s India* [cit. n. 14], p. 33 Sachau).

<sup>36</sup> Secondo quanto affermato da al-Bīrūnī nell’introduzione del *Taḥqīq mā li-l-Hind*, l’opera è composta su richiesta di Abū Sahl Tiffīsi, il quale sarebbe stato un alto funzionario (Cf. *Alberuni’s India* [cit. n. 13], Vol. I, p. 7 trad. Sachau), che avrebbe invitato l’autore a scrivere per coloro che vogliono discutere con gli abitanti dello Hind [Sachau glossa “a proposito di religious questions”] e per quelli che vogliono averci a che fare”, (لمن أراد مناقضتهم ولمن رام مخالطتهم). Cf. *Alberuni’s India* (cit. n. 14), p. 4.10 Sachau.

<sup>37</sup> وكذلك ذهبوا إلى أن الموجود شيء واحد وإن العلة الأولى تترايا فيه بصور مختلفة وتحل قوتها في ابعاضه بأحوال متباينة و كذا cf. *Alberuni’s India* (cit. n. 14), p. 16.11-12 ed. Sachau.

<sup>38</sup> Quando al-Bīrūnī scrive il *Taḥqīq mā li-l-Hind*, ha effettuato una traduzione interpretativa dal sanscrito in arabo degli *Yoga-Sūtra* di Patañjali, intitolando l’opera *Tarḡamat kitāb Bātanḡal fi-l-ḥalāṣ min al-irtibāk* (v. sopra, n. 29). Patañjali, vissuto presumibilmente in un periodo imprecisato tra il II sec. a.C. e il V d.C., è il nome cui sono attribuiti due grandi classici della letteratura sanscrita, gli *Yoga-Sūtra* appunto, e il *Mahabāṣya*, il “Grande commentario” agli scritti del grammatico Pāṇini. Secondo Mario Kozah, al-Bīrūnī fa riferimento agli *Yoga-Sūtra* di Patañjali come il “Libro Sacro” degli hindu (Kozah, *The Birth of Indology* [cit. n. 11], pp. 1-2). Inoltre, l’idea di una possibile liberazione dell’intelletto dai legami sensibili per unirsi al divino è presente, com’è noto, in modo

L'argomentazione di al-Bīrūnī, quindi, prosegue presentando una spiegazione tipicamente evemeristica dell'origine del politeismo presso i greci, secondo la quale questi ultimi ritenevano che anime e spiriti (*anfus, arwāḥ*) preesistessero all'incarnazione e potessero guadagnare, grazie alle azioni compiute assieme ai corpi utilizzati durante la vita terrena, la facoltà di governare gli andamenti del mondo (*al-iqtidār 'alā taṣārīf al-'ālam*), e che pertanto furono chiamati 'dei' (*āliha*) a cui dedicare altari (*hayākil*) ed offrire sacrifici (*qarābīn*). Quindi al-Bīrūnī cita, secondo la sua prassi,<sup>39</sup> dalle fonti greche tradotte in arabo in suo possesso, in questo caso dal *Protreptico* di Galeno: secondo questa fonte, Asclepio e Dioniso furono deificati (*ta'allaha*) in virtù delle loro scoperte tecniche, il primo la medicina, il secondo la coltivazione dei vigneti.<sup>40</sup> Come si vedrà di seguito, la differenza tra politeismo e monoteismo viene ricondotta in gran parte ad un problema terminologico. Nel fare ciò, al-Bīrūnī riprende in parte i termini delle dispute tra grammatici e logici, all'interno di un nuovo quadro concettuale: quello di una comparazione tra religioni.

### 5. Il politeismo come problema terminologico

Nel capitolo che stiamo esaminando, dopo il passo del *Protreptico* sopra menzionato, al-Bīrūnī utilizza abilmente un autorevole passo che egli dichiara essere tratto dal *Timeo* di Platone, sebbene, come indicato da Rüdiger Arnzen, non sia facile capire quale testo egli abbia avuto effettivamente a disposizione.<sup>41</sup> La prima citazione, introdotta dalla frase "Platone dice nel *Timeo*<sup>42</sup>", si apre con: "Gli dei (*ṭay*), che i barbari (*ḥunafā*) chiamano dei poiché non muoiono, mentre chiamano Iddio (*āllāh*) il primo dio, sono gli angeli".<sup>43</sup> La frase non si trova identica nell'epitome di Galeno in arabo per come noi la conosciamo,<sup>44</sup> ma può darsi non si tratti di una citazione letterale, bensì di una

---

generalizzato nelle opere della *falsafa* come eredità del pensiero platonico ed aristotelico rielaborato attraverso le formulazioni neoplatoniche.

<sup>39</sup> Kozah, *The Birth of Indology* (cit. n. 11), p. 30: "It is significant that save for the tenth-century Ismā'īlī author, Abū Ya'qūb al-Sijistānī, no other author writing in Arabic is mentioned in the Hind, despite the vast wealth of information about Greek philosophy contained in the works of al-Bīrūnī's contemporaries such as Abū Sulaymān al-Sijistānī (d. 1000), Ibn Hindū (d. 1030), Miskawayh (d. 1030) and many others".

<sup>40</sup> Cf. *Alberuni's India* (cit. n. 14), pp. 16-17 ed. Sachau.

<sup>41</sup> R. Arnzen ha fornito ad oggi la piú dettagliata analisi della circolazione del testo di Platone in arabo, cercando di districare l'intreccio di citazioni, traduzioni, sintesi e varianti nel suo "Plato's *Timaeus* in the Arabic Tradition. Legends – Testimonies – Fragments", in F. Celia - A. Ulacco (eds.), *Il Timeo. Egesesi greche, arabe, latine*, Pisa U.P., Pisa 2012 (Greco, Arabo, Latino. Le vie del sapere. Studi, 2), pp. 181-267. Secondo Arnzen occorre considerare 8 versioni e titoli del *Timeo* in arabo, due delle quali sarebbero in effetti traduzioni dell'epitome di Galeno chiamate anche "*Timeo medico*" e "*Timeo sulle scienze naturali*" (pp. 199-200). Quanto alle citazioni presenti nel *Tahqīq mā li-l-Hind*, Arnzen ritiene si tratti di parafrasi interpretative (p. 190), tratte da piú versioni diverse del *Timeo* (p. 227), sebbene il passo qui di seguito citato (n. 46), non sia comparato con la sezione designata [c] di *Tim.* 41 A 5 –B 5 nella tabella di p. 226. Arnzen cita Badawī, che aveva raccolto un passo piú ampio del capitolo 3 del *Tahqīq mā li-l-Hind*, inclusivo anche della citazione qui riportata, associandola però in modo meno preciso a *Tim.* 41 A: cf. 'A. Badawī, *Aflātūn fi-l-Islām. Nuṣūṣ ḥaḡaḡabā wa-'allaḡa 'alyahā*, Mu'assasa-i muṭāla'āt-i islāmī-yi dāniṣḡāh-i McGill, Tīhrān 1353/1974 (Silsila-i dāniṣ-i irānī, 13), p. 132. Anche C.J. Larrain, citato da Arnzen nell'articolo sopra menzionato, nel suo "Ein unbekanntes Exzerpt aus Galens *Timaioskommentar*: Γαλήνου περὶ τῶν ἐν τῷ Πλάτωνος Τιμαίῳ ἱατρικῶς εἰρημένων. ὑπόμνημα πρῶτον καὶ δεύτερον", *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik* 85 (1991), pp. 9-30, sembra prendere in considerazione esclusivamente la citazione del capitolo 32 del *Tahqīq mā li-l-Hind*, che già Badawī aveva associato a *Tim.* 42 D 5, mentre non menziona la citazione del *Timeo* contenuta nel capitolo 3 del *Tahqīq mā li-l-Hind* qui riportata nella nota 46.

<sup>42</sup> وقال افطن في طيماسوس cf. *Alberuni's India* (cit. n. 14), p. 17.6 Sachau.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.* p. 17.6-7.

<sup>44</sup> Non nell'edizione pubblicata nel Galeni *Compendium Timaei Platonis*, P. Kraus - R. Walzer (eds.), *Plato Arabus*,

parafrasi. Proprio per questo, risultano particolarmente interessanti le scelte terminologiche, che potrebbero essere state effettuate da al-Bīrūnī per un fine specifico. Innanzitutto, la scelta del termine *ḥunafā'* (che Sachau traduce “Barbarians”) per riferirsi a persone che credono in una molteplicità di dei, produce l'effetto di accostare dei “politeisti” a coloro che erano monoteisti già prima della rivelazione islamica, il primo *ḥanīf*, infatti, è Abramo. Allo stesso tempo, ricondurre l'attribuzione del nome di “dei” agli angeli fa sí che possa essere giustificata agli occhi dei musulmani la credenza in esseri sovraumani senza che tale credenza confligga con i pilastri della fede islamica nel Dio unico. A differenziare “politeisti” e credenti in unico Dio sarebbe un aspetto sostanzialmente terminologico, dal momento che i primi semplicemente chiamano con un diverso nome quegli angeli in cui anche i musulmani credono. Anche nel seguente caso al-Bīrūnī potrebbe stare parafrasando:

Iddio (*āllāh*) disse agli dei (*āliha*): non siete in voi stessi esenti dalla corruzione per origine (*aṣlan*), ma non sarà la morte a corrompervi, avete ottenuto nel tempo in cui vi creai il contratto piú sicuro.<sup>45</sup>

Si confronti ora il passo con il corrispondente nell'*Epitome del Timeo* ad opera di Galeno edita nel *Plato Arabus*.<sup>46</sup>

Iddio l'Altissimo disse agli angeli (*malā'ika*) parlando in generale (*qawlan 'āmmiyyan*) che essi erano creati (*mukawwanīn*) pertanto non incorruttibili se non per il fatto che per sua volontà e provvidenza (*ināya*) non si sarebbero corrotti in un certo tempo (*fi waqtin min al-awqāti*).<sup>47</sup>

Seppure, come detto piú sopra, non possiamo essere sicuri che si tratti di effettive citazioni dirette del testo, l'utilizzo del termine dei/*āliha* al posto di angeli/*malā'ika*, risulta rilevante. E al-Bīrūnī ribadisce ulteriormente l'idea in modo inequivocabile con un'ultima citazione: “Dio è singolare per numero e non vi sono dei al plurale”.<sup>48</sup>

A questo punto, al-Bīrūnī ha preparato il terreno per affermare che i Greci chiamavano “dio (*ilāh*) qualsiasi cosa fosse glorioso e nobile e cosí fanno molti altri popoli”.<sup>49</sup> Dopo ulteriori citazioni di Giovanni Filopono e Galeno, al-Bīrūnī ci offre il cuore delle riflessioni linguistiche presenti nelle analisi comparative del capitolo:

Ma vi sono espressioni (*alfāz*) che sono riprovevoli in un *dīn* e non in un altro, come pure una lingua le permette e un'altra le rigetta, e tra queste la parola *ta'allub* nel *dīn* dell'Islam: difatti se consideriamo la lingua degli arabi troviamo che tutti i nomi con i quali viene chiamato il Vero Assoluto (*al-ḥaqq al-mahḍ*), vengono indirizzati anche verso altri, eccetto che per il nome “Allah”, il quale gli si addice esclusivamente, per cui viene detto essere il suo nome supremo.<sup>50</sup>

---

Warburg Institute, London 1951 (Corpus Platonicum Medii Aevi, 1). Tale edizione riporta il titolo *Kitāb Ṭimāwus fi l-ilm al-ṭabī'yy* (“*Timeo sulle scienze naturali*”), tradotto da Ḥunayn ibn Ishāq. Benché sia noto che al-Bīrūnī utilizzò piú versioni del *Timeo*, come mostra il fatto che egli stesso si riferisca al testo anche come “*Timeo medico*” (cf. sopra, n. 41), nessuna di quelle da lui citate sembra corrispondere al testo “sulle scienze naturali” edito da Kraus e Walzer.

<sup>45</sup> إن الله قال للآلهة انكم لستم في انفسكم غير قابلين للفساد أصلاً وإنما لن تفسدوا بموت انكم نلتهم من مشيئتي وقت احدائى لكم أوثق عقد

<sup>46</sup> Cf. n. 44.

<sup>47</sup> إن الله تعالى قال للملائكة قولاً عاماً إنهم إذا كانوا مكونين فليس هم غير فاسدين إلا أنهم لا يفسدون في وقت من الأوقات بمشيئته وعنايته بهم Galen., *Compendium Timaei, Pars Arabica*, p. 9, VI, a.3-5.

<sup>48</sup> الله بالعدد الفرد ولا آلهة بالعدد الكثير cf. *Alberuni's India* (cit. n. 14), p. 17.9 Sachau.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 17.10-11.

<sup>50</sup> ولكن من الألفاظ ما يسمح في دين دون دين ويسمح به لغة وتأباه أخرى ومنها لفظة التآله في دين الإسلام فإن إذا اعتبرناها

Se si considera il primo passo, “ma vi sono espressioni che sono riprovevoli in un *dīn* e non in un altro, come pure una lingua le permette e un'altra le rigetta”, sembra che al-Bīrūnī differenzi le categorie di *dīn* (“religione”) e *luġa* (“lingua”); ma la frase successiva introduce una relazione vincolata tra Islam e “lingua degli arabi”. Al-Bīrūnī chiarisce che il problema con *ta'allub* (“apoteosi”) è un problema di ordine linguistico, dovuto al fatto che la parola deriva dalla stessa radice di *Allāh*, nome esclusivo per il Dio unico. Per sostenere questo punto di vista propone una comparazione innanzitutto con altre due lingue semitiche utilizzate in testi rivelati precedenti al Corano: siriano ed ebraico.<sup>51</sup> Nel rintracciare esempi “dalla Torà e dai numerosi testi successivi dei profeti”, al-Bīrūnī dimostra come le prerogative del termine arabo *Allāh* non si applichino, nel caso dell'ebraico, al termine *ulūhīm* (“Elohim”), apparentemente piú vicino, ma al termine *al-rabb* (“il signore”). Secondo al-Bīrūnī in ebraico a questo termine non può esserne annesso un altro come nel caso di espressioni quali “signore della casa”, come si fa in arabo (*rabb al-bayt*). Difficile individuare a cosa faccia effettivamente riferimento al-Bīrūnī, dal momento che, mentre per l'accostamento *Allāh/ulūhīm* si ha una corrispondenza nella comune radice semitica 'LH, nel caso di *rabb* non è chiaro quale termine ebraico egli stia considerando. In ebraico la parola *rabbī* proviene dalla stessa radice, ma non risulta interdizione al suo utilizzo in costruzione con altri termini. Al-Bīrūnī potrebbe forse riferirsi al termine *Adon(aī)*, ma il divieto da lui menzionato di annettere questo termine ad altri non è noto.

