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Plato and Aristotle Holding Scrolls: An Arabic Ekphrasis *of a Christian Painting?*

Alexander Treiger

Abstract
The present contribution analyzes an intriguing tradition that appears in al-Rāġib al-Iṣfahānī's (d. 422/1031) *Kitāb al-Ḏarīʿa ilā makārim al-šarīʿa* and Abū Ḥāmid al-Ġazālī's (d. 505/1111) *Mīzān al-ʿamal* and *Iḥyāʾ ʿulūm al-dīn*. This tradition discusses a painting of two philosophers holding scrolls with pithy sayings. An analysis (based on a wide array of related texts: from al-ʿĀmirī, al-Muṭahhar ibn Ṭāhir al-Maqdisī, and Arabic gnomologia) demonstrates that the philosophers are to be identified as Plato and Aristotle. It also shows (on the basis of a comparison to late-Byzantine and post-Byzantine Orthodox frescoes of Greek philosophers) that the Arabic tradition is, most likely, a literary depiction (*ekphrasis*) of an actual painting that once adorned a Christian church. The present contribution also suggests that the Arabic tradition in question owes its origin to the Muslim *Diyārāt* and *Zuhd* literatures, dedicated to Christian monasteries and asceticism respectively.

In Chapter 27 of the *Balance of Action* (*Mīzān al-ʿamal*) and in Book 1 of the *Revival of the Religious Sciences* (*Iḥyāʾ ʿulūm al-dīn*), the famous Muslim scholar Abū Ḥāmid al-Ġazālī (d. 505H./1111) recounts the following story:

> وقد رُوِيَ أنّه رُئِيَ صورة حكيمَيْن من الحكماء المتعبّدين / المتقدّمين* في مسجد وفي يد أحدهما رقعة فيها: "إن أحسنتَ كلّ شيء فلا تظنّنّ أنّك أحسنتَ شيئاً حتّى تعرف الله تعالى وتعلم أنّه مسبّب الأسباب وموجد الأشياء"، وفي يد الآخر: "كنتُ قبل أن أعرف الله تعالى أشرب وأظمأ حتّى إذا عرفتُه رَوِيتُ بلا شرب".
>
> It has been told that there was seen a picture (*ṣūra*) of two devout / ancient* philosophers in a mosque. One of them was holding a scroll (*ruqʿa*)[1] in his hand on which it was written: "If you (sg.) have mastered everything, do not think that you have mastered a thing, until you know God (may He be exalted!) and know that He is the Cause of causes and the Originator of [all] things". And in the hand of the other [there was a scroll]: "Before I knew God (may He be exalted!), I would drink and still be thirsty, until I came to know Him, and my thirst was quenched without drinking".[2]

As is often the case, especially for the *Balance of Action*, al-Ġazālī's direct source is al-Rāġib al-Iṣfahānī's (d. 422/1031) *The Method of [Acquiring] the Noble Qualities of the*

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[1] The word *ruqʿa* means "a piece (of cloth), a sheet (of parchment or paper)." I translate it idiomatically as a "scroll" throughout this paper.

[2] Al-Ġazālī, *Mīzān al-ʿamal*, ed. S. Dunyā, Dār al-maʿārif bi-Miṣr, Cairo 1964, Chapter 27, p. 351:3-9; al-Ġazālī, *Iḥyāʾ ʿulūm al-dīn*, 5 vols., al-Maktaba al-tawfīqiyya, Cairo n.d., Book 1, *bāb* 5, *waẓīfa* 6, vol. 1, p. 83:13-16. At the asterisk the reading of the *Mīzān* is given first, followed by the reading of the the *Iḥyāʾ*.

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Religious Law (*Kitāb al-Ḏarīʿa ilā makārim al-šarīʿa*), where this tradition appears in a nearly identical form.[3] The only notable variants are the following:

1. instead of المتعبّدين ("devout") or المتقدّمين ("ancient"), al-Rāġib al-Iṣfahānī's text has المتألّقين ("radiant"), which, however, seems to be a corruption of المتألهين ("divine[ly-minded]")—the latter reading being confirmed by the parallel place in Bahāʾ al-Dīn al-ʿĀmilī's (d. 1030/1621) *A Beggar's Bag* (*al-Kaškūl*), a source directly dependent on al-Rāġib al-Iṣfahānī's *Ḏarīʿa*;[4]
2. instead of مسجد ("a mosque") al-Rāġib al-Iṣfahānī's text has بعض مساجدهم ("one of their mosques"); the parallel place in al-ʿĀmilī's *al-Kaškūl* has بعض معابدهم ("one of their temples").

Who are these two philosophers? In order to identify them, we have to open a tenth-century Arabic philosophical work: al-ʿĀmirī's (d. 381/992) *On Life Everlasting* (*Kitāb al-Amad ʿalā l-abad*). Al-ʿĀmirī writes:

> من الحكايات المشهورة عن افلاطن انّه كان يقول لأصحابه: "إنّكم إن عرفتم كلّ شيء فلا تحسبوا انّكم عرفتم شيئاً ما لم تعرفوا الله عزّ وجل". ثمّ من الحكايات المشهورة عن ارسطاطاليس انّه كان يقول: "كنتُ قبل اليوم أشرب وأظمأ، حتّى إذا عرفتُ الله عزّ وجلّ فرويتُ بلا شرب".