Molto significativa risulta ancora la scelta delle ulteriori citazioni veterotestamentarie operata da al-Bīrūnī, che gli permette di preparare la strada alla successiva comparazione con il cristianesimo. Si tratta di quattro citazioni: una da Genesi, una da Giobbe, una da Esodo e una dai Salmi. La prima citazione è parte di Genesi 6, 4:<sup>52</sup> “i figli di Dio (*ulūhīm*) si univano alle figlie degli uomini”<sup>53</sup> e introduce un'espressione in cui alla divinità vengono attribuiti “figli”. La seconda è da Giobbe 1, 6 ed anche qui troviamo lo stesso tipo di espressione: “i figli di Dio (*ulūhīm*) andarono a presentarsi davanti al Signore e anche Satana andò in mezzo a loro”.<sup>54</sup> Ed ancora da Esodo 7, 1: “Il Signore (*al-rabb*) disse a Mosè: Vedi, io ti ho posto a far le veci di Dio (*ilāh*) per il faraone”,<sup>55</sup> in cui ad un uomo viene attribuito l'epiteto “dio” e, infine, da Salmi 82, 1: “Dio (*Allāh*) si alza nell'assemblea

في لغة العرب وجدنا جميع الأسماء التي سمى بها الحق المحض متجهة على غيره بوجه ما سوى اسم الله فإنه يختص به اختصاصاً في لغة العرب وجدنا جميع الأسماء التي سمى بها الحق المحض متجهة على غيره بوجه ما سوى اسم الله فإنه يختص به اختصاصاً  
<sup>51</sup> *ibid.*, p. 17.20-22.

<sup>51</sup> *ibid.*, p. 18.2.

<sup>52</sup> *Editio minor* CEI, 1974.

<sup>53</sup> Sembra che al-Bīrūnī abbia accesso ad una qualche traduzione araba dei testi sacri dell'ebraismo. Se si comparano queste citazioni veterotestamentarie con quella evangelica nell'introduzione del *Tahqiq mā li-l-Hind*, le prime appaiono molto piú vicine alla lettera del testo ebraico. Stando alla periodizzazione presentata da M. Polliack, “Semantics of Hebrew in Medieval Arabic Bible Translation and Interpretation”, in G. Khan *et al.* (eds.), *Encyclopedia of Hebrew Language and Linguistics (EHL)*, Brill, Leiden - Boston 2013, pp. 1-10, al-Bīrūnī potrebbe essere stato in possesso di una versione precedente alla traduzione di Saadia Gaon (882-942), ma si sarebbe trattato di edizioni in giudeo-arabo non standardizzato. Sembra da escludersi, invece, nonostante la suggestività dell'ipotesi, che al-Bīrūnī avesse accesso al *Tafsīr* di Saadia Gaon, fosse anche nella versione in caratteri arabi per noi perduta, che è menzionata da Ibn Ezra (1093 ca-1167). Il testo delle citazioni di Bīrūnī, infatti, si discosta in modo significativo da quello del *Tafsīr*, almeno nell'edizione parigina del 1893 in nostro possesso, in diverse scelte terminologiche, tra le quali la piú rilevante è certamente quella di rendere il nome dell'unico Dio con “Elohim”, laddove Gaon utilizza il termine arabo *Allāh*, e mostra chiara riluttanza ad utilizzare i nomi ebraici: cf. J. Kearny, “The Torah of Israel in the Tongue of Ishmael: Saadia Gaon and his Arabic Translation of the Pentateuch”, *Proceedings of the Irish Biblical Association* 33-34 (2010-2011), pp. 55-75.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibidem*.

divina (*ġamā'a al-ālibati*)<sup>56</sup> un versetto in cui si trovano insieme il nome del Dio unico e il plurale “dei”. Ancora, al-Bīrūnī aggiunge che nella Torah gli idoli (*al-aṣnām*) sono chiamati “dei stranieri” (*ālība ġurabā*), e ne inferisce che, essendo l'idolatria chiaramente vietata nei testi della rivelazione ebraica, il termine “apoteosi” (*ta'allub*) debba intendersi, alla stessa stregua di *tamalluk*, ovvero “essere nominati re”,<sup>57</sup> utilizzato presso quel popolo per riferirsi agli angeli e alle anime che lo avessero meritato, e quindi, metaforicamente, alle immagini che rappresentano quegli stessi soggetti, ai re e ad altri maggiori.

Le citazioni tratte da Genesi ed Esodo offrono ad al-Bīrūnī l'occasione di trattare dell'uso di termini esprimenti paternità e filiazione applicati alla divinità. L'esempio naturalmente si offre nella tradizione cristiana. Anche in questo caso al-Bīrūnī evidenzia come l'Islam con la sua lingua araba non permetta l'utilizzo di termini come “padre” e “figlio” per indicare la signoria divina (*al-rubūbiyya*), mentre in altre lingue il termine “padre” è pressoché equivalente di “signore”. A proposito dei cristiani, al-Bīrūnī afferma che chi non utilizza i termini di “padre” e “figlio” non viene considerato appartenere alla loro comunità (*milla*). Specifica poi che il termine “figlio” è riferito principalmente a Gesù, come egli stesso ha detto: a supporto di queste affermazioni, al-Bīrūnī cita Matteo 6, 9 e Giovanni 20, 17, specificando che Gesù stesso ha spiegato il senso di questa espressione nella maggior parte dei propri discorsi, dato che si è presentato come “il figlio dell'uomo” (*ibn al-bašar*). Queste espressioni evangeliche vengono poi connesse da al-Bīrūnī al passo veterotestamentario in cui viene detto che Dio consolò Davide dicendogli che avrebbe adottato il suo futuro genito “come figlio” (1Cr. 22, 9-10).

Al-Bīrūnī passa poi ad un parallelo tra cristiani e manichei, attraverso una citazione non commentata tratta dal *Tesoro della vivificazione*, nella quale il futuro “mondo della gioia” vedrà i credenti non più distinti in padri, figli, maschi o femmine, perché dotati di corpi divini.

A questo punto al-Bīrūnī è pronto per presentare le credenze degli abitanti dello Hind. Ha esordito con diversi esempi tratti dalla cultura greca antica; questi gli hanno fornito una base concettuale per mettere in luce come un approccio linguistico possa mostrare che le differenze in materia di credo sono meno marcate di quanto si possa pensare; ha quindi operato una comparazione terminologica con passi della Torah, dei Vangeli e del *Tesoro della vivificazione* di Mani. Grazie a queste comparazioni, ha mostrato la necessità di contestualizzare espressioni che si riferiscano alla divinità in termini plurali o di generazione, poiché nelle stesse tradizioni rivelate dal Dio che i musulmani riconoscono come unico si trovano espressioni che sembrano alludere a forme di idolatria insopportabili per l'Islam: esse però non sono da intendere come tali.

Così al-Bīrūnī introduce le concezioni degli abitanti dello Hind a partire da una netta differenziazione: le élites hanno repulsione per le rappresentazioni antropomorfe, che sono invece care alle masse e alle loro sette (*nihāl*) e scuole (*madāhib*). Egli chiarisce subito che si occuperà dei brahmani e di ciò che essi credono, ovvero innanzitutto l'unità del creato, credenza degli abitanti dello Hind che egli ha già accostato a quella dei greci, e per loro tramite ai sufi musulmani. La concezione presentata attraverso una citazione tratta dalla *Ġitā*<sup>58</sup> viene poi accostata ad una

<sup>56</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>57</sup> Si noterà che i due termini *malāk* (angelo) e *mālik* (re) derivano, secondo alcuni autori, dalla medesima radice *MLK*, benché altri facciano derivare *malāk* da *LK*, radice con il senso generale di “inviare”, più vicino al greco ἄγγελος.

<sup>58</sup> أما عند التحقيق فجميع الأشياء إلهية لأن بشن جعل نفسه أرضاً ليستقر الحيوان عليها وجعله ماء ليغذيهم وجعله ناراً  
 وريحا لينميهم وينشئهم وجعله قلباً لكل واحد منهم ومنح الذكر والعلم وضديهما على ما هو مذکور في بيد  
*Indiā* (cit. n. 14), p. 19.14-16 Sachau.



al-Bīrūnī, in particolare quel *burhān*, termine coranico e tecnico, nell'ambito della *falsafa*, per indicare la certezza ottenuta tramite un sillogismo.<sup>64</sup>

### 6. Controversia tra logica e grammatica e pluralismo religioso

Come ho accennato nel paragrafo 4, l'ipotesi che qui avanzo è che al-Bīrūnī abbia realizzato una forma di comparazione nuova, utilizzando quel metodo compilativo che già aveva applicato nello studio dei calendari e in altre sue opere. Penso che nel *Tahqīq mā li-l-Hind* egli accosti le concezioni di diverse tradizioni religiose nello stesso modo in cui aveva compilato le tabelle di corrispondenze astronomiche in gioventù, e quelle tra datazioni differenti in *al-Ātār al-bāqīya*. Osservare questa attitudine compilativa di al-Bīrūnī non ci dà la certezza che egli non avesse elaborato criteri che lo mettevano in grado di concepire come comparabili culture diverse, come supposeva invece Lawrence.<sup>65</sup> Sappiamo solo che, se al-Bīrūnī possedeva tali criteri, non si occupò di esplicitarli. Le considerazioni linguistiche che egli esprime nel capitolo del *Tahqīq mā li-l-Hind* qui in oggetto suggeriscono una certa consapevolezza dei termini della controversia tra logica e grammatica che tanto spazio ebbe nello sviluppo della *falsafa*. Gerhard Endress ha offerto la più completa trattazione di quella controversia nell'ambito della filosofia islamica medievale nel suo *Logik und Grammatik*,<sup>66</sup> delineando i termini fondamentali del dibattito. Il punto di partenza è rappresentato dal tema della convenzionalità dei segni linguistici utilizzati nella Rivelazione, oggetto di discussione tra i teologi musulmani.<sup>67</sup> Endress sottolinea che non si trattò di un dibattito strettamente filosofico: esso coinvolse fin dal principio una dimensione religiosa. La distinzione tra Parola divina e sua espressione linguistica convenzionale entrò pienamente nello scontro tra scuola mu'tazilita e altre forme del pensiero teologico e filosofico, con gravi conseguenze politiche e sociali durante il periodo della *mihna*, quando il dogma del Corano creato fu imposto dall'apparato statale.<sup>68</sup> La scuola mu'tazilita, e poi quella aš'arita, si occuparono dello statuto ontologico degli attributi divini (*ṣifāt*) e sulla loro conciliabilità con l'assoluta trascendenza divina. Tutto il problema

---

<sup>64</sup> *Burhān* è termine coranico che si ritrova 8 volte nel testo, con il significato, nella traduzione di A. Bausani, di "prova (da parte del vostro Signore)", (Cor. IV, 174), la "Prova del Signore" (Cor. XII, 24), e in Cor. XXVIII, 32 si riferisce ad un miracolo operato da Dio su Mosè (cf. *Il Corano*, ed. A. Bausani, BUR, Milano 1988). Come indicato da L. Gardet nella voce "Burhān", in P. Bearman - Th. Bianquis - C.E. Bosworth - E. van Donzel - W.P. Heinrichs, *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., Vol. I, Brill, Leiden 1986, nella logica sviluppata dai *falāsifa* il termine passò a indicare la dimostrazione sillogistica: gli *Analitici Secondi* di Aristotele vennero tradotti come *Kitāb al-burhān* e il termine assunse valore tecnico, divenendo oggetto di trattazione anche da parte di Avicenna. Oltre alla bibliografia indicata da Gardet nella voce della *EP*, è qui utile ricordare la trattazione di M. Kozah a proposito della *Prefazione* del *Kitāb Bātanġal*, nella quale al-Bīrūnī connette il termine *burhān* con *al-istidlāl/al-dalīl*, secondo Kozah con lo scopo di giustificare l'equivalenza cognitiva tra processo intellettuale e analisi testuale con l'osservazione diretta in quanto a certezza (Kozah, *The Birth of Indology* [cit. n. 11], pp. 85-96).

<sup>65</sup> Cf. sopra n. 12.

<sup>66</sup> G. Endress, "Grammatik und Logik. Arabische Philologie und griechische Philosophie im Widerstreit", in B. Mojsisich (ed.), *Sprachphilosophie in Antike und Mittelalter*, Verlag B.R. Grüner, Amsterdam 1986, pp. 163-233.

<sup>67</sup> Endress, "Grammatik und Logik", p. 181.

<sup>68</sup> L'istituzione della *mihna* come tribunale atto a verificare l'adesione al credo del "Corano creato" secondo la dottrina mu'tazilita, avvenne sotto il califfo 'abbāsīde al-Ma'mūn (r. 813-33), nell'833 e rimase operativa sotto il successore al-Mu'taṣim (r. 833-842), e il successore di questo al-Wāṭiq (r. 842-847) fino a che fu definitivamente abolita dal califfo al-Mutawakkil apparentemente in modo progressivo tra l'848 e l'851; si veda M. Hinds, la voce "Mihna", in P. Bearman - Th. Bianquis - C.E. Bosworth - E. van Donzel - W.P. Heinrichs (eds.), *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., Vol. VII, Brill, Leiden - New York 1993, nella quale è riportata una cospicua seppure in parte datata bibliografia. Per approfondimenti successivi cf. J. Van Ess, *Theology and Society in the Second and Third Centuries of the Hijra - A History of Religious Thought in Early Islam*, Vol. 3, Brill, Leiden - Boston 2018 (Handbook of Oriental Studies, Section one The Near and Middle East, Vol. 116/3), pp. 483-550.

viene sintetizzato da Endress: “Gott offenbart sich in der Sprache seiner Kreatur; aber läßt sich seine Transzendenz in der Sprache abbilden, ohne dem Maß und der Beschränkung menschlicher Vorstellungen unterworfen zu werden? Die Antinomie zwischen Offenbarung und Transzendenz kristallisiert sich für die islamische Theologie in dieser Frage”.<sup>69</sup>

Al tempo in cui al-Bīrūnī scrive, sono passati circa 80 anni dalla celebre sfida dialettica svoltasi a Bagdad nel 938 tra il logico Mattā Ibn Yūnus (m. 940), cristiano nestoriano, e il grammatico Abū Saʿīd al-Sīrāfī (m. 979), musulmano, sfida che aveva visto il successo del secondo sul primo. Le controversie islamo-cristiane si svilupparono in tutto il periodo del movimento di traduzione dal greco all’arabo e lo accompagnarono in diverse forme.<sup>70</sup> Così la controversia interreligiosa si accompagnava al dibattito più propriamente filosofico, a volte in maniera diretta, a volte in maniera indiretta, sul terreno di una *falsafa* di lingua araba che vedeva tra i suoi esponenti figure di fede diversa. La lunga diatriba tra le due arti aveva richiesto la distinzione dei concetti di espressione (*lafẓ*) e significati (*maʿānī*), che venivano analizzati nel contesto di lingue storicamente attestate come il greco antico e l’arabo. In questo modo si formava una triangolazione concettuale tra lingua/linguaggio, senso e verità da perseguire. Al-Bīrūnī, nel capitolo qui analizzato del *Tahqīq mā li-l-Hind*, sta forse inserendo consapevolmente in questo schema un quarto elemento: quello della tradizione religiosa. Egli, infatti, trattando dello Hind, deve affrontare allo stesso tempo il problema della religione e della dottrina filosofica. Non abbiamo prove dirette di un suo interesse per la diatriba tra logica e grammatica, benché egli abbia inserito nella propria bibliografia una *Risāla fī dilālāt al-lafẓ ‘alā al-māʿanā*<sup>71</sup> (*Epistola sull’indicazione dell’espressione sul significato*), che indica come scritta a suo nome da Sahl ‘Isa b. Yaḥyā al-Masīhī, medico che fu tra i maestri di Avicenna di cui non conosciamo molto per poterne cogliere gli interessi, se non che, secondo al-Bayhaqī (m. 1169) fu un filosofo per il quale la medicina era l’attività prevalente.<sup>72</sup> Sebbene, quindi, il testo non sia di al-Bīrūnī, bisogna ricordare come egli stesso si esprime a proposito dei testi scritti da altri a suo nome, che inserì nella propria bibliografia:

ما عمله غيري باسمي فهو بمنزلة الرئائب في الحجور والقلائد على النحور لا أمير بينها وبين الأبناء  
Quant à ce que d’autres ont fait en mon nom, il faut le placer au rang des beaux-fils dans les giron, et des colliers sur le haut des poitrines: je ne fais pas de distinction entre eux et mes propres fils (trad. Boilot).<sup>73</sup>

Questa notazione può farci presumere che al-Bīrūnī conoscesse il contenuto di questi testi scritti a suo nome e pertanto avesse una conoscenza dei termini in cui si esprime la riflessione su espressioni e significati. Scrivendo degli hindu, egli ha a che fare con una situazione che richiede maggiori cautele nel trattare di temi religiosi. Gli abitanti dello Hind non sono appartenenti ai “Popoli del Libro”, né praticanti di tradizioni note come gli zoroastriani, ma una popolazione di politeisti dominati con particolare violenza, popolazione che per di più tende a disprezzare gli stranieri. Così al-Bīrūnī sta forse riprendendo categorie e concetti della disputa tra logica e grammatica in un processo di comparazione tra religioni. Egli starebbe compiendo in questo modo un’azione fortemente innovativa. Al-Bīrūnī non è il primo autore della storia del pensiero musulmano a occuparsi di

<sup>69</sup> Endress, “Grammatik und Logik” (cit. n. 65), p. 182.

<sup>70</sup> Cf. I. Zilio-Grandi, “Temi e figure dell’apologia musulmana”, in C. D’Ancona (ed.), *Storia della filosofia nell’Islam medievale*, I-II, Einaudi, Torino 2005 (Piccola Biblioteca Einaudi Ns), pp. 137-179, in part. p. 155.

<sup>71</sup> رسالة في دلالة اللفظ على المعنى inserito alla voce 130 della bibliografia di Boilot, “L’œuvre d’al-Beruni” (cit. n. 7), p. 222.

<sup>72</sup> Bayhaqī, *Tārīḫ hukamāʾ al-Islām*, ed. M. Kurd ‘Alī, Maṭba‘at at-Taraqqī, Damasco 1365/1946, pp. 95-7.

<sup>73</sup> Boilot, “L’œuvre d’al-Beruni” (cit. n. 7), p. 166.

altre tradizioni religiose in termini descrittivi e non di confutazione, ma l'approccio metodologico è completamente nuovo.

Come al-Bīrūnī afferma fin dall'introduzione del *Tahqīq mā li-l-Hind*, l'opera non ha intenti polemici, ma descrittivi. Non si tratta però delle modalità descrittive già note alla letteratura araba, come i resoconti di viaggio o geografici, ma di uno sguardo su tutto lo spettro della produzione culturale del subcontinente.<sup>74</sup> Al-Bīrūnī crea un quadro concettuale almeno parzialmente sovraconfessionale per comparare linguaggi religiosi. Il senso di questa concezione è contenuto già nel titolo dell'opera: *Rapporto su quanto dei discorsi dello Hind è, secondo l'intelletto ('aql), da accogliersi o rifiutare*. Il metro di giudizio per valutare i saperi dello Hind non è quello scritturistico, ma quello dell'intelletto, facoltà alla quale al-Bīrūnī, come la *falsafa* in generale, attribuisce un fine ultimo, quello della liberazione dal groviglio del sensibile per giungere alla verità di ordine intelligibile. Egli dunque non si basa su una comparazione formale, articolata sulle formulazioni della scrittura, disprezzando anzi ogni forma di pensiero troppo legata alla percezione sensibile e stimando nel più alto grado il pensiero capace di astrazione. Lo sviluppo del pensiero astratto è così centrale in al-Bīrūnī da superare le tradizioni religiose: egli individua forme di antropomorfismo<sup>75</sup> e idolatria<sup>76</sup> che accomunano tanto musulmani quanto appartenenti ad altre confessioni, accomunati non sulla base della confessione, ma dalle (scarse) abilità cognitive. Tale sistema di pensiero ha fatto supporre che al-Bīrūnī coltivasse una concezione di "proto-religione",<sup>77</sup> o che appartenesse a correnti sciite.<sup>78</sup> Certamente la concezione bīrūniana di religione merita più attente considerazioni alla luce dei recenti studi sia sul concetto stesso di religione,<sup>79</sup> sia su ciò che si può dire del carattere islamico della *falsafa*.

### Conclusioni

Da quanto ho esposto si può supporre che al-Bīrūnī, trovandosi dinanzi alla possibilità di descrivere elementi della cultura del subcontinente indiano nel contesto intellettuale islamico del suo tempo, abbia provato a farlo utilizzando una modalità a lui familiare: quella della compilazione e dell'accostamento tra formulazioni diverse di saperi, al fine di creare strumenti di traduzione da un linguaggio ad un

<sup>74</sup> Si tratta certamente di un'innovazione che rimase sostanzialmente incompresa dai suoi contemporanei, come dimostra il fatto stesso che l'opera finì per essere classificata tra le opere storiografiche (*ta'rih*) ed anche l'edizione a stampa più recente del 1993 (Institute for the History of Arabic-Islamic Science, Frankfurt a.M.) è inserita nella serie "Islamic Geography".

<sup>75</sup> Cf. *Alberuni's India* (cit. n. 14), p. 15 Sachau.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 53-4.

<sup>77</sup> Kozah, *The Birth of Indology* (cit. n. 11), p. 31.

<sup>78</sup> M. Meyerhof, "Études de pharmacologie arabe tirées de manuscrits inédits", *Bulletin de l'Institut d'Égypte* 22 (1939-40), pp. 133-52.

<sup>79</sup> Il dibattito relativo alla definizione di "religione" ha accompagnato gli studi accademici al riguardo fin dal loro inizio nella seconda metà del XIX secolo. Già nel 1912 lo psicologo americano James H. Leuba poteva citare 49 diverse definizioni di religione (*A psychological Study of Religion, its Origin, Function, and Future*, The Macmillan Company, New York 1912) ed il numero è andato crescendo. Molti grandi pensatori in campi differenti hanno dato il proprio contributo alla ricerca di una definizione scientificamente solida: tra questi E. Durkheim, S. Freud, C. Geertz e molti altri. Una panoramica generale sugli sviluppi più recenti si trova in R. King, "The Copernican Turn in the Study of Religion", in *Method & Theory in the Study of Religion. Journal of the North American Association for the Study of Religion* 25/2 (2013), pp. 137-59. King considera come gli sviluppi più recenti degli studi post-coloniali abbiano portato a mettere radicalmente in crisi le concezioni di "religione" o "religioni" finora utilizzate, in quanto intrinsecamente legate alla storia occidentale. Tale crisi, evidenzia King, sollecita oggi la ricerca di una rielaborazione del concetto che tenga conto di altre tradizioni culturali, alla ricerca di un costrutto che possa realmente dirsi universale.





# *Al-Bīrūnī's Use of Philoponus for Arguing Against the Eternity of the World*

Paul Hullmeine\*

## *Abstract:*

Abū Rayḥān al-Bīrūnī is famous mostly for his various scientific treatises on astronomy, mathematics, and geodesy. This paper aims to establish him as an important figure in the philosophical debates in the Islamic world around 1000 AD. The famous exchange of letters between him and the young Avicenna on physical and cosmological questions is a clear indication of al-Bīrūnī's general interest in philosophical issues and Aristotelian texts. In one of these letters, al-Bīrūnī questions one of the most fundamental Aristotelian teachings – that of the eternity of the world. The discussion of this point and Avicenna's answer reveal the sources of both interlocutors. While Avicenna is deeply influenced by the Ps.-Aristotelian *Theology*, al-Bīrūnī draws heavily from John Philoponus, even defending him against Avicenna. In addition, a passage from the geodetic work *Kitāb Taḥdīd nihāyat al-amākin* gives further evidence for a Philoponian influence on al-Bīrūnī. In this text, al-Bīrūnī answers objections to the *Kalām*-argument for creation made by Ibn al-Ḥammār. In conclusion, it is argued that al-Bīrūnī played a major role in the philosophical debates of his time, in addition to his well-known contributions to the scientific debates.

In a recent paper, Cristina Cerami has argued that Avicenna (d. 1037 AD), in his paraphrase of Aristotle's *De Caelo*, targets a "neo-Philoponian trend among his Arabic contemporaries".<sup>1</sup> She considers Abū Rayḥān al-Bīrūnī (d. around 1050) as one possible target of Avicenna's critique, and refers to four questions from the famous correspondence between Avicenna and al-Bīrūnī, pointing out that Avicenna uses similar arguments in his paraphrase. In her paper, she considers the influence of Philoponus on this correspondence, and briefly raises the problem of the eternity of the world as is discussed in these letters.<sup>2</sup> This debate will be the starting point of the present paper.<sup>3</sup> The overall aim of this investigation is to offer a more detailed analysis

---

\*This article was initially part of my Master's thesis. Thus, I would like to thank my two supervisors Peter Adamson and Rotraud Hansberger for their general support and for their help with some of the translations from Arabic. Further, I want to thank Gotthard Strohmaier, who introduced me to the study of al-Bīrūnī when I was an undergraduate in Berlin. I am also grateful for the several suggestions made by the two referees, that greatly improved this article.

<sup>1</sup> C. Cerami, "The *De Caelo et Mundo* of Avicenna's *Kitāb al-Šifā'*. An Overview of its Structure, its Goal and its Polemical Background", *Documenti e studi sulla tradizione filosofica medievale* 28 (2017), pp. 273-329. Marwan Rashed had already argued similarly: cf. M. Rashed, "The Problem of the Composition of the Heavens (529-1610). A New Fragment of Philoponus and its Readers", *Bulletin of the Institute of Classical Studies* 83 (2004), pp. 35-58, esp. 41-46.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Cerami, "The *De Caelo et Mundo*", pp. 309-12.

<sup>3</sup> The main edition, which is used as reference in this paper, is provided by S.H. Nasr - M. Mohaghegh, *al-As'īlah wa-l-Ajwibah (Questions and Answers). Including the further Answers of al-Bīrūnī and al-Mā'sūmī's Defense of Ibn Sīnā*, Dānišgāh-i Tihārān, Tehran 1973 (Šūrā-i 'Ālī-i Farhang wa Hunar, 9), concisely referred to as *As'īla* in the following. See also the partial edition by M. Tancı, "Beyruni'nin Ibn-i Sinā'ya Yönelttiği Bazı Sorular, Ibn-i Sinā'nın Cevapları ve Bu Cevaplara Beyruni'nin İtirazları", in *Beyruni'ye Armağan*, Türk Tarih Kurumu Basımevi, Ankara 1974, pp. 231-301. Fi-

of al-Bīrūnī's arguments against the eternity of the world than previously available. In order to understand his objections in full, it is, of course, necessary to examine Avicenna's answer to al-Bīrūnī in some detail. Finally, we will investigate other selections from al-Bīrūnī's corpus, since one can elsewhere find additional hints of his reliance upon arguments that can be traced back to John Philoponus. In the end, I will argue that al-Bīrūnī draws heavily on Philoponus while engaging with Aristotelian philosophy.

### 1. *The 4<sup>th</sup> Question in the correspondence between al-Bīrūnī and Avicenna on the eternity of the world*

It is not surprising that the question of the eternity of the world, widely discussed among Arab philosophers and theologians, also arises in the exchange between al-Bīrūnī and Avicenna. However, al-Bīrūnī's formulation of the question is unusual, for he directs his attention only to a tiny part of Aristotle's argument in *De Caelo*.

Why does Aristotle make the claim of past generations and periods on the heavens and [on the fact] that they found them just as he has found them, a strong argument (*ḥuḡḡa qawwiyya*) for the permanence and the endurance of the sphere (*falak*), which he mentions twice in his book [*De Caelo*]? Someone who does not cling to or insist on the incorrect [has to] admit that this cannot be known. Also, we know about its temporal extent even less than what the people of the book report and what is told us in the tradition of (*an*) the Indians and similar people, so that it is obviously of no value for the investigation. For among the inhabitants of the populated regions of the earth the incidents (*ḥawādīṭ*) succeeded, sometimes altogether, sometimes periodically. Indeed, also the condition of the mountains, in their entirety as such as in eternity, is a testimony of the centuries to the same degree as such a testimony,<sup>4</sup> although change is apparent for them.<sup>5</sup>

In this question, al-Bīrūnī seems to challenge only the Aristotelian argument (or rather, what he takes to be an argument) according to the "teaching of the ancients". Indeed, in his *De Caelo*, Aristotle introduces this reference twice in connection with the discussion of the eternity of the world, first in I 3 and second in II 1.<sup>6</sup> In the former, Aristotle proves the perfection of the circular moving bodies that are not vulnerable to change. The latter refers, again, to the superior rank of the circular moving spheres. At this point, however, the actual argumentation for the eternity of the world has already been completed. It is between these two passages, specifically in *De Caelo*, I 10-12, that Aristotle introduces several arguments for the eternity of the world. Having discussed the most important teachings of earlier philosophers (Plato, Empedocles), Aristotle devotes chapters 11 and 12 to proving that whatever is originated in time cannot last forever, and that everything that is not originated and does not fall under corruption is necessarily eternal.<sup>7</sup> As is well known,

---

nally, there is a complete English translation without commentary by Rafik Berjak and Muzaffar Iqbal. Cf. R. Berjak - M. Iqbal, "Ibn Sīnā / Al-Bīrūnī Correspondence", *Islam & Science* 1-5 (2003-2007), published in eight parts. I offer my own translation in this article.