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[3] Al-Rāġib al-Iṣfahānī, *Kitāb al-Ḏarīʿa ilā makārim al-šarīʿa*, ed. A. al-ʿAğamī, Dār al-Salām, Cairo 1428/2007, Chapter 2, section "al-Ḥaṯṯ ʿalā tanāwul al-bulġa min kull ʿilm wa-l-iqtiṣār ʿalayhi", 174:16-19: وقد روي أنه رئي صورة حكيمَيْن من القدماء المتألّقين في بعض مساجدهم وفي يد أحدهما رقعة فيها: إن أحسنت كل شيء فلا تظن أنّك أحسنت شيئا حتّى تعرف الله تعالى وتعلم أنه مسبّب الأسباب وموجد الأشياء، وفي يد الآخر: كنت قبل أن أعرف الله تعالى أشرب وأظمأ حتى إذا عرفته رويت بلا شرب. – I tentatively adopt al-Rāġib al-Iṣfahānī's death date indicated in the London manuscript of his *Mufradāt ġarīb al-Qurʾān*, as there seems to be no good reason to question it. See A. Key, "A Linguistic Frame of Mind: ar-Rāġib al-Iṣfahānī and What It Meant to Be Ambiguous", PhD diss., Harvard University 2012, p. 35. On al-Rāġib al-Iṣfahānī's influence upon al-Ġazālī, see W. Madelung, "Ar-Râġib al-Iṣfahânî und die Ethik al-Ġazâlîs", in R. Gramlich (ed.), *Islamkundige Abhandlungen: Fritz Meier zum sechzigsten Geburtstag*, Harrassowitz, Wiesbaden 1974, pp. 152-63; J. Janssens, "al-Ghazālī's *Mīzān al-ʿamal*: An Ethical Summa Based on Ibn Sīnā and al-Rāghib al-Iṣfahānī", in A. Akasoy – W. Raven (eds.), *Islamic Thought in the Middle Ages: Studies in Text, Transmission and Translation, in Honour of Hans Daiber*, Brill, Leiden 2008, pp. 123-38; Y. Mohamed, "The Ethical Philosophy of al-Rāghib al-Iṣfahānī", *Journal of Islamic Studies* 6.1 (1995), pp. 51-75; Id., "Knowledge and Purification of the Soul: An Annotated Translation with Introduction of Iṣfahānī's *Kitāb al-Dharīʿa ilā makārim al-sharīʿa* (58-76; 89-92)", *Journal of Islamic Studies* 9.1 (1998), pp. 1-34; Id., *The Path to Virtue: The Ethical Philosophy of al-Rāghib al-Iṣfahānī, An Annotated Translation, with Critical Introduction of Kitāb al-Dharīʿah ilā makārim al-sharīʿah*, International Institute of Islamic Thought and Civilization, Kuala Lumpur 2006; Id., "The Ethics of Education: al-Iṣfahānī's al-*Dharīʿa* as a Source of Inspiration for al-Ghazālī's *Mīzān al-ʿAmal*", *Muslim World* 101 (2011), pp. 633-57; Id., "The Duties of the Teacher: al-Iṣfahānī's *Dharīʿa* as a Source of Inspiration for al-Ghazālī's *Mīzān al-ʿAmal*", in G. Tamer (ed.), *Islam and Rationality: The Impact of al-Ghazālī*, Papers Collected on His 900th Anniversary, vol. 1, Brill, Leiden 2015, pp. 186-206.

[4] Bahāʾ al-Dīn al-ʿĀmilī, *al-Kaškūl*, ed. al-Sayyid Muḥammad al-Sayyid Ḥusayn al-Muʿallim, 4 vols., Mašhad 1427/2006, chapter on al-Sayyid Tāğ al-Dīn ibn Muġība, vol. 3, p. 1304, section 4090: روي أنه رؤي صورة حكيمين من الحكماء المتألهين في بعض معابدهم، وفي يد إحدهما رقعة فيها: إن أحسنت كل شيء فلا تظنن أنك أحسنت شيئا حتى تعرف الله وتعلم أنه مسبب الأسباب وموجد الأشياء، وفي يد الآخر: كنت قبل أن عرفت الله أشرب وأظمأ حتى إذا عرفته رويت بلا شرب. In the preceding pages, al-ʿĀmilī often quotes al-Rāġib al-Iṣfahānī's *Ḏarīʿa*. On al-ʿĀmilī, see C.E. Bosworth, *Bahāʾ al-Dīn al-ʿĀmilī and His Literary Anthologies*, University of Manchester, Manchester 1989. The designation of certain philosophers as *mutaʾallihūn* or (commonly) *ilāhiyyūn* is very common in Arabic philosophical literature: *al-ilāhiyyūn min al-falāsifa* are those who think rightly about God and are experts in metaphysics (*ilāhiyyāt*).

> One of the famous stories about Plato is that he used to say to his disciples:[5] "Even if you (pl.) should know everything, still do not consider yourselves as knowing anything, so long as you do not know God (may He be exalted and glorified!)." And one of the famous stories about Aristotle is that he used to say: "Before today I used to drink and be thirsty; but now that I have learned of God (may He be exalted and glorified!), my thirst has been quenched without drinking."[6]

With the help of this parallel place, both philosophers can be securely identified: unsurprisingly, these are Plato and Aristotle. Interestingly, however, al-ʿĀmirī does not specify that Plato and Aristotle were depicted in a "mosque" (or "temple") or that they were holding scrolls. Instead – in the case of Plato, at least – al-ʿĀmirī argues that this is something "he used to say to his disciples." As a result, Plato's statement is re-formulated in the 2nd person plural, as opposed to the 2nd person singular as in al-Rāġib al-Iṣfahānī and al-Ġazālī.