<sup>4</sup> As is with regard to the stars and heavens, the mountains seem to stay unaltered. Nevertheless, there are changes over the years, which can be observed. This goes along with my translation of *ḥawādīṭ* as 'incidents'. Later, I argue that *ḥawādīṭ* has the philosophical meaning of 'accidents'. However, in this passage this term simply refers to incidents such as natural catastrophes changing the shape of the world.

<sup>5</sup> Ibn Sīnā and al-Bīrūnī, *As'ila*, pp. 12.7-13.1 Nasr - Mohaghegh.

<sup>6</sup> Arist., *De Caelo*, I 3, 270 b 11-16 and II 1, 284 a 2-12.

<sup>7</sup> Detailed analysis especially regarding the complex discussion of the different concepts is offered in F.R.H. Solmsen, *Aristotle's System of the Physical World*, Cornell U.P., Ithaca (NY) 1960, ch. 12; L. Judson, "Eternity and Necessity in

these arguments correlate with arguments from other Aristotelian works, namely the *Physics* and *Metaphysics*, dealing with the eternal, never-ceasing nature of the circular motion of the heavens and the inquiry into the first cause of this motion, the Prime Mover.<sup>8</sup> But already in I 3, i.e. the chapter wherein one finds his first appeal to the “teaching of the ancients”, he refers to physical arguments concerning the nature of the first substance, which he discussed in other works, i.e. in his *Physics*. After rehearsing these arguments for the eternal, indestructible nature of circular motion, he presents further evidence by appealing to the common belief in the gods and sensory experience (διὰ τῆς αἰσθήσεως), namely the lack of alteration in heavenly motion as evidenced by the observations of the foregoing astronomers. Thus, he can show that an eternal world, although it constitutes a fundamental break with the accounts of his philosophical predecessors, is nevertheless consistent with popular religious beliefs. However, at this point in *De Caelo*, the eternity of the world as such is not yet at stake.

While this is the Aristotelian background to the question of the eternity of the world, it does not seem to play a major role in al-Bīrūnī's formulation. He simply compares the heavens to mountains. These, as well, appear to remain unchanged over the course of the years, but nevertheless it is obvious that some slight alterations do occur. Thus, when al-Bīrūnī questions that the report of the “teaching of the ancients” is a “strong argument” (*huǧǧa qawwiyya*), he not only conceives this argument to be inconclusive. Rather, by his allusion to the case of the mountains, he intends to show both that this report from ancient civilizations is misleading and that therefore this argument is not convincing in any way. Alessandro Bausani has already pointed to parallel passages in other works by al-Bīrūnī. For example, in his *Kitāb Taḥdīd nihāyat al-amākin li-taṣḥīḥ masāfāt al-masākin* (*The Determination of the Directions of Places for the Correction of Local Distances*),<sup>9</sup> we find a remark of particular interest in this respect:

Sea is changed to dry land, and dry land to sea over long periods of time. If these periods have passed before the creation of mankind, then they are unknown, and if after that epoch, there are no records of them. For reports are usually discontinued after a long period of time, and those about things happening gradually, in particular, are remembered by educated people only.<sup>10</sup>

---

Aristotle's *De Caelo* I, 12<sup>o</sup>, *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy* 1 (1983), pp. 217-56, R. Sorabji, *Matter, Space and Motion. Theories in Antiquity and Their Sequel*, Duckworth, London 1988, pp. 276-9; S. Broadie, “The Possibilities of Being and Not-Being in *De Caelo* 1.11-12”, in A.C. Bowen - C. Wildberg (eds.), *New Perspectives on Aristotle's De Caelo*, Brill, Leiden - Boston 2009 (*Philosophia Antiqua*, 117), pp. 29-50.

<sup>8</sup> There is a vast amount of modern literature about these proofs and their reception in the medieval tradition. Perhaps most important are Solmsen, *Aristotle's System* (above, n. 7), ch. 10; E. Behler, *Die Ewigkeit der Welt*, Schöningh, München 1965; R. Sorabji, *Time, Creation, and the Continuum. Theories in Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages*, Cornell U.P., Ithaca (NY) 1983, ch. 3, and H.A. Davidson, *Proofs for Eternity, Creation and the Existence of God in Medieval Islamic and Jewish Philosophy*, Oxford U.P., Oxford 1987, pp. 238-9.

<sup>9</sup> Al-Bīrūnī, *Kitāb Taḥdīd nihāyat al-amākin li-taṣḥīḥ masāfāt al-masākin*, ed. P. Bulgakow, Maṭba'at Laḡnat al-ta'līf, Cairo 1962 (repr. Institute for History of Arabic-Islamic Science, Frankfurt 1992). English trans. in J. Ali, *The Determination of the Coordinates of the Positions for the Correction of Distances between Cities*, American University, Beirut 1967.

<sup>10</sup> Al-Bīrūnī, *Kitāb Taḥdīd nihāyat al-amākin*, p. 43.11-14 Bulgakow, Engl. translation by Ali, *The Determination* (above, n. 9), p. 18, modified. For further similarities, Bausani points to al-Bīrūnī's *Chronology of Ancient Nations and India*, cf. A. Bausani, “Some Considerations on Three Problems of Controversy between al-Bīrūnī and Ibn Sīnā”, in A. Dietrich (ed.), *Akten des VII. Kongresses für Arabistik und Islamwissenschaft*, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, Göttingen 1976, p. 79. Seyyed Hossein Nasr has also investigated this question, cf. S.H. Nasr, *An Introduction to Islamic Cosmological Doctrines. Conceptions of Nature and Methods Used for its Study by the Ikhwān al-Safā', al-Bīrūnī, and Ibn Sīnā*, State University of New York Press, SUNY Press, Albany 1993, pp. 141-2.

This passage again emphasizes that, for al-Bīrūnī, reports of earlier generations do not offer strong evidence for the endurance of the sea, mountains, or the heavens.<sup>11</sup> In his question to Avicenna, al-Bīrūnī additionally appeals to Indian reports concerning the origin of the world, which suggests that al-Bīrūnī was engaged with Indian thought even before he spent time there later in his life. These travels to India, which took place within the war campaigns of Maḥmūd of Ġaznā (d. 1030 AD) between 1027 and 1029 AD,<sup>12</sup> served as the foundation for his famous study on the various traditions and beliefs of the Hindus, which is in the following referred to as *India*.<sup>13</sup> There, he devotes one chapter to precisely these reports, but without much sympathy. He begins by presenting Abū Bakr al-Rāzī's (d. 925 AD) famous theory of the five eternal principles. Al-Bīrūnī lays out how al-Rāzī derives the necessary eternal existence of God (*bārī*) from the eternity of matter. However, he contrasts al-Rāzī's account with Aristotle's deduction from what is moved to the First Unmoved Mover on the grounds of the eternity of circular motion. However, he himself finds the subject of time and eternity to be "very minute" and "obscure".<sup>14</sup> In the rest of this chapter, al-Bīrūnī discusses the various Indian beliefs of time and creation. On the Indians' accounts of time, he comments that they are "trivial" (*nazr*) and "not acceptable" (*ḡayr muḥaṣṣal*), which reveals his general critical attitude.<sup>15</sup> Further, this leads him to the question of the world's origin, and he reports that they have, on the one hand, argued for creation, and on the other hand for the eternity of matter. On their understanding of creation, he writes: "Since we already described their [the Indians'] opinion on the eternity of matter, they do not mean by creation (*ḥalq*) an originating process from nothing (*ibdā'an min lā šay*), but rather the workmanship (*šinā'a*) of clay".<sup>16</sup>

These critical and doubtful remarks do not express al-Bīrūnī's personal view explicitly. While his question to Avicenna presented above did not seem at first glance to be a severe rejection of Aristotle's doctrine of the eternity of the world, the passage from *India* shows that al-Bīrūnī, indeed, was, at least at a later stage of his life, interested in different philosophical positions regarding this question. Moreover, he presents al-Rāzī's view, upon which the eternity of the world does not necessitate the existence of a creator (*bārī*), and opposes to this view the Aristotelian First Unmoved Mover, which al-Bīrūnī does not identify as a creator. Such an identification, in fact, is what Avicenna will do in his reply, as we are about to see.

With this passage in mind, it may seem quite odd that al-Bīrūnī only refers to Aristotle's "claim of past generations and periods on the heavens and [the fact] that they found them just as he has found them", which Aristotle uses as "a strong argument for the permanence and the endurance of the sphere", and that he does not open up a discussion of the notion of eternity and time in general. But in many other questions in this correspondence we can detect the same strategy, according to which al-Bīrūnī does not express his main worries before he replies to Avicenna's answers. In addition, we should not forget that his *India* represents a later stage in al-Bīrūnī's intellectual career. However,

<sup>11</sup> It is noteworthy that he is even allowing for the existence of, for example, giants: the fact that they do not exist at a certain time does not in itself make their existence in the past impossible. Cf. Nasr, *Introduction* (above, n. 10), pp. 120-21. and Bausani, "Some Considerations" (above, n. 10), p. 78.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. J.S. Mishra, "New Light on Al-Bīrūnī's Stay and Travel in India", *Central Asiatic Journal* 15 (1972), pp. 302-12.

<sup>13</sup> Al-Bīrūnī, *Kitāb Fi Tahqīq mā li-l-hind min maqūla maqbūla fi l-aql aw mardūla*, ed. Dā'irat al-ma'ārif al-ʿuṣmāniyya, Hyderabad 1958, English translation by E. Sachau, *Al-Bīrūnī's India*, 2 vols, Kegan Paul - Trench - Trübner & Co, London 1910.

<sup>14</sup> Al-Bīrūnī, *India*, p. 271 (cf. translation by Sachau, *Al-Bīrūnī's India*, vol. I, p. 320).

<sup>15</sup> Al-Bīrūnī, *India*, p. 272 (cf. translation by Sachau, *Al-Bīrūnī's India*, vol. I, p. 320).

<sup>16</sup> Al-Bīrūnī, *India*, pp. 272-3 (cf. the translation by Sachau, *Al-Bīrūnī's India*, vol. I, pp. 321-2).

once we examine his reply to Avicenna, it will be clear that the young al-Bīrūnī was already familiar with Philoponus' critique.

Although al-Bīrūnī is rather vague in his critique of the *De Caelo*, for a champion of Aristotle like Avicenna even this vague criticism of the Aristotelian argument is provocative. This provocation is evident in his answer to al-Bīrūnī, to the first part of which we now turn:

You should know that this [argument concerning the mountains] does not belong to the composition of the proof, but rather it is [just] something he brings up in the course of the discussion. However, the case regarding the heavens is not the same as the case regarding the mountains. For even though the generations have testified that the mountains are preserved in their entirety, they are not free from accidental differences (*iḥtilāfāt al-'awāriḍ*) in their particulars: some of them break and some pile up on each other and the forms of others are destroyed. Plato has written what is beyond that in his books on politics<sup>17</sup> and others. It seems to me that you adopted this objection from John Philoponus, who pretended for the Christians to be in disagreement with Aristotle. For someone looking into his commentary on the end of *De Generatione et corruptione* and other books, the agreement with Aristotle on this question is hopefully not hidden. Or you have adopted this from Muḥammad ibn Zakariyyā' al-Rāzī, who burdened himself with needless things in his attempt of the metaphysics, and who exceeded his abilities of cutting wounds open and examining excrements. Without any doubt, he has embarrassed himself and uncovered his ignorance of what he attempted and pursued.<sup>18</sup>

Avicenna accepts al-Bīrūnī's objection regarding the changing nature of the mountains, since their alteration is apparent over time. However, he rightly points out that Aristotle does not use it as a decisive argument. Rather, it serves only as a rhetorical argument supporting the demonstrative arguments that have not yet been part of the debate. Avicenna's reading of these remarks is similar to that of Simplicius: "And notice that what another person might use as the clearest of demonstrations, he [i.e. Aristotle] uses as confirmations which come after the demonstrations".<sup>19</sup> Furthermore, Avicenna tries to locate the sources for the doubts raised in al-Bīrūnī's question, and mentions John Philoponus and Abū Bakr al-Rāzī. But he does not leave it at that, and tries to discredit al-Bīrūnī's position by questioning the credibility of these two thinkers. In the case of Philoponus, Avicenna reports the widespread story within the Arabic tradition that Philoponus had renounced his own teachings regarding the Trinity only to escape punishment.<sup>20</sup> Avicenna's intention to cast a

<sup>17</sup> This reference is not without difficulty. On the one hand, with this Avicenna could refer to Plato's *Republic*, but the plural form of "book", *kutub*, does not fit this identification. In addition, Avicenna calls the *Republic* in his *Šarḥ Kitāb Uṭūlūḡiyyā*, ed. 'A. Badawī in *Aristū' ind al-'arab*, Cairo 1947 [Wikālat al-maṭbū'āt, Kuwait 1978<sup>2</sup>], p. 74, "*kitāb al-siyāsa*". More probable seems to be that Avicenna does refer here to Plato's political works in general, in which topics like natural catastrophes are described, for example the *Timaeus*.

<sup>18</sup> Ibn Sinā and al-Bīrūnī, *A'ila*, pp. 13.2-13 Nasr - Mohaghegh.

<sup>19</sup> Simplicii *In Aristotelis De Caelo commentaria*, ed. J.L. Heiberg, Reimer, Berlin 1894 (*CAG* VII), p. 118.10-12 (translation by I. Mueller, *On Aristotle. On the Heavens I 3-4*, Bloomsbury, London 2002, p. 59). However, there is no evidence for the transmission of Simplicius' commentary into Arabic. Cf. F.E. Peters, *Aristoteles Arabus. The Oriental Translations and Commentaries on the Aristotelian Corpus*, Brill, Leiden 1968, p. 36.