Another parallel appears in a tenth-century theological and historical work: al-Muṭahhar ibn Ṭāhir al-Maqdisī's *Book of Creation and History* (*Kitāb al-Bad' wa-l-tārīḫ*), written in the city of Bust in Sīǧistān (present-day Laškargāh in southwestern Afghanistan) ca. 355/966 at the request of an anonymous Sāmānid minister. In this book, al-Maqdisī indicates that he once met a man in Sābūr (Bīšāpūr in the province of Fārs in southwestern Iran), whose followers taught a doctrine that disagreed with that of the common folk (*yaḏhabūna maḏhaban yuḫālifūna ʿawāmm al-nās*). This man, according to al-Maqdisī, had some familiarity with philology (*ʿilm al-luġa*) and with the teachings of the ancients (*maḏāhib al-qudamā'*); he practiced extensive night vigils, long prayers, and fasting (*ṭūl tahaǧǧud wa-qiyām wa-kaṯrat ṣalāt wa-ṣiyām*) – much like the Ṣūfīs did – but he also held a secret doctrine, namely the belief in the fundamental unity of all spirits and their identity with God. It is in this context that he reportedly told al-Maqdisī the following:

> وحدّثني عن بعض مشائخه عن أبي يزيد البسطامي أنّه قال: "طلبتُ اللّٰه ستّين سنة فإذا أنا هو"، وعن ارسطاطاليس: "وُجِدَتْ صورة مصوّرة في بعض المواضع وفي يده كتاب مكتوب فيه: كنتُ أشرب شراباً ولا أروَى فلمّا عرفتُ البارئ (جلّ وعزّ) رَوِيتُ بلا شرب".
>
> He told me on the authority of one of his teachers about [or: on the authority of?] Abū Yazīd al-Biṣṭāmī that he said: "I sought God for sixty years, and lo, I am He"; and about Aristotle: "There was a painted picture (*ṣūra muṣawwara*) [of him] in one of the places, and in his hand he held a book (*kitāb*) in which it was written: 'I used to drink and never get sated, but when I came to know the Creator (may He be glorified and exalted!), my thirst was quenched without drinking'."[7]

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[5] The word *aṣḥāb* means "disciples" especially in Arabic biographical dictionaries.

[6] E.K. Rowson, *A Muslim Philosopher on the Soul and Its Fate: al-ʿĀmirī's Kitāb al-Amad ʿalā l-abad*, American Oriental Society, New Haven 1988, section III.13, pp. 76-7; cf. commentary p. 217. I have slightly modified Rowson's translation. On Saʿīd ibn Dāḏurmuz using al-ʿĀmirī's text, see V. Kaya, "*Kalām* and *Falsafa* Integrated for Divine Unity: Saʿīd b. Dādhurmuz's (5th/11th century) *Risāla fī l-Tawḥīd*", *Studia graeco-arabica* 4 (2014), pp. 65-123, at p. 69.

[7] [Al-Muṭahhar ibn Ṭāhir Al-Maqdisī], *Le livre de la Création et de l'histoire d'Abou-Zeid Ahmed ben Sahl el-Balkhi*, 6 vols., ed. Clément Huart, Paris 1899-1919, vol. 2, p. ٩١ (French trans.: vol. 2, p. 81); this passage is briefly discussed in F. Rosenthal, "Art and Aesthetics in Graeco-Arabic Wisdom Literature", in Id., *Four Essays on Art and Literature in Islam*, Brill, Leiden 1971, pp. 1-19, at p. 8. Al-Maqdisī goes on to compare this doctrine

In this text, only Aristotle is mentioned, while Plato does not appear at all.[8] What is significant here is that, in contradistinction to al-ʿĀmirī, al-Maqdisī specifically mentions that Aristotle was depicted in a painting and that he was holding a book – or, perhaps more generally, a piece of writing (in Classical Arabic the word *kitāb* can be used in this generic sense) – in which the statement attributed to him appeared. This brings al-Maqdisī's testimony much closer to al-Rāġib al-Iṣfahānī's and al-Ġazālī's. There are, of course, some minor textual variations between al-Maqdisī on the one hand and al-Rāġib al-Iṣfahānī and al-Ġazālī on the other, but they are easily explainable by the fact that al-Maqdisī was citing from memory a story he had heard years earlier. It is unfortunate that we have no way of identifying al-Maqdisī's mysterious Bīšāpūrian acquaintance, and so it is not possible to say more about the ultimate provenance of the story, except that it was obviously part of the latter's knowledge about the "teachings of the ancients."

Apart from these sources, the statement attributed to Aristotle (but not that attributed to Plato) appears also in a number of Arabic gnomologia: al-Mubaššir ibn Fātik's *The Choicest Maxims and the Best Sayings* (*Muḫtār al-ḥikam wa-maḥāsin al-kalim*, written in 440/1048-1049),[9] al-Šahrazūrī's *Promenade of Spirits and Garden of Joys* (*Nuzhat al-arwāḥ wa-rawḍat al-afrāḥ*, written in 665/1266-1267),[10] and three texts from the "*Ṣiwān al-ḥikma*" complex: the *Muḫtaṣar Ṣiwān al-ḥikma* (by ʿUmar ibn Sahlān al-Sāwī, fl. 540/1145), the *Muntaḫab Ṣiwān al-ḥikma*, and the *Philosophical Quartet*.[11]

It may be useful to present this statement in a tabular form, for easy comparison between the five gnomologies.[12]

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to that of certain Ṣūfīs, such as the "incarnationists" (*ḥulūliyya*, i.e., those who believe that God can dwell inside a human being) and the followers of al-Ḥallāǧ (*ḥallāǧiyya*). On al-Maqdisī, see also C. Adang, *Muslim Writers on Judaism and the Hebrew Bible: From Ibn Rabban to Ibn Hazm*, Brill, Leiden 1996, pp. 48-50.