<sup>20</sup> Cf. the report in Ibn al-Nadīm's *Fihrist*, ed. R. Tajaddud, Tehran 1987, pp. 314-15. The actual historical background is Philoponus' condemnation in 575 AD because of his tritheistic positions. Another narrative that seemed to prove that Philoponus only pretended to agree with mainstream Christian belief is preserved in Ibn al-Qifṭī's *Tārīḥ al-ḥukamā'*, ed. by J. Lippert, Dieterich'sche Verlagsbuchhandlung, Leipzig 1903, pp. 354-7: Philoponus is said to have met 'Amr ibn al-'Āṣ

dubious light on al-Bīrūnī's attitude is even more apparent in his remarks on Abū Bakr al-Rāzī, the philosophical works of whom he does not value at all and whom he insults quite scathingly. Even though these accusations might be of a purely polemical nature in their original context, Avicenna's remarks remain useful for the modern reader, since he accurately identifies possible sources for al-Bīrūnī's criticism. In a fragment of Philoponus' *De Aeternitate mundi contra Aristotelem*, which was fully translated into Arabic (but survives only in fragments) and to which al-Bīrūnī appeals at a number of passages in his *India* (more on this below), Philoponus engages critically with Aristotle's account of the "teachings of the ancients":

But, he [i.e. Philoponus] says, the fact that in the entire past the heavens do not seem to have changed either as a whole or in [their] parts must not be taken as a proof that they are completely indestructible and ungenerated. For there are also some animals which live longer than others, and [some] parts of the earth, mountains for example, and stones like the diamonds, exist almost as long as the whole of time, and there is no record that Mount Olympus had a beginning of existence, or [was subject to] increase or diminution. And in the case of mortal animals, for the time that they are to be preserved it is necessary that the most important of their parts retain their proper nature, so that as long as God wants the world to exist it is also necessary that the most important of its parts be preserved. But it has been agreed that the heavens as a whole as well as in [their] parts are the most important and most essential parts of the world. For by their movement all bodies inside are guided naturally. Therefore it is necessary that as long as the world is to be preserved, the heavens will not abandon their proper nature in any respect, neither as a whole nor in [their] parts. But if it has rightly been shown by Aristotle that all bodies have a limited capacity (δύναμις), [and if] the heavens, too, are a body, [then] it is evident that they are also liable to destruction because the term 'destruction' applies to them, even though so far they clearly have not been affected by anything leading to destruction.<sup>21</sup>

The parallelism suggested by Avicenna is immediately evident. Both Philoponus and al-Bīrūnī criticise Aristotle for taking the sayings of ancient people to be an argument for the immutability of the heavens. Further, they similarly refer to the mountains as a counter-example. Interestingly, in the last sentence of this passage, Philoponus draws a connection to an argument against the eternity of the heavens, which will be of importance for the present investigation in short. Now, let us turn back to Avicenna's answer. To prove that Philoponus' argument does not express his personal view, he refers to the latter's commentary on *De Generatione et corruptione*, especially to a passage "towards the end" of this commentary. There, Philoponus writes as follows:

Having shown that necessity is a property of circular movement alone, [Aristotle] says that it is "reasonable" that this follows, since it is in accord with what has been demonstrated elsewhere. And it has been demonstrated in the eighth book of *Physics* [VIII.9] that movement in a circle alone is eternal. If therefore necessity simpliciter belongs to things eternal, as was proven earlier, it is reasonable that it belongs to circular movement alone.<sup>22</sup>

---

(d. around 663 AD) and talked to him on the falsehood of the Christian trinity, although the latter lived much later than Philoponus. See E. Giannakis, "Philoponus, Arabic" in H. Lagerlund (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Medieval Philosophy. Philosophy Between 500 and 1500*, Springer, Dordrecht 2011, pp. 975-8, and E. Gannagé, "Philopon (Jean -)", in R. Goulet (ed.), *Dictionnaire des Philosophes Antiques*, Va, CNRS Éditions, Paris 2012, pp. 503-63, esp. 504-9.

<sup>21</sup> Simpl., *In De Cael.*, p. 142.7-25 Heiberg. Cited following C. Wildberg, *Philoponus. Against Aristotle, on the Eternity of the World*, Cornell U.P., Ithaca (NY) 1987, Fragm. 80, pp. 89-90.

<sup>22</sup> Philoponus, *Commentaria in libros De Generatione et Corruptione Aristotelis*, ed. G. Vitelli, Reimer, Berlin 1897

This is the kind of argument that Avicenna seems to have in mind when he appeals to Philoponus' 'real' personal opinion on this matter. In this appeal, he disregards the fact that a huge part of Philoponus' *De Aeternitate mundi contra Aristotelem* was an attack against Aristotle's theory of aether, leading to a denial of the eternal circular motion of the heavens.<sup>23</sup> However, Philoponus does not mention his doubts against the Aristotelian aether and against the eternity of the world in his commentary on *De Gen. et corr.* It is unclear whether this remark provides solid ground for thinking that Avicenna had access to Philoponus' commentary, especially since the Arabic translation mentioned in the *Fihrist* is lost.<sup>24</sup> As short as this allusion might be, it is not unusual for Avicenna's style, since he often concisely refers to works to which he definitely had extensive access. For example, in the letter exchange with al-Bīrūnī, he also refers to Aristotle's *De Anima* and the influential commentaries by Themistius and Alexander in an even shorter way, here by giving only the commentator's names.<sup>25</sup> Thus, his claim that one finds such an opinion in Philoponus' commentary on a passage "towards the end of Book II" is the most accurate allusion we get in these letters. Of course, it still may be the case that he borrows this exact remark from an intermediate source. However, he definitely intends to suggest to al-Bīrūnī that he was directly acquainted with the text in question.

For al-Rāzī as well, one finds a similar passage that Avicenna might have identified as al-Bīrūnī's source. In his *Doubts about Galen*, al-Rāzī cites from Galen's *On Demonstration*, where Galen seems to argue for the eternity of the world. In al-Rāzī's words, Galen uses the same argument from observation for the world's eternity as Aristotle uses, i.e. that there is no change in the celestial bodies, their magnitude, and their motions, as the astronomers have observed for thousands of years.<sup>26</sup> Al-Rāzī offers a longer reply to this account than what we find in al-Bīrūnī, but both accounts follow the same train of thought. The mere observation that the heavens and the celestial bodies have not changed over a thousand years does not necessitate the impossibility of their corruption. He distinguishes between two kinds of corruption, namely "immediate degeneration" (he uses the example of an uprooted tree) and "deterioration" (for example, of vegetables). Both types of corruption could account for the possible corruption of the world after remaining for thousands of years in one state. Even if one assumed that an immediate degeneration was not possible for the heavens, it still would be possible to imagine their deterioration being too slow and occurring in steps too minute to be recognized by astronomers.<sup>27</sup> In general, al-Rāzī took

---

(*CAG* XIV.2) p. 312.15-20 (trans. by I. Kupreeva, *On Aristotle. On Coming-to-Be and Perishing II.5-11*, Bloomsbury, London 2005, p. 107).

<sup>23</sup> Cf. the fragments gathered in Wildberg, *Philoponus. Against Aristotle* (above, n. 21), esp. fragm. 7 (p. 46) and 104 (pp. 117-19). Of course, modern scholars have also struggled with the opposition between *Contra Aristotelem* and Philoponus' commentaries. For an overview, see R. Sorabji, *Philoponus and the Rejection of the Aristotelian Science*, Institute of Classical Studies, London 2010 (2<sup>nd</sup> edition), pp. 14-18.

<sup>24</sup> See Peters, *Aristoteles Arabus* (above, n. 19), pp. 37-8. Such doubts can be found in H. Eichner (ed.), *Averroes' Mittlerer Kommentar zu Aristoteles' De Generatione et corruptione*, Schöningh, Paderborn 2005, p. 14.

<sup>25</sup> Cf. *As'ila*, p. 25 Nasr - Mohaghegh.

<sup>26</sup> Cf. al-Rāzī, *Doubts about Galen*, ed. M.L. 'Abd al-Ġanī, *Kitāb al-Ṣukūk 'alā Ġālīnūs*, Dār al-Kutub wa-l-waṭā'iq al-qawmiyya Cairo 2005, p. 44, and the Engl. trans. in J. McGinnis - D.C. Reisman, *Classical Arabic Philosophy. An Anthology of Sources*, Hackett, Indianapolis - Cambridge 2007, p. 51.

<sup>27</sup> For this foregoing discussion and the translation of some terms I rely on the already mentioned English translation in McGinnis - Reisman, *Classical Arabic Philosophy* (above, n. 26), pp. 51-3. Cf. al-Rāzī, *Doubts about Galen*, pp. 44-9 'Abd al-Ġanī. P. Koetschet, "Galién, al-Rāzī, et l'éternité du monde. Les fragments du *Traité sur La démonstration*, IV, dans les *Doutes sur Galien*", *Arabic Sciences and Philosophy* 25 (2015), pp. 167-98, esp. pp. 177-9 offers French translations

an intermediate position in this discussion. He did not argue for creation *ex nihilo*, nor did he argue for Aristotle's doctrine of the eternity of the world. Instead, he endorsed the eternal status of five basic principles. God, being one of these principles, created the world out of the other four. Even for God, a creation *ex nihilo* is impossible.<sup>28</sup> We know that al-Bīrūnī read Galen's *On Demonstration*, which he cites in his *India*,<sup>29</sup> and that he was aware of al-Rāzī's doctrine of the five eternal principles. He compares the latter to the previously mentioned Hinduistic beliefs in an eternal matter and a creational process at the same time.<sup>30</sup>

It is clear, then, that Avicenna had good reason to accuse al-Bīrūnī of being influenced by these two thinkers. Thus, his overall strategy in his reply to al-Bīrūnī is as follows: first, he rejects the importance of Aristotle's reference to the "teachings of the ancients" to his overall argumentation. Second, he locates this critique in the somewhat dubious tradition (at least in Avicenna's eyes) of the Christian Philoponus, who constantly hides his personal beliefs, and the doctor al-Rāzī, who should have confined himself to being a doctor. However, Avicenna thinks he has more to say about al-Bīrūnī's remarks. He adds one sentence about the philosophical question of the world's eternity, in general, and then continues to excoriate al-Bīrūnī:

You should know that Aristotle, with his statement "the world has no beginning", does not suppose that it has no creator, but with this statement he rather intends to free the creator from non-creating (*ta'īl 'an al-fi'l*). But this is not the place to discuss such things. Regarding your statement "Who does not cling to or insist on the wrong": this insult and rudeness is repugnant. For either you have understood the meaning of Aristotle's statement or not. If you have not understood it, you cannot consider someone as stupid or look down upon someone, who says something you do not understand. However, if you have understood it, your knowledge of the meaning of the statement should restrain you from acting that harshly; the fact that you undertake something from which the mind should restrain you, is repugnant and inappropriate for you.<sup>31</sup>

The last part of his answer is a good example of the occasionally rude style of the exchange (if Avicenna's comments on al-Rāzī were not enough). However, it is the first sentence that is of particular interest to us, since there Avicenna gives a possible answer to someone who doubts Aristotle's doctrine of the eternity of the world. Avicenna takes al-Bīrūnī's question to address not only this small detail (namely the "teachings of the ancients"), but rather the result of Aristotle's overall argumentation. In order to justify the world's eternity while considering its creation through God, he ascribes to Aristotle the view that one should not think of God as ever being non-creating. This view exceeds the original Aristotelian material, since the Aristotelian Prime Mover is a mover that does not create the world, but is the first cause of the heavenly motions. As is well-known, Avicenna was able to find the basis for this attribution in a Neoplatonic reinterpretation of the Aristotelian corpus, and most prominently in the so-called *Theology of*

---

of and a commentary on the passages in question.

<sup>28</sup> Cf. Sh. Pines, *Beiträge zur islamischen Atomenlehre*, Heine, Berlin 1936, pp. 40-2; M. Fakhry, "A Tenth-Century Arabic Interpretation of Plato's Cosmology", *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 6 (1968), pp. 15-22, esp. p. 19, and Davidson, *Proofs for Eternity* (above, n. 8), pp. 14-15.

<sup>29</sup> Cf. al-Bīrūnī, *India*, p. 74 (translation by Sachau, *Alberuni's India*, vol. I, p. 97).

<sup>30</sup> Cf. al-Bīrūnī, *India*, p. 279f. (translation by Sachau, *Alberuni's India*, vol. I, pp. 319-320). See also above p. 186.

<sup>31</sup> Ibn Sīnā and al-Bīrūnī, *As'ila*, pp. 13.13 - 14.8 Nasr - Mohaghegh.

*Aristotle*, a part of the Arabic Plotinus attributed to Aristotle.<sup>32</sup> Avicenna's defense of Aristotle is linked to the assumption of an eternal emanation of creation from God that has its roots in Plotinus' *Enneads*. Everything that God creates through this emanation process exists together with him, and as a result, his creation is as eternal as He is.<sup>33</sup> With the help of the Neoplatonic and pseudo-Aristotelian works, Avicenna is able to connect the eternity of the world with a creation *ex nihilo* that does not happen in time. Thus, he goes beyond Aristotle's notion of a world without an origin to his own teaching that the world exists eternally, but on the ground of an eternal creation by God.<sup>34</sup>

These considerations undoubtedly play a major role in Avicenna's attribution of the view that God is never non-creating to Aristotle. Thus, in his answer to al-Bīrūnī, his main intention is to emphasize that Aristotle did not reject the origin of the world with respect to God as its cause, but only with respect to His temporal priority. That Avicenna indeed has the *Theology* in mind becomes evident in light of the *Theology* itself and of his remarks in his commentary upon this work. An example of this influence can be seen in the following excerpt of the *Theology*:

How beautifully and how rightly does the philosopher [i.e. Plato]<sup>35</sup> describe the Creator, may He be exalted, when he says that He created the intellect and the soul and nature, and all other things! But it is necessary for whoever hears the philosopher's statements that he does not consider them literally ["according to the expression"] and imagine that he says that the Creator, may He be exalted, creates in time. If someone imagines this of him according to his expression and words, he only expressed

<sup>32</sup> The Arabic text of the so-called *Theology of Aristotle* is edited under the title *Ūṭūlūḡiyya Aristāṭālīs* in 'A. Badawī, *Aflūṭīn 'ind al-'arab*, Maktabat al-nahḡa al-miṣriyya, Cairo 1955, pp. 3-166. Further, there is an edition of Avicenna's notes on the *Theology*, published by the same editor under the title *Šarḡ Kitāb Ūṭūlūḡiyya al-mansūb ilā Aristū*, in 'A. Badawī, *Aristū 'ind al-'arab*, Cairo 1947 (Wikālat al-maṭbū'āt, Kuwait 1978<sup>2</sup>), pp. 35-74. For secondary literature on the *Theology* and the Arabic Plotinus, see most importantly F. Rosenthal, "Aš-Šayḡ al-Yūnānī and the Arabic Plotinus Source", *Orientalia* 21 (1952), pp. 461-92, F.W. Zimmermann, "The Origins of the So-called *Theology of Aristotle*" in J. Krayer - W.F. Ryan - C.B. Schmitt (eds), *Pseudo-Aristotle in the Middle-Ages. The Theology and other Texts*, Warburg Institute, London 1986, pp. 110-240, and lastly the various contributions by Cristina D'Ancona, for example C. D'Ancona, "The Textual Tradition of the Arabic Plotinus. The *Theology of Aristotle*, its *ru'ūs al-masā'il*, and the Greek model of the Arabic Version", in A.M.I. van Oppenraay - R. Fontaine, (eds), *The Letter before the Spirit: The Importance of Text Editions for the Study of the Reception of Aristotle*, Brill, Leiden 2012, pp. 37-71 and the new partial edition in C. D'Ancona, *L'immortalità dell'anima IV 7[2] – Plotiniana Arabica: (pseudo-Teologia di Aristotele, capitoli I, III, IX)*, Pisa U.P., Pisa 2017 (Greco Arabo latino, Testi 5). A detailed analysis of the content can be found in P. Adamson, *The Arabic Plotinus. A Study of the 'Theology of Aristotle'*, Gorgias Press, Piscataway (NJ) 2017 (repr.).