[8] The tradition ascribed to the ninth-century Ṣūfī Abū Yazīd al-Biṣṭāmī is not relevant for our purposes.

[9] On al-Mubaššir ibn Fātik, see F. Rosenthal, "Al-Mubashshir ibn Fâtik: Prolegomena to an Abortive Edition", *Oriens* 13-14 (1960-1961), pp. 132-58. On al-Mubaššir's Syriac sources see Y.N. Arzhanov, "The Arabic Version of the Syriac Gnomologies 'On the Soul' by Mubaššir b. Fātik", *Khristianskij Vostok* N.S. 6 (12) (2013), pp. 312-22 (on Sinai *syr*. 16 cf. S. Brock, "The Genealogy of the Virgin Mary in Sinai syr. 16", *Scrinium* 2 (2006), pp. 58-71) and E. Cottrell, "Al-Mubaššir ibn Fātik and the α Version of the Alexander Romance", in R. Stoneman – K. Erickson – I. Netton (eds.), *The Alexander Romance in Persia and the East*, Groningen Univ. Library, Groningen 2012, pp. 233-53.

[10] On al-Šahrazūrī's *Nuzhat al-arwāḥ*, see E. Cottrell, "Šams al-Dīn al-Šahrazūrī et les manuscrits de 'La promenade des âmes et le jardin des réjouissances: Histoire des philosophes' (*Nuzhat al-arwāḥ wa-rawḍat al-afrāḥ fī ta'rīḫ al-ḥukamā'*)", *Bulletin d'Études orientales* 56 (2004-2005), pp. 225-60.

[11] On the "*Ṣiwān al-ḥikma*" complex, see D. Gutas, *Greek Wisdom Literature in Arabic Translation: A Study of the Graeco-Arabic Gnomologia*, American Oriental Society, New Haven 1975; Id., "The *Ṣiwān al-ḥikma* Cycle of Texts", *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 102.4 (1982), pp. 645-50; W. al-Qāḍī, "*Kitāb Ṣiwān al-ḥikma*: Structure, Composition, Authorship and Sources", *Der Islam* 58 (1981), pp. 87-124; F. Griffel, "On the Character, Content, and Authorship of *Itmām Tatimmat Ṣiwān al-ḥikma* and the Identity of the Author of *Muntakhab Ṣiwān al-ḥikma*", *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 133.1 (2013), pp. 1-20. On Arabic gnomologia generally, see now D. Gutas (with P. Kotzia), "Popular Ethics, Practical Politics", in U. Rudolph – R. Hansberger – P. Adamson (eds.), *Philosophy in the Islamic World, Volume 1: 8th–10th Centuries*, Brill, Leiden 2017, pp. 655-80, esp. pp. 662-70.

[12] (1) al-Mubaššir ibn Fātik, *Muḫtār al-ḥikam wa-maḥāsin al-kalim*, ed. ʿA. Badawī, al-Muʾassasa al-ʿarabiyya li-l-dirāsāt wa-l-našr, Beirut 1980, p. 206; (2) Šams al-Dīn al-Šahrazūrī, *Tārīḫ al-ḥukamāʾ "Nuzhat al-arwāḥ wa-rawḍat al-afrāḥ"*, ed. ʿA. Abū Šuwayrib, Ǧamʿiyyat al-daʿwa al-islāmiyya al-ʿālamiyya, Tripoli 1988, p. 170; (3) R. Mulyadhi Kartanegara, "The *Mukhtaṣar Ṣiwān al-ḥikma* of ʿUmar b. Sahlān al-Sāwī", PhD diss., University of Chicago 1996, p. 109 (Aristotle No. 4) [=MS Istanbul, Fatih 3222, fol. 13r]; (4) *Muntaḫab Ṣiwān al-ḥikma* = [Pseudo-]Abū Sulaymān al-Siǧistānī, *Ṣiwān al-ḥikma wa-ṭalāṭ rasāʾil*, ed. ʿA. Badawī, Bonyād-e farhang-e Īrān,

al-Mubaššir ibn Fātik	al-Šahrazūrī	*Muḫtaṣar Ṣiwān al-ḥikma*	*Muntaḫab Ṣiwān al-ḥikma*	*Philosophical Quartet*
كنتُ أشرب فلا أروى، فلمّا عرفتُ اللّٰه رَويتُ من غير شَرب.	كنتُ أشرب فلا أروى، فلمّا عرفتُ اللّٰه رَويتُ من غير شرب.	قد كنتُ أشرب فأزداد ظمأً، حتّى عرفتُ البارئ فرَويتُ من غير شرب.	وقد كنتُ أشرب فأزداد ظمأً، حتّى عرفتُ البارئ فرَويتُ من غير شرب.	قد كنتُ أشرب فأزداد ظماءً، حتّى عرفتُ الحقّ جلّ جلاله فرَويتُ من غير شرب.

It is easy to see that the texts in al-Mubaššir and al-Šahrazūrī are identical, while the three *Ṣiwān* gnomologies have a somewhat different version (with minor variant readings between them: the *Muntaḫab Ṣiwān al-ḥikma* has وقد where the other two gnomologies have قد, and the *Philosophical Quartet* has الحقّ جلّ جلاله where the other two gnomologies have البارئ). We can now compare the readings represented by the gnomologies with those of al-Rāġib al-Iṣfahānī and al-Ġazālī, al-ʿĀmirī, and al-Maqdisī. (The reading of the *Muḫtaṣar Ṣiwān al-Ḥikma* will be chosen as a representative of the *Ṣiwān* group).

	al-Rāġib + al-Ġazālī	al-ʿĀmirī	al-Maqdisī	al-Mubaššir + al-Šahrazūrī	*Muḫtaṣar Ṣiwān al-Ḥikma*
Plato	إن أحسنتَ كلّ شيء فلا تظنّنّ أنّك أحسنتَ شيئاً حتّى تعرف اللّٰه تعالى وتعلم أنّه مسبّب الأسباب وموجد الأشياء.	إنّكم إن عرفتم كلّ شيء فلا تحسبوا انّكم عرفتم شيئاً ما لم تعرفوا اللّٰه عزّ وجلّ.	—	—	—
Aristotle	كنتُ قبل أن أعرف اللّٰه تعالى أشرب وأظمأ، حتّى إذا عرفتُه رَويتُ بلا شرب.	كنتُ قبل اليوم أشرب وأظمأ، حتّى إذا عرفتُ اللّٰه عزّ وجلّ فرَويتُ بلا شرب.	كنتُ أشرب شراباً ولا أروى، فلمّا عرفتُ البارئ جلّ وعزّ رَويتُ بلا شرب.	كنتُ أشرب فلا أروى، فلمّا عرفتُ اللّٰه رَويتُ من غير شَرب.	قد كنتُ أشرب فأزداد ظمأً، حتّى عرفتُ البارئ فرَويتُ من غير شرب.

This table allows us to draw some conclusions about the history of the "Plato and Aristotle Holding Scrolls" tradition.

There is no doubt that al-Rāġib al-Iṣfahānī's *Darīʿa* and al-Ġazālī are closest to the original version of the tradition, which must have included a framework story (two philosophers painted as holding scrolls in a place or worship, identified as a "mosque", or as a "temple",

Tehran 1974, p. 142; (5) Gutas, *Greek Wisdom Literature* (above, n. 11), p. 164 (Aristotle No. 10); cf. translation on p. 165, commentary on pp. 386-7, 466.

or perhaps in some other way) and a pair of pithy sayings (written on these scrolls). This original version, which I shall call **Ω**, must have specifically identified these philosophers as Plato and Aristotle. Al-Rāġib al-Iṣfahānī was likely familiar with **Ω**, though he decided to drop the identification of the philosophers. It is possible that he is also responsible for the addition "and know that He is the Cause of causes and the Originator of [all] things", absent in the other versions. Al-Ġazālī was no longer familiar with **Ω**, but cited the tradition directly from al-Rāġib al-Iṣfahānī's *Ḏarīʿa.* (Bahāʾ al-Dīn al-ʿĀmilī also cited the tradition from al-Rāġib al-Iṣfahānī).

Al-ʿĀmirī must have been familiar with **Ω** or some intermediate source very close to **Ω**. He faithfully reproduced the identification of the two philosophers as Plato and Aristotle and the two sayings attributed to them, though he (or his source) decided to drop the framework story and re-frame Plato's saying as being addressed to his disciples (which is why it is re-formulated in the 2nd person plural).

Then the tradition enters into the stream of gnomological literature—and becomes subject to secondary transmission within that literature. For reasons unknown to us, at this point the Plato half of the story disappears for good, and we are left with Aristotle alone, though, for the time being, still painted (albeit no longer in a mosque or in a temple, but in some unidentified "place") and still holding some piece of writing (albeit no longer identified as a scroll). I shall call this Aristotle-only version, which still preserves some rudimentary elements of the framework story: **α**. It is in this form that al-Maqdisī's Bīšāpūrian acquaintance read it, probably in some gnomological work, and transmitted it to al-Maqdisī.[13]

Al-Mubaššir's version of the tradition likely depends, directly or indirectly, on al-Maqdisī's (with al-Šahrazūrī citing al-Mubaššir *verbatim*). What al-Mubaššir, al-Maqdisī, and al-Šahrazūrī all have in common is the highly distinctive "*lā arwā*, *fa-lammā*" sequence, which is not present in any other version examined above (but see below). (All the other retellings have some variety of the root *ẓ-m-ʾ*, followed by *ḥattā*).[14] Of course, al-Mubaššir does not include whatever little was retained of the framework story in al-Maqdisī's version, but cites Aristotle's saying alone.

For completeness' sake, however, I need to point out that the same distinctive sequence "*lā arwā*, *fa-lammā*" appears in a different work by al-Rāġib al-Iṣfahānī, *al-Mufradāt fī ġarīb al-Qurʾān*, where he quotes an unidentified lexicographical authority (possibly, al-Maqdisī's lost work *Kitāb Maʿānī al-Qurʾān*).[15] Whatever the case might be, it would seem that this

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[13] It is, of course, possible that al-Maqdisī's Bīšāpūrian acquaintance (and even al-Maqdisī himself) were familiar with the full version of the tradition. Nonetheless, it is a striking coincidence that the Plato half of the tradition, which is absent in all the gnomologies, is absent in al-Maqdisī as well. This is why it is likelier, on balance, that the Plato half was already absent when al-Maqdisī's Bīšāpūrian acquaintance read it, and al-Maqdisī heard it. Otherwise, we would be hard pressed to explain why the Plato half of the tradition was omitted by both al-Maqdisī and the gnomologies independently.