<sup>33</sup> This reasoning can also be found in the metaphysical part of his *Kitāb al-Šifā'*, see Ibn Sīnā, *Ilāhiyyāt*, Arabic text and English translation in M.E. Marmura, *The Metaphysics of the Healing*, Brigham Young U.P., Provo (Utah) 2005, chs IV.1 and VI.2. In ch. VIII.1, Avicenna offers the proof of God's existence from the impossibility of an infinite regress of causes.

<sup>34</sup> Cf. esp. Behler, *Die Ewigkeit der Welt* (above., n. 8), pp. 110-14 and J. Janssens, "Creation and Emanation in Ibn Sīnā", *Documenti e studi sulla tradizione filosofica medievale* 8 (1997), pp. 455-77, esp. pp. 474-5.

<sup>35</sup> As is well-known, the *Theology* was used to prove the agreement between Plato and Aristotle, for example in al-Fārābī's *al-Ġam' bayna ra'yay al-ḡakīmayn Aflātūn al-ilāhī wa-Aristūṭālīs*, cf. the edition and French translation in F.M. Najjar - D. Mallet, *L'Harmonie entre les opinions de Platon et d'Aristote*, Damascus 1999, pp. 130, 142, 152. A more recent edition with an Italian trans. can be found in al-Fārābī, *L'armonia delle opinioni dei due sapienti, il divino Platone e Aristotele*, ed. by C. Martini Bonadeo, Pisa U.P., Pisa 2008 (Greco Arabo Latino. Le vie del sapere, 3). As is also well-known, there are serious doubts about the attribution of this work to al-Fārābī: see M. Rashed, "On the Authorship of the *Treatise on the Harmonization of the Opinions of the Two Sages* Attributed to al-Fārābī", *Arabic Sciences and Philosophy* 19 (2009), pp. 43-82 and D. Janos, "Al-Fārābī, Creation *ex nihilo*, and the Cosmological Doctrine of *K. al-Jam'* and *Jawābāt'*", *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 129 (2009), pp. 1-17.

himself in this way wishing to follow the practice of the Ancients. The Ancients were only forced to mention time regarding the beginning of creation because the Ancients wished to describe the generation (*kawn*) of things, and were forced to incorporate time in their description of the generation and in their description of creation, which was not in time at all, in order to distinguish between the first, high causes and the second, low causes. This is because when one wants to be clear about and recognize cause, one is forced to mention time, because there is no doubt that the cause is prior to its effect, so that one imagines that priority is time, and that every agent performs its act in time. But this is not the case. I mean that not every agent performs its act in time, and not every cause is prior to its effect in time. If you want to know whether [a given] thing acted on is temporal or not, then consider the agent. If it is under time, then the thing acted on is inevitably under time. And if the cause is temporal, the effect is also temporal. So the agent and the cause indicate the nature of the thing acted on and the effect: if they are under time or not under time.<sup>36</sup>

Once one accepts that the *Theology of Aristotle* actually represents Aristotle's positions, one indeed finds enough material to justify the interpretation offered by Avicenna in his answer to al-Bīrūnī. Even if one speaks of the causal relation between the creator and the world, it is still possible to think of this relation as not being in time. Instead, the action of the cause is in time, only if the agent is in time. But since the eternal acting creator is not in time, his creation is not in time, either. This is exactly the line of thought that is found in Avicenna's *Metaphysics*. Accordingly, he comments upon the passage cited above as follows:

I say that the procession of the act from the True First is only posterior to the first beginning, not in time, but rather on account of the essence, according to what is proven in the books. But when the ancients wanted to express causality and when they needed to mention priority – whereas priority includes time in [its] expression, as [it is] in the meaning for someone untrained – then their expressions make one imagine that the act of the True First is a temporal act, and that its precedence is a temporal one. But this is wrong.<sup>37</sup>

There are other similar passages in the *Theology* that could further strengthen Avicenna's interpretation.<sup>38</sup> Accordingly, Avicenna's reply to al-Bīrūnī, read together with the *Theology* and his commentary upon it, reveals the following picture. Avicenna considered the *Theology* to be an authentic Aristotelian work.<sup>39</sup> Thus, he also believed he was following an Aristotelian

<sup>36</sup> Ps.-Aristotle, *Uṭūlū ḡīyyā*, pp. 27.7-28.3 Badawī (trans. by Adamson [above, n. 32], p. 142, slightly modified).

<sup>37</sup> Ibn Sīnā, *Ṣarḥ Kitāb Uṭūlū ḡīyyā*, p. 47.1-5 Badawī.

<sup>38</sup> Cf. for example Ps.-Aristotle, *Uṭūlū ḡīyyā*, p. 114.14-16 (trans. by Adamson, *Arabic Plotinus* [above, n. 32], p. 143): "You must remove from your imagination every generation (*kawn*) in time if you want to know how the true, abiding, noble beings (*anniyāt*) were originated from the First Originator, because they are only generated from Him atemporally (*bi-ḡayr zamān*), and between the origination and the Originator, and the making and the Maker, there is no intermediary at all". Additionally, it is often suggested in the *Theology* that God acts only through the fact that He is, which of course leads to the conclusion that if He is eternal, he eternally acts. Cf. Ps.-Aristotle, *Uṭūlū ḡīyyā*, p. 71.14-15 Badawī: "The perfect Creator only acts through the fact that He is, and not through one of his properties".

<sup>39</sup> Despite the fact that Avicenna apparently knew of doubts about its authenticity, see D. Gutas, *Avicenna and the Aristotelian Tradition. Introduction to Reading Avicenna's Philosophical Works*, Brill, Leiden - Boston 2014 (2<sup>nd</sup> edition), p. 58. The same view, namely that Avicenna treated the *Theology* as a genuine Aristotelian work, has also been argued for in M. Geoffroy - J. Janssens - M. Sebti, *Avicenne (Ibn Sīnā). Commentaire sur le livre Lambda de la Métaphysique d'Aristote (chapitres 6-10)*, Vrin, Paris 2014 (Études musulmanes), pp. 7-9. For further remarks on the influence of the *Theology* on Avicenna, see also Janssens, "Creation and Emanation" (above, n. 34).

doctrine regarding the eternity of the world as it is presented in the *Theology*. Nevertheless, it is obvious to the modern reader that he is in debt to the Neoplatonic (which in this case means Arabic Plotinian) tradition.

Nevertheless, it is important to highlight that Avicenna does argue for a kind of *creatio ex nihilo*.<sup>40</sup> Before Avicenna and al-Bīrūnī, al-Fārābī (d. 950 AD), who directly attacked Philoponus, seems to have been quite alone in defending Aristotle's doctrine of the eternity of the world. He also critically engaged with al-Kindī (d. around 870 AD), who on his part used the Philoponan arguments to argue for a creation of the world in time.<sup>41</sup> But al-Fārābī was in this respect opposed not only to al-Kindī, but of course also to the mainstream *Kalām*-tradition which extensively defended the temporal creation of the world *ex nihilo*.<sup>42</sup> As short as this overview might be, it sufficiently shows that al-Bīrūnī was not the first to attack Aristotle's doctrine of the eternity of the world, but could rely on a wide range of earlier arguments. Avicenna's remark that al-Bīrūnī might be influenced by John Philoponus raises the question of whether this influence is limited to the argument regarding the "teachings of the ancients" or extends to further arguments as well. Before we take a look at other works by al-Bīrūnī in which he critically engages with this question, his reply to Avicenna further illustrates just how familiar he was with the works of Philoponus.<sup>43</sup>

It should be far away from John Philoponus to be accused of pretence. This designation would be more justified for Aristotle, who adorned his blasphemies. I think you, o sage, did not engage with his [i.e. Philoponus'] book *On the Eternity of the World against Proclus*, nor did you engage with his book on what Aristotle has adorned<sup>44</sup> [i.e. *Contra Aristotelem*], and nor with his commentaries on the books by Aristotle.<sup>45</sup> This objection (*hāda l-i'tirād*) only aimed at determining the finitude of motion and time to be necessary with respect to the beginning. But Aristotle came close to this in his statement where he denies the existence of infiniteness. However, succumbing to his emotions he abandoned what he stated in this passage. Your statement that Aristotle does not, with his saying "the world has no

<sup>40</sup> Cf. Janssens, "Creation and Emanation" (above, n. 34), pp. 468 und 474-5.

<sup>41</sup> Regarding al-Kindī, cf. K. Staley, "Al-Kindī on Creation: Aristotle's Challenge to Islam", *Journal of the History of Ideas* 50 (1989), pp. 355-70, Davidson, *Proofs for Eternity* (above, n. 8), pp. 106-15 and P. Adamson, *Al-Kindī*, Oxford U.P., Oxford 2007, ch. 4, and regarding al-Fārābī, M. Mahdi, "Alfarabi against Philoponus", *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 26 (1967), pp. 233-60 and M. Rashed, "al-Fārābī's Lost *Treatise on Changing Beings* and the Possibility of a Demonstration of the Eternity of the World", *Arabic Sciences and Philosophy* 18 (2008), pp. 19-58. Of course, here one must address again the question of the authorship of *al-Ġam'* (see n. 35), where the author argues for creation in time. See again Rashed, "On the Authorship" (above, n. 35), pp. 56-64.

<sup>42</sup> Davidson, *Proofs for Eternity* (above, n. 8), ch. V gives an outline of the various authors within *Kalām* embracing arguments against the eternity of the world.

<sup>43</sup> Compare this account to the much shorter version in the edition by Muhammad Tancī. There, al-Bīrūnī's defense of Philoponus is omitted. Cf. the edition in Tancī, "Beyrūnī'nin Ibn-i Sinā'ya" (above, n. 3), p. 273. In his introductory remarks (pp. 231-3), Tancī writes that there are flaws in the edition by Nasr and Mohaghegh, and that he used two manuscripts from Istanbul, which had not been taken into account. However, Avicenna's pupil al-Ma'sūmī (d. 1029 AD), who was charged with answering to al-Bīrūnī's replies, reiterated his master's critique of Philoponus. Cf. *As'ila*, p. 69. I want to thank Hayim Malkhasy for his help regarding Tancī's edition.

<sup>44</sup> By the word *zahrafa*, which comes up twice in this reply and which I render literally as "to adorn", al-Bīrūnī intends to signify that Aristotle embellished his false doctrines in a way that they seem to be true.

<sup>45</sup> In his recently published doctoral dissertation, Andreas Lammer discusses many aspects of Avicenna's physics with respect to its Late Antique heritage. In the course of his analysis, he often indicates the influence of Philoponus on Avicenna, as well. Thus, this accusation by al-Bīrūnī cannot be entirely true. See A. Lammer, *The Elements of Avicenna's Physics. Greek Sources and Arabic Innovations*, W. de Gruyter, Berlin - Boston 2018 (*Scientia graeco-arabica*, 20).

beginning”, suppose that it has no creator, is a statement without any validity (*qawḥ laysa labū maḥṣūl*). For if the actions did not have a beginning, it would be impossible to imagine a world with a creator. If it is Aristotle’s teaching that the world has a creational, not temporal, beginning, why should he mention the group [of the ancients] and their testimonies, although a change in the attributes does not necessitate a change in the essence?<sup>46</sup>

This reply indicates that al-Bīrūnī indeed knowingly uses arguments against Aristotle that had already been set forth by Philoponus. After initially questioning an insignificant point in his letter to Avicenna, in his reply al-Bīrūnī instead critiques the core of Aristotle’s argument. He claims that Aristotle, rather than Philoponus, should be accused of betraying his personal beliefs because, according to al-Bīrūnī, he proved elsewhere the impossibility of an infinite existence (*wuḡūd lā nihāyat*). Al-Bīrūnī does not specify the exact source, but he might be appealing to *Physics* III 4-8. After a terminological introduction, Aristotle first proves the impossibility of an infinite body.<sup>47</sup> Immediately after doing so, he nevertheless admits that there are things that seem to have no beginning or end, for example time and a sequence of numbers. To address this problem, he introduces the distinction between actual and potential infinity, for time or a sequence of numbers could potentially be continued infinitely. In actuality, however, one is concerned only with pieces or parts.<sup>48</sup> Nevertheless, al-Bīrūnī insists that Aristotle had proven the impossibility of the infinite, in general. Perhaps this point could be related to another issue at stake in the correspondence, namely, Zeno’s paradox of a faster body that is never able to overtake a slower body. Avicenna answers that Aristotle allows a line to be infinitely divided only potentially, but never actually. Thus, the faster body does indeed overtake the slower body in actuality, although the distance between the bodies may become smaller and smaller in potentiality. Al-Bīrūnī replies that either he is not able to understand this difference, namely of potentiality and actuality, or it is just mere sophistry.<sup>49</sup> If we assume that al-Bīrūnī indeed has *Physics* III 4-8 in mind, then his remark would be similar to Philoponus’ criticism that Aristotle himself argued for the impossibility of traversing time, an argument later picked up by al-Kindī.<sup>50</sup> Al-Kindī, in fact, transmitted this sort of argumentation concerning the impossibility of a past time.<sup>51</sup> With his introductory sentence, “this objection only aimed at determining the finitude of motion and time to be necessary with respect to the beginning”, al-Bīrūnī rightly traces the origin of these arguments from the impossibility of the infinite back to Philoponus.<sup>52</sup> However, one might still wonder what he refers to by “this objection”. Considering Avicenna’s earlier reply to al-Bīrūnī, namely that one should look into Philoponus’ commentary on *De Generatione et corruptione*,

<sup>46</sup> Ibn Sīnā and al-Bīrūnī, *As’ila*, pp. 51.13 - 52.10 Nasr - Mohaghegh. Bausani, “Some Considerations” (above, n. 10), pp. 80f., translates the last sentence as follows: “and if Aristotle meant that the world does not have a temporal beginning but has only a creational beginning, how is this in agreement with what he says about those who believe that change in the attributes does not necessarily involve a change in the essence?” Building on this translation, he writes that al-Bīrūnī is concerned here with a change in God’s essence. Cf. G. Strohmaier, *Al-Bīrūnī. In den Gärten der Wissenschaft. Ausgewählte Texte aus den Werken des muslimischen Universalgelehrten*, Reclam, Leipzig 2002, pp. 49-50, n. 6.

<sup>47</sup> Arist., *Phys.* III 5.