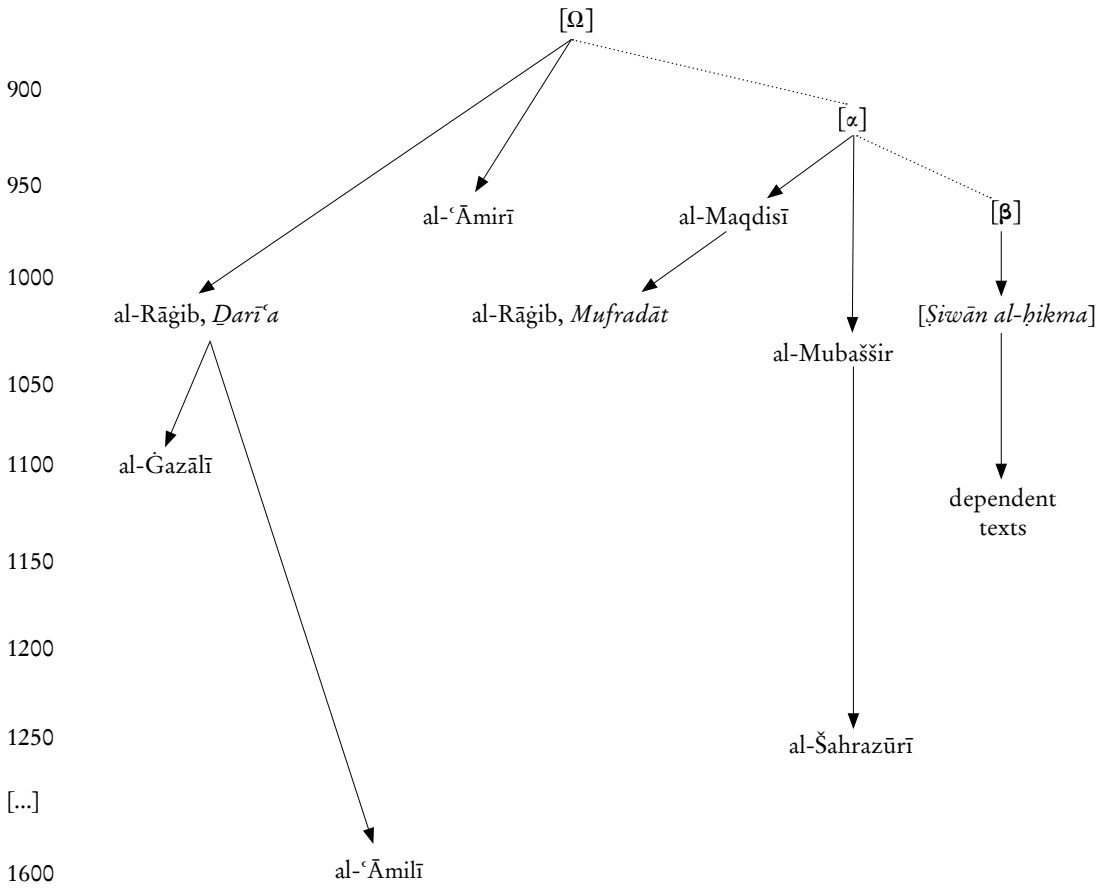
[14] Dimitri Gutas has pointed out that the medieval Latin translation of al-Mubaššir reads "et sitis invalescebat" (reflecting the Arabic فازداد ظمأ, with the Arabic verb apparently read as 3rd person sg. perfect and the word *ẓama'* in the nominative) – see Gutas, *Greek Wisdom Literature* (above, n. 11), p. 387. In light of the evidence presented herein, this does not seem to be the original reading of al-Mubaššir, but a "contamination" of the manuscript of al-Mubaššir that underlay the Latin translation by a reading from the *Ṣiwān al-ḥikma* corpus of texts.

[15] See al-Rāġib al-Iṣfahānī, *al-Mufradāt fī ġarīb al-Qurʾān*, ed. M.S. Ḳaylānī, Dār al-maʿrifa, Beirut n.d., *s.v.* *š-r-ʿ*, pp. 208-209: قال بعضهم: سُمّيت الشريعة شريعة تشبيها بشريعة الماء من حيث إنّ مَنْ شرع فيها على الحقيقة المصدوقة: «كنت أشرب فلا أروى، فلمّا عرفتُ اللّٰه تعالى رَوِيتُ بلا شربٍ»، رَوِيَ وتطهّر، قال: وأعني بالريّ ما قال بعض الحكماء: وبالتطهّر ما قال تعالى: ﴿إنّما يريد اللّٰه ليُذهِبَ عنكم الرجس أهل البيت ويُطَهِّرَكم تطهيراً﴾. On al-Maqdisī's *Kitāb Maʿānī al-Qurʾān*, see Adang, *Muslim Writers* (above, n. 7), p. 49.

version too is ultimately dependent on al-Maqdisī's phrasing. There is, in any case, no connection between this version and the tradition cited by al-Rāġib al-Iṣfahānī in the *Ḏarīʿa*.

By the time the tradition reached the author of the *Ṣiwān al-ḥikma*, the framework story would have disintegrated completely. I shall call this Aristotle-only version with nothing remaining of the framework story: β. It is in this form that the author of the *Ṣiwān al-ḥikma* would have recorded it among the sayings of Aristotle. Though the original *Ṣiwān al-ḥikma* is lost, the saying is faithfully reproduced (with only minor variations) in the three texts dependent on it: the *Muḫtaṣar Ṣiwān al-ḥikma*, the *Muntaḫab Ṣiwān al-ḥikma*, and the *Philosophical Quartet*.