<sup>48</sup> Arist., *Phys.* III 6, 206 a 9-12.

<sup>49</sup> Cf. *As’ila*, p. 53.9 Nasr - Mohaghegh.

<sup>50</sup> Cf. Davidson, *Proofs for Eternity* (above, n. 8), p. 87, and Adamson, *al-Kindī* (above, n. 41), p. 96.

<sup>51</sup> Cf. Davidson, *Proofs for Eternity* (above, n. 8), p. 107, and Adamson, *al-Kindī* (above, n. 41), p. 96.

<sup>52</sup> Since al-Bīrūnī does not mention al-Kindī, we cannot be sure of whether here he draws directly on Philoponus or depends on al-Kindī as a transmitter.

one finds a relevant comment in II 5. On Aristotle's account that elements cannot transform into each other in a way that is not circular, Philoponus comments: "This is impossible, for the infinite is not traversable".<sup>53</sup> Philoponus draws on the same passage in the *De Aeternitate mundi contra Aristotelem*, as Simplicius reports:

For Aristotle himself, he [Philoponus] says, showed from this in the *De Generatione [et corruptione]* that it is impossible that the elements of bodies should be infinite in number, if indeed one is generated out of the other. For the infinite cannot be traversed [...].<sup>54</sup>

Given al-Bīrūnī's reference both to Philoponus' claim regarding the beginning of motion and time and to the connection Philoponus draws to Aristotle's apparent denial of the existence of the infinite, al-Bīrūnī here likely refers to one of these passages (or both). However, whether we assume that in his reply to Avicenna he draws from the *Physics* or from Philoponus' report and critique of the *De Generatione et corruptione*, the result remains the same, namely that al-Bīrūnī is deeply influenced by Philoponus and uses the same critique in his discussion of the (Ps.-)Aristotelian account Avicenna gave in his reply. In response to Avicenna's suggestion that al-Bīrūnī looks closely at Philoponus' commentary on *De Generatione et corruptione*, al-Bīrūnī now refers to a number of treatises, namely to the two treatises against the eternity of the world and to the various commentaries by Philoponus. Thereby, he gives the impression to Avicenna (and to us) of knowing these works and using them directly. At least in the case of the *De Aeternitate mundi contra Proclum*, we can be certain that this work was available to him, thanks to his numerous quotations in other works.<sup>55</sup>

As for Avicenna, we concluded that he was deeply influenced by an Arabic compendium of the Neoplatonic *Enneads*. Thus, his position can be labelled as being in some way Neoplatonic. As we just highlighted, this label is certainly true for al-Bīrūnī, too. However, there is a decisive difference not only in terms of the sources they use, but also in the way they think about the origins of their argument. Whereas al-Bīrūnī knowingly uses Philoponus to take an anti-Aristotelian position, Avicenna believes that he defends the eternity of the world on Aristotelian grounds, unaware of his departure from the original Peripatetic doctrine.

This final look at the rest of al-Bīrūnī's reply has revealed the same doubt concerning creation and eternal matter that we have already seen in his *India*: al-Bīrūnī is not willing to accept that there can be creation without a temporal beginning. For Avicenna, there is no contradiction in assuming an eternally acting God whose creation has no beginning in time. But for al-Bīrūnī, the existence of a creator implies a beginning of his creation. Lastly, he remarks that Aristotle's report of the "teachings of the ancients" is either way superfluous. For even if there occurred alterations in the properties (*ṣifāt*) of the heavens, this would not imply a change in their essence (*ḍāt*).

## 2. *Philoponus in al-Bīrūnī's India*

So far, we have found indications for a possible influence of Philoponus on al-Bīrūnī's critique, firstly regarding the argument against the "teachings of the ancients", and secondly regarding actual

<sup>53</sup> Philop., *In De Gen. et corr.*, p. 254.18-19 Vitelli (transl. by Kupreeva, *On Aristotle. On Coming-to-Be and Perishing II 5-11* [above, n. 22], p. 46). This has already been pointed out by Davidson, *Proofs for Eternity* (above, n. 8), p. 87.

<sup>54</sup> Simplicii *In Aristotelis Physicorum libros quattuor posteriores commentaria*, ed. H. Diels, Reimer, Berlin 1895 (*CAG X*), p. 1178.15-18 (trans. Wildberg, *Philoponus. Against Aristotle* (above, n. 21), fragm. 132, p. 144).

<sup>55</sup> See the overview in E. Giannakis, "The Quotations from John Philoponus' *De Aeternitate mundi contra Proclum* in al-Bīrūnī's *India*", *Zeitschrift für Geschichte der arabisch-islamischen Wissenschaften* 8 (1993), pp. 185-95.

and potential infinity of time. But further evidence of another argument that may have formed al-Bīrūnī's attitude towards the problem of the world's eternity has escaped our attention. When we look back to the end of what Philoponus had to say about the "teachings of the ancients", we find the following sentence:

But if it has rightly been shown by Aristotle that all bodies have a limited capacity (δύναμις), [and if] the heavens, too, are a body, [then] it is evident that they are also liable to destruction because the term 'destruction' applies to them, even though so far they clearly have not been affected by anything leading to destruction.<sup>56</sup>

In this passage, Philoponus introduces another influential argument against the eternity of the world. He refers to *Physics* VIII 10, where Aristotle proves the incorporeality of the Prime Mover: a finite body can possess only a finite capacity. But in order to account for the infinite motion of the heavens, it is necessary to ascribe infinite power to the Prime Mover. Therefore, the Prime Mover cannot be bodily. According to Philoponus, this implies that the heavens are perishable. For they are bodily and, therefore, do not possess infinite power.<sup>57</sup> Interestingly, al-Kindī omits this argument when arguing against the eternity of the world, as Peter Adamson has pointed out.<sup>58</sup> But in *India*, al-Bīrūnī again draws attention to *Physics* VIII 10 in the context of the nature of the Prime Mover and the outermost sphere:

Some hold the existence of a ninth sphere to be a necessity on account of the rotation from East to West, in so far as it moves in this direction and compels everything which it comprehends to move in the same direction. Others assume the ninth sphere on account of the same motion, but suppose that it by itself is motionless. The tendency of the representatives of the former theory is known.<sup>59</sup> However, Aristotle has proved that each moving body is brought into motion by a mover not within itself.<sup>60</sup> Therefore, this ninth sphere would presuppose a mover outside itself. What, however, should prevent this mover from putting the eight spheres into motion without the intermediation of a ninth sphere? As regards the representatives of the second view,<sup>61</sup> one might almost think that they had knowledge of the words of Aristotle, which we have quoted, and that they knew that the first mover is motionless, for they represent the ninth sphere as motionless and as the source of the East to West rotation. However, Aristotle has also proved that the First Mover is not a body,<sup>62</sup> whilst he [i.e. the First Mover] must be a body, if they describe Him as a globe, as a sphere, as comprehending [something else], and as [being] in rest.<sup>63</sup> Thus the theory of the ninth sphere is proved to be impossible. To the same effect are the words of Ptolemy in the preface of his *Almagest*: "The first cause of the first motion of the universe, if we consider the motion by itself, is according to our opinion an invisible and motionless god, and the study of this subject we call a divine one. We perceive his action in the highest heights of the world, but as an altogether different one from the action of those substances, which can be perceived by the

<sup>56</sup> Cited after Wildberg, *Philoponus. Against Aristotle* (above, n. 21), *Fragm.* 80, p. 90.

<sup>57</sup> Cf. Davidson, *Proofs for Eternity* (above, n. 8), pp. 89-93, and for the reception in Sa'adya, *ibid.*, pp. 101f.

<sup>58</sup> Cf. Adamson, *Al-Kindī* (above, n. 41), p. 95.

<sup>59</sup> This is the position of other Indian scientists that al-Bīrūnī has mentioned right before the cited passage.

<sup>60</sup> Cf. Arist., *Phys.* VIII 4, and *Metaph.* XII 7.

<sup>61</sup> I.e. those who "assume the ninth sphere on account of the same motion, but suppose that it by itself is motionless".

<sup>62</sup> Cf. Arist., *Phys.* VIII 10.

<sup>63</sup> This last description is somewhat strange, since it is famously Aristotle's doctrine that the Prime Mover is himself unmoved. He probably means that God cannot be described in such physical terms.

senses.<sup>64</sup> These are the words of Ptolemy on the First Mover, without any indication of the [ninth] sphere, which is mentioned by John Philoponus on the basis of him [i.e. Ptolemy] in his refutation of Proclus, where he says: "Plato did not know the ninth sphere, which has no stars and the conception of which Ptolemy claimed".<sup>65</sup>

The issue at stake here is the existence of a ninth, starless sphere above the sphere of the fixed stars. Al-Bīrūnī rejects the first theory of some Indian astronomers, according to whom it moves both itself and everything that it encompasses, on the grounds of the Aristotelian arguments for the Prime Mover being itself unmoved. The possibility remains that this ninth sphere is itself motionless, but is nevertheless the source for the diurnal rotation. Against this account, al-Bīrūnī again uses Aristotelian arguments. Since the Prime Mover cannot be corporeal, and since spheres are regarded as bodies,<sup>66</sup> the Prime Mover cannot be a sphere. The immateriality of the Prime Mover is a result of the arguments in *Physics* VIII 10. We have already seen that this chapter was an important source for Philoponus (and consequently for al-Bīrūnī), grounding his argument against the eternity of the world. In the context of the question of the existence of the ninth sphere, al-Bīrūnī accepts Aristotle's argument that no body can have infinite power. This is the basis for Philoponus' argument against the eternity of the world, as well. Al-Bīrūnī contrasts the nature of the Prime Mover with the nature of the spheres, which are bodily.<sup>67</sup> Although he does not explicitly say it here, one can be sure that al-Bīrūnī would also be willing to contrast the eternal nature of the Prime Mover with the non-eternal nature of the heavens, since they are finite bodies and God is not. This contrast would also be along the lines of the Philoponian argument.

Before I present some further evidence for such a reading, a brief look at the end of the cited passage might be of interest. Not only Philoponus, but also Simplicius reported in Late Antiquity that Ptolemy claimed the existence of a sphere above that of the fixed stars to account for the precession of the equinoxes.<sup>68</sup> It is quite surprising that al-Bīrūnī, who is famous mostly for his astronomical works, refutes claims about the existence of a ninth sphere by appealing to philosophical arguments that ultimately stem from Aristotle. In addition, he criticizes Philoponus for ascribing this theory to Ptolemy, since al-Bīrūnī himself believes this ascription to be an uncertain report. This short remark provides us with further evidence of how well al-Bīrūnī knew Philoponus' work. Furthermore, it

<sup>64</sup> Cf. Ptolemaeus, *Almagest*, I.1, transl. by G. J. Toomer, Princeton U.P., Princeton 1984, pp. 35-6.

<sup>65</sup> Al-Bīrūnī, *India*, pp. 183.19-184.15 (trans. by Sachau, *Alberuni's India*, vol. I, pp. 223-7, modified). The citation from Philoponus is from his *De Aeternitate mundi contra Proclum*, ed. H. Rabe, Teubner, Leipzig 1899, ch. 13.18, p. 537.7-10. Sachau translates from the Arabic as follows: "[...] where he says: 'Plato did not know a ninth, starless sphere'. And, according to Johannes, it was this, i.e. the negation of the ninth sphere, which Ptolemy meant to say". This is the opposite of what Philoponus actually says about Ptolemy. The Greek text as well as al-Bīrūnī's account leave no doubt.

<sup>66</sup> Cf. for example al-Bīrūnī, *The Book of Instruction in the Elements of the Art of Astrology* (*Kitāb al-Taḥḥīm li-awā'il ṣinā'at al-tanḡīm*), ed. and transl. by R. Wright, Luzac & Co, London 1934, nr. 120, p. 43.

<sup>67</sup> However, this is only another piece of evidence for a possible of influence of Philoponus on al-Bīrūnī in general terms. In this passage, he does not connect this argument with the non-eternity of the world.

<sup>68</sup> Cf. Simpl., *In De Caelo*, p. 462.12-31 Heiberg. They might refer to the second book of Ptolemy's *Planetary Hypotheses*, transl. by L. Nix, in J.L. Heiberg, *Claudii Ptolemaei Opera quae exstant Omnia*, Vol. 2: *Opera Astronomica Minora*, Teubner, Leipzig 1907, pp. 122, 123, and 125. There, Ptolemy introduces a sphere (*kura*) as a mover for the sphere of the fixed stars. However, Ptolemy does not call this a 'ninth sphere'. Al-Bīrūnī knew this work and used it extensively in *al-Qānūn al-Maṣ'ūdī* (*The Maṣ'udic Canon*). This can be easily seen from the entries in the index, cf. *al-Qānūn al-Maṣ'ūdī*, ed. Hyderabad 1956. He refers to it as *Kitāb al-Manṣūrāt*, cf. W. Hartner, "Mediaeval Views on Cosmic Dimensions and Ptolemy's *Kitāb al-Manṣūrāt*", in I.B. Cohen - R. Taton (eds.), *Mélanges Alexandre Koyré*. Vol. I: *L'aventure de la science*, Hermann, Paris 1964 (Histoire de la Pensée XII. École Pratique des Hautes Études), pp. 254-82.

nicely underlines that al-Bīrūnī indeed has philosophical interests, is familiar with the Aristotelian and Neoplatonic texts, and that although he may be critical towards Peripatetic philosophy in some respects, he nevertheless adopts its arguments in others.

### 3. *A hitherto unnoticed passage from al-Bīrūnī's Kitāb Taḥdīd nihāyat al-amākin*

There are further references to Philoponus in al-Bīrūnī's works. The fact that al-Bīrūnī also cites Philoponus' *De Aeternitate mundi contra Proclum* five times in his *India*, in completely different contexts, reveals his familiarity with this work.<sup>69</sup> However, in what follows I will focus on one further passage, which I believe deserves particular attention. In the introduction of the geographical work *Kitāb Taḥdīd nihāyat al-amākin*, which I discussed above, al-Bīrūnī describes the formation of mountains, oceans, and rivers, as well as their alterations. The following excerpt leads us back to our first object of inquiry, namely to the question of the eternity of the world.