We can thus construct the following tentative stemma (lost texts are given in brackets):



Our next task is investigating the origin of the tradition under discussion and exploring the possible identity (or, at least, the likely genre and/or milieu) of Ω. We shall discuss the sayings first and the framework story second. The sayings are, of course, not literal quotations of anything found in Plato's and Aristotle's writings; nonetheless, they do bear a certain resemblance to their philosophical ideas. Everett Rowson has already pointed out that "The quotation from Plato is a paraphrase of *Republic* 505A,

where he speaks in these terms of the Good."[16] As regards Aristotle's quotation, I submit that it bears a certain thematic resemblance to Aristotle's *Metaphysics*. Indeed, the theme of thirst for knowledge is emblematized by Aristotle's famous statement at the beginning of *Metaphysics* A (*Metaphysics*' first book in Greek, though not always in Arabic) that "All humans by nature desire to know" (πάντες ἄνθρωποι τοῦ εἰδέναι ὀρέγονται φύσει).[17] Human search for the supreme object of knowledge is, of course, an overarching concern of Aristotle's *Metaphysics*, which culminates in his discussion, in *Metaphysics* Λ, of the Unmoved Mover, described as the divine self-thinking Intellect.[18]

Significantly, however, Aristotle's quotation seems to have biblical overtones as well: one immediately thinks of certain Psalm verses that speak of the soul's longing for God (e.g., Psalms 63:1 and 84:2 in modern English numbering) and, especially, of Jesus' conversation with the Samaritan woman about the "living water" of which whoever drinks shall never thirst (John 4:7-15). We can thus conclude that the sayings attributed to Plato and Aristotle were likely crafted by someone who had basic familiarity with their philosophy, be it on a popular level, and was likely at home with biblical imagery. This likely puts us in a Christian context. Whether these sayings were originally crafted in Arabic or in some other language – such as Greek or Syriac – and then translated into Arabic, is difficult to say just on the basis of the sayings themselves, but further considerations, to be presented below, will lead us to a plausible hypothesis.

We should now discuss the framework story. It sounds very much like a literary description (*ekphrasis*) of what might have been a late antique or early medieval painting

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[16] Rowson, *Muslim Philosopher* (above, n. 6), p. 217. Here is the Platonic passage in question (in Paul Shorey's translation): "For you have often heard that the greatest thing to learn is the idea of good by reference to which just things and all the rest become useful and beneficial. And now I am almost sure you know that this is what I am going to speak of and to say further that we have no adequate knowledge of it. And if we do not know it, then, even if without the knowledge of this we should know all other things never so well, you are aware that it would avail us nothing, just as no possession either is of any avail without the possession of the good." On Plato's *Republic* in Arabic, see D.C. Reisman, "Plato's *Republic* in Arabic: A Newly Discovered Passage", *Arabic Sciences and Philosophy* 14 (2004), pp. 263-300 (on *Resp*. 506D-509B, a passage closely adjacent to the one cited above, preserved in Arabic by al-Isfizārī); A. Arberry, "An Arabic Treatise on Politics", *Islamic Quarterly* 2 (1955), pp. 9-22; Id., "Some Plato in an Arabic Epitome", *Islamic Quarterly* 2 (1955), pp. 86-99; G.J. Moseley, "*Plato Arabus*: On the Arabic Transmission of Plato's *Dialogues*—Texts and Studies", PhD diss., Yale University 2017, pp. 143-204; M. Campanini, "La tradizione della *Repubblica* nei *falâsifah* musulmani", in M. Vegetti – P. Pissavino (eds.), *I Decembrio e la tradizione della Repubblica di Platone tra Medioevo e Umanesimo*, Bibliopolis, Napoli 2005, pp. 31-81.

[17] On the Arabic translations of Aristotle's *Metaphysics*, see R. Walzer, "On the Arabic Versions of Books A, α, and Λ of Aristotle's *Metaphysics*", *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology* 63 (1958), pp. 217-31; C. Martini, "The Arabic Version of the Book *Alpha Meizon* of Aristotle's *Metaphysics* and the Testimony of the Ms. Bibl. Apostolica Vaticana, *Ott. Lat*. 2048", in J. Hamesse (ed.), *Les traducteurs au travail: Leurs manuscrits et leurs méthodes*, Brepols, Turnhout 2001, pp. 173-206; and especially A. Bertolacci, "On the Arabic Translations of Aristotle's *Metaphysics*", *Arabic Sciences and Philosophy* 15 (2005), pp. 241-75.

[18] Cf. Rowson, *Muslim Philosopher* (above, n. 6), p. 217: "The point made here [i.e., in Aristotle's quotation] is paralleled in the introductory courses on the philosophy of Aristotle given in the late Neoplatonic school at Alexandria. The fourth of the ten points covered in these lectures was the end (*telos*) of Aristotle's philosophy, which was defined as 'knowledge of the single *archē* of all, and that it is one' (with various elaborations in the different authors). Al-ʿĀmirī uses material from another of these ten points in his explanation of the philosophers' obscurities ([*al-Amad*] IV.17); and while nothing similar to these sayings of Plato and Aristotle appears in any of the extant Greek introductions, it seems likely that al-ʿĀmirī is here, too, reflecting some later development of that tradition".

(or mosaic) of the two philosophers. It is particularly noteworthy that Plato and Aristotle are depicted holding scrolls, very much like saints in Byzantine iconography.