I say now: although we arrive through rational proofs and true logical syllogisms (*al-dalā'il al-'aqliyya wa-l-qiyāsāt al-manṭiqiyya*) at the knowledge of the temporal origin (*ḥadaṭ*) of the world and at [the fact] that the enumerable parts of its duration (*muddatihī*), which emerge into actuality and existence, have a temporal beginning (*ibtidā' min awwalihā*), we cannot obtain knowledge about the quantity of such parts through such or similar proofs, in order that we could know the date of the origination of the world. For the syllogism is built in the following [way]: a body cannot be separated from the accidents (*ḥawādīt*), which succeed one another upon it. Everything, which cannot be separated from the accidents, occurs in time (*ḥādīt*) like them. Therefore, the body is originated in time (*muhḍaṭ*), not eternal [*azalī*], and a temporal origin (*ḥadaṭ*) results for the body according to the first figure (*ṣakl*).<sup>70</sup> It is impossible, that the accidents (*ḥawādīt*) succeed one another infinitely because this would necessitate the eternity of time, which is impossible. For if we claim that the past parts of time, i.e. periods, are existent and enumerable and can receive increase, and if every existent and enumerable is finite, so that it starts with '1' and comes to an end at the limit of the number, then time has a beginning and an ending at a certain moment (*ān*). From the first figure (*ṣakl*) the finitude of time and its temporal origination (*ḥadaṭ*) results.<sup>71</sup>

When I called this passage a "hitherto unnoticed" passage, I do not mean to imply that nobody has ever cited this passage. Rather, until now, no use has been made of this account in the reconstruction of al-Bīrūnī's philosophical positions. This passage may have escaped rigorous investigation because the terminology employed in it is not particularly classical. Most importantly, the argument revolves around the terms 'accidents' (in Arabic *ḥawādīt*, more commonly *a'rād*), 'temporal origination' (*ḥadaṭ*, more commonly *hudūt*, as opposed to *qidam*; at the same time, *ḥadaṭ* can be the singular form of *ḥawādīt*, accidents, which led to confusion in the mentioned translation by Jamil Ali), and 'created' or 'occurring in time' (*muhḍaṭ* or *ḥādīt*). Once the terminology is clarified, the argument itself is not very difficult to follow: first, a body cannot be without accidents. Since the accidents themselves are in time, whatever cannot be

<sup>69</sup> See the analysis in Giannakis, "The Quotations from John Philoponus" (above, n. 55).

<sup>70</sup> This means that the middle term (here "what cannot be separated from accidents") stands chiastically.

<sup>71</sup> Al-Bīrūnī, *Kitāb Taḥdīd nihāyat al-amākin*, pp. 38.13-40.2 Bulgakow. Compare to the (not always entirely comprehensible) translation in Ali, *The Determination of the Coordinates* (above, n. 9), pp. 14f. Nasr, *Introduction* (above, n. 10), pp. 116-17 also cites this passage, but without highlighting its importance, and without resolving the difficulties of Jamil Ali's translation.

without accidents must be in time, as well. Therefore, the body has to be in time, i.e. there has to be a beginning in time for it. A possible objection could be that this body is eternal, while the accidents, which are in time, succeed upon this body infinitely. This objection is subsequently refuted. For, this being possible, it would be necessary for time to be eternal. We have already seen that al-Bīrūnī received the refutation of a potential infinity of time from Philoponus, and we have discussed briefly the impact Philoponus had on al-Kindī in this regard.<sup>72</sup> This train of thought is very well documented, especially in *kalām*. Herbert A. Davidson, who has already provided an overview of the different authors who adopt this proof, has called this the “standard *Kalām* proof for creation”.<sup>73</sup> However, al-Bīrūnī's objection against an infinite succession of accidents seems to be an addition to the original *kalām*-proof. Although this proof for the finiteness of time, derived from Philoponus, was well known and widely adopted in *kalām*, we have no witness that it was added to the standard *kalām*-proof of accidents before al-Bīrūnī. Davidson ascribes this sort of reasoning to al-Ġuwaynī (d. 1085 AD).<sup>74</sup>

From the various authors engaging with the standard *kalām*-proof, I want to draw attention only to al-Bīrūnī's contemporary Ibn al-Ḥammār (d. after 1017 AD), also known as Ibn Suwār. He wrote a treatise with the informative title “Treatise on [the fact] that the proof by John Philoponus on the temporal origination of the world has to be preferred to the proof by the *mutakallimūn*” (*Maqāla fī anna dalīl Yahyā al-Nahwī 'alā ḥadaṭ al-'ālam awlā bi-l-qubūl min dalīl al-mutakallimīn aṣlan*).<sup>75</sup> In this small treatise, he argues against the proof from accidents, which he ascribes to the *mutakallimūn*.<sup>76</sup> He describes the proof from accidents with the same terminology we know from al-Bīrūnī's *Kitāb Tahdīd nihāyat al-amākin* and goes on to explain this terminology:

The [*mutakallimūn*] say: a body cannot be separated from the accidents (*ḥawādīṭ*) and cannot precede them. Everything that cannot be separated from the accidents and cannot precede them, is originated in time (*muhḍat*). Therefore, any body is originated in time. [...] By ‘*ḥawādīṭ*’, they mean accidents (*a'rād*). [...] What they mean by ‘*muhḍat*’, which is included in the major premise, is something existing after non-existence (*'adam*).<sup>77</sup>

<sup>72</sup> Cf. again Davidson, *Proofs for Eternity* (above, n. 8), pp. 92 and 107 and Adamson, *al-Kindī* (above, n. 41), ch. 4. According to Averroes, this is an extension by later *mutakallimūn*, cf. H.A. Wolfson, “The Kalam Arguments for Creation in Saadia, Averroes, Maimonides and St. Thomas”, in *Saadia Anniversary Volume*, New York 1943, pp. 197-245, esp. p. 213.

<sup>73</sup> Cf. Davidson, *Proofs for Eternity* (above, n. 8), pp. 134-43. For further sources, cf. H.A. Davidson, “John Philoponus as a Source of Medieval Islamic and Jewish Proofs of Creation”, *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 89 (1969), pp. 357-91, Wolfson, “The Kalam Arguments” (above, n. 72), esp. pp. 211-14, H.A. Wolfson, *The Philosophy of the Kalam*, Harvard U.P., Cambridge (Mass.) 1976, pp. 392-409, and P. Adamson - R. Wisnovsky, “Yahyā Ibn 'Adī on a Kalām Argument for Creation”, *Oxford Studies in Medieval Philosophy* 5 (2017), pp. 213-39. The first witness in *kalām* is Abū al-Ḥudayl, cf. J. van Ess, *Theologie und Gesellschaft im 2. und 3. Jahrhundert Hidschra. Eine Geschichte des religiösen Denkens im frühen Islam*, W. de Gruyter, Berlin, 1991-1997, vol. III, p. 231.

<sup>74</sup> Cf. Davidson, *Proofs for Eternity* (above, n. 8), pp. 144-6. I do not intend to claim that all the subsequent discussion is dependent on al-Bīrūnī in this respect, since this philosophical passage is well hidden in an otherwise geographical work.

<sup>75</sup> Edited in Badawī, *Al-Aflātūniyya al-muhḍata 'ind al-'arab*, Wikālat al-maṭbū'āt, Kuwait 1977<sup>2</sup>, pp. 243-7.

<sup>76</sup> Cf. Wolfson, *Philosophy in the Kalam* (above, n. 72), pp. 393-6.

<sup>77</sup> Ibn al-Ḥammār, *Maqāla fī dalīl Yahyā al-Nahwī*, ed. Badawī, in *al-Aflātūniyya al-muhḍata* (above n. 75), p. 243.9-16.

Additionally, that the meaning of *ḥadaṭ* is equivalent to *ḥudūt* is already clear from the title. This description of the terminology indicates that there was indeed some canonized form of this proof within *Kalām*, on which al-Bīrūnī relied. But the most interesting passage for our present purpose is the following:

If one were to admit to them that body does not lack accidents, and that each of the accidents that successively come to it [i.e. body] were originated, it would not follow that body is originated. For it is possible that this successively comes to it forever (*dā'imān*) and without interruption, so that it is not originated, even though each one of those accidents taken individually is originated. For it is possible that a given motion occurs in it, and then departs from it, and that rest occurs in it, then departs from it, and then a different motion arrives in it so that rest departs, and so on like this forever without cease, so that this repeats eternally (*abadan*). Thus [body] will not be without originated accidents, yet will itself be unoriginated.<sup>78</sup>

This is one of Ibn al-Ḥammār's arguments against the standard *Kalām*-version of this proof. In short, he argues that although accidents do occur in time and that bodies cannot be free of them, one could still conceive of an infinite chain of succeeding accidents. This would allow the body always to be equipped with temporal accidents, but at the same time not to be temporal itself. As such, this is exactly the way of reasoning that al-Bīrūnī later tries to refute in the above cited passage from his *Kitāb Taḥdīd nihāyat al-amākin*. As we have already pointed out, he argued that there cannot be such an infinite number of succeeding accidents, because in that case time would need to be infinite as well, which he rejects. A striking historical feature of this debate illuminates the importance of al-Bīrūnī's reception of the Philoponian tradition. Al-Bīrūnī and Ibn al-Ḥammār spent time together at the court of Maḥmūd of Ġaznā. As such, they were actual interlocutors advocating opposed stances regarding the legitimacy of this *Kalām*-argument. From their biographies, we can reconstruct the following: when he was already in his seventies, Ibn al-Ḥammār came to the court of Maḥmūd in 1017 AD, where he met al-Bīrūnī.<sup>79</sup> At this point, Ibn al-Ḥammār probably had already written his treatise against the *Kalām*-proof. Regarding the composition date of al-Bīrūnī's *Kitāb Taḥdīd nihāyat al-amākin*, the author himself informs us in the colophon that he finished it at Ġaznā in 1025 AD. Therefore, it is clear that al-Bīrūnī directly attacks Ibn al-Ḥammār's objection against the proof from accidents with his addition in the *Kitāb Taḥdīd nihāyat al-amākin*. In sum, this passage from al-Bīrūnī's *Kitāb Taḥdīd nihāyat al-amākin* gives us not only further evidence of his reception of Philoponus, but also adds a further step to the long history of the reception of the proof against the eternity of the world from accidents. Al-Bīrūnī was the first to connect this proof with another, originally Philoponian argument, namely from the finitude of time, in order to protect it against certain objections, such as the one he was confronted with by Ibn al-Ḥammār personally.

As a minor note, it should be emphasized that in this passage from his *Kitāb Taḥdīd nihāyat al-amākin*, it is not al-Bīrūnī's main purpose to address the ongoing discussions regarding the eternity of the world. His concern in the introduction is to emphasize the impossibility

<sup>78</sup> Ibn al-Ḥammār, *Maqāla fī dalīl Yahyā al-Naḥwī*, ed. Badawī, in *al-Aflātūniyya al-muḥdaṭa* (above n. 75), pp. 244.21-245.5; transl. by Adamson - Wisnovsky, "Yahyā Ibn 'Adī" (above, n. 73), p. 218.

<sup>79</sup> Cf. U. Rudolph (ed.), *Grundriss der Geschichte der Philosophie. Philosophie in der islamischen Welt*. Vol. 1, Schwabe, Basel 2012, p. 335. See the report by al-Bayhaqī, who also writes that al-Bīrūnī predicted Ibn al-Ḥammār's death through an accident. Cf. the English translation of some passages of his *Šiwān al-ḥikma* in M. Meyerhof, "Alī al-Bayhaqī's *Tatimmat Siwān al-Hikma*: A Biographical Work on Learned Men of the Islam", *Osiris* 8 (1948), pp. 122-217, esp. pp. 138-9.

of calculating an exact date of the world's creation, contrary to what "the people of the Book" have tried to do.<sup>80</sup> At no point does he refer to the possibility that the world could be eternal. For al-Bīrūnī, the world's creation in time is a certainty. Finally, this reference to the "people of the Book" brings us back to the beginning of the present paper, i.e. to his question concerning the eternity of the world in the correspondence with Avicenna. There, he writes to Avicenna: "Also, we know about its temporal extent even less than what the people of the Book report and what is told us in the tradition of (*'an*) the Indians and similar people, so that it is obviously of no value to the investigations".<sup>81</sup> In light of his account in the *Kitāb Tahdīd nihāyat al-amākin*, it becomes evident that he is talking only about the attempts of the Jews and Christians to determine the age of the world.

#### 4. Conclusion

The present investigation offers a clear picture of the ways in which al-Bīrūnī engaged with the Aristotelian corpus. He read the Aristotelian texts closely together with Philoponus' refutations of Proclus and Aristotle on the eternity of the world (and with Philoponus' commentaries as well, if we believe to his account in his reply to Avicenna). This can be seen with regard to both his arguments and his familiarity with Philoponus' works. Al-Bīrūnī accepts the argument from the impossibility of traversing time and correctly ascribes it to Philoponus. With respect to the argument from accidents, which can be traced back to Philoponus, he could rely on an established tradition within *Kalām*. Furthermore, the passage on the existence of the ninth sphere in his *India* has brought to light further similarities. Al-Bīrūnī accepts the Aristotelian proofs that the Prime Mover is non-bodily, since his power must not be finite. This is the very same premise that Philoponus accepts in his argument against the eternal motion of the heavens, and al-Bīrūnī ultimately disproves this eternal motion as well. This is only one of few direct references to Philoponan works. Al-Bīrūnī even accuses Avicenna of not having devoted enough time to reading Philoponus' works.<sup>82</sup>

All in all, this evidence sufficiently establishes Philoponus' influence on al-Bīrūnī. Therefore, it also further evidences the impact Philoponus had on the Arabic tradition, in general. We already briefly hinted at the influence Philoponus had on Avicenna's understanding of Aristotle.<sup>83</sup> Against al-Bīrūnī's accusation that Avicenna did not study Philoponus' works carefully enough, quite the opposite seems to be the case. However, the engagement with Philoponus by both of these two great scholars of the Arabic medieval tradition had in each case rather opposite effects. For example, with respect to the concept of place, Avicenna tries to rescue the Aristotelian account against the Neoplatonists' critique (and critiques by his contemporaries, as well). In doing so, Avicenna had to take Philoponus' account into consideration, and found an elegant way to refute him.<sup>84</sup> As we now know, al-Bīrūnī, on the other hand, was himself willing to accept Philoponus criticism against Aristotle.

---

<sup>80</sup> Al-Bīrūnī, *Kitāb Tahdīd nihāyat al-amākin*, p. 41 Bulgakow (compare the transl. by Ali, *The Determination of the Coordinates* [above, n. 9], pp. 15-16).

<sup>81</sup> Ibn Sinā and al-Bīrūnī, *As'īla*, p. 12.10-12 Nasr - Mohaghegh.

<sup>82</sup> These outcomes are in line with what Cerami has to say about the correspondence. See Cerami, "The *De Caelo et Mundo*" (above, n. 1), pp. 309-12 and n. 2.

<sup>83</sup> See above n. 45.

<sup>84</sup> Cf. Lammer, *The Elements of Avicenna's Physics* (above, n. 45), pp. 307-428.



Finito di stampare nel mese di dicembre 2019  
presso le Industrie Grafiche della Pacini Editore S.p.A.  
Via A. Gherardesca • 56121 Ospedaletto • Pisa  
Tel. 050 313011 • Fax 050 3130300  
[www.pacineditore.it](http://www.pacineditore.it)