It is highly significant in this context that frescoes of Greek philosophers are a common feature of Orthodox churches and monasteries from the late-Byzantine and post-Byzantine era. The philosophers (Plato, Aristotle, Homer, Solon, Plutarch, the Sibyl, and several others) are commonly painted in the narthex (or sometimes in the refectory or on external walls) as part of the "Tree of Jesse" composition—e.g., in the narthex of the Bogorodica Ljeviška church in Prizren, Kosovo (1310-1313, damaged); at the Romanian monasteries of Voroneț (1547 – see Illustrations 1 and 2 below), Sucevița (1600), and several others; at the Bačkovo Monastery in Bulgaria (ca. 1643); in the refectory of the Great Lavra on Mount Athos (1536); in the narthex of the church of the Theotokos Portaitissa at the Iveron Monastery on Mount Athos (1774);[19] at the Monastery of the Holy Cross in Jerusalem (now lost; presumably, dated to the post-Byzantine era, not to Shota Rustaveli's time as often thought);[20] at the Great Monastery in Meteora, Greece; etc. In these frescoes the Greek philosophers are commonly depicted holding scrolls with apocryphal sayings (typically, confirming Christian Trinitarian and Christological beliefs).[21]

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[19] On the date, see В.И. Силогава – В.Г. Ченцова – иером. Леонтий (Козлов) – Л.К. Масиель Санчес – М.А. Маханько – А.В. Захарова, "Иверский монастырь" [The Monastery of Iveron], in *Православная энциклопедия* [*Orthodox Encyclopedia*], vol. 21, Moscow 2009, pp. 24-60, at p. 49 (online version: http://www.pravenc.ru/text/293365.html).

[20] Kh.A. Papadópoulos, "Ἡ ἱερὰ Μονὴ τοῦ Σταυροῦ καὶ ἡ ἐν αὐτῇ Θεολ. Σχολή", Νέα Σιών 2 (1905), pp. 642-783, at pp. 651-2. There seems to be no justification for Papadopoulos' claim that these particular frescoes of the Greek philosophers were commissioned by the Georgian poet Shota Rustaveli (d. after ca. 1220) and were modeled on similar frescoes in the Iveron Monastery on Athos, let alone for Sebastian Brock's claim (based, it seems, on a misreading of Spetsiéres' quotation from Papadópoulos' study) that Rustaveli already found these frescoes in place when he visited Jerusalem in 1192. See K. Spetsiéres, "Εἰκόνες ἑλλήνων φιλοσόφων εἰς ἐκκλησίας", Ἐπιστημονικὴ ἐπετηρὶς τῆς Φιλοσοφικῆς Σχολῆς τοῦ Πανεπιστημίου Ἀθηνῶν 14 (1963-1964), pp. 386-458, at p. 426; S. Brock, "A Syriac Collection of Prophecies of the Pagan Philosophers", *Orientalia Lovaniensia Periodica* 14 (1983), pp. 203-46, at p. 203. Of the dating of the Monastery of Holy Cross frescoes, see Э. Мамиствалишвили – Н. Томадзе, "Крестовый монастырь" [The Monastery of the Cross], in *Православная энциклопедия* [*Orthodox Encyclopedia*], vol. 38, Moscow 2015, pp. 591-609, at pp. 597-8, 604-5 (on the fate of the frescoes of the Greek philosophers), 606-7 (online version: http://www.pravenc.ru/text/2459035.html). On the fate of the frescoes, see also A. Baumstark, "Die Wandgemälde in der Kirche des Kreuzesklosters bei Jerusalem (Ein orientierender Überblick)", *Monatshefte für Kunstwissenschaft* 1.9 (1908), pp. 771-84, at p. 782; cf. M. Didebulidze – M. Janjalia, "Wall Paintings of the Holy Cross Monastery in Jerusalem", in T. Mgaloblishvili (ed.), *Georgians in the Holy Land: The Rediscovery of a Long-lost Christian Legacy*, Bennett and Bloom, London 2014, pp. 47-66.

[21] On Christian iconography of Greek philosophers, see N.A. Bees, "Darstellungen altheidnischer Denker und Autoren in der Kirchenmalerei der Griechen", *Byzantinisch-neugriechische Jahrbücher* 4 (1923), pp. 107-28; A. von Premerstein, "Griechisch-heidnische Weise als Verkünder christlicher Lehre in Handschriften und Kirchenmalereien", in *Festschrift der Nationalbibliothek in Wien*, Österreichische Staatsdruckerei, Wien 1926, pp. 647-66; Id., "Neues zu den apokryphen Heilsprophezeiungen heidnischer Philosophen in Literatur und Kirchenkunst", *Byzantinisch-neugriechische Jahrbücher* 9 (1932), pp. 338-74; Spetsiéres, "Εἰκόνες ἑλλήνων φιλοσόφων" (above, n. 20); M.D. Taylor, "A Historiated Tree of Jesse", *Dumbarton Oaks Paper* 34-35 (1980-1981), pp. 125-76; D. Knipp, "Medieval Visual Images of Plato", in S.E. Gersh – M.J.F.M. Hoenen (eds.), *The Platonic Tradition in the Middle Ages: A Doxographic Approach*, De Gruyter, Berlin 2002, pp. 373-414; Albocicade [S. Robin], "Les païens au monastère", online publication, 2019 (https://www.academia.edu/40287264/Les_Sages_païens_au_monastère). I thank Albocicade for referring me to his important publication.

Illustrations 1 and 2: Aristotle (left) and Plato at the Voroneț Monastery, Romania (1547). © Dr. Oana Iacubovschi. I am grateful to Dr. Oana Iacubovschi for granting permission to use these images and to Dr. Ioana Feodorov for assistance.

Post-Byzantine Orthodox manuals on icon painting provide details on how Greek philosophers are to be depicted. Thus, a sixteenth-century manuscript from Jerusalem (Greek Orthodox Patriarchate, Stavrou 85) contains the following instructions:

> Aristotle, to be depicted as not white-skinned, predicted: "The light of the Holy Trinity shall shine upon all of creation and, being God, shall make the idols made by hands disappear forever." […] Plato, too, wearing, as it were, a diadem, prophesied: "God always was, is, and shall be, with no beginning and unceasingly."[22]

[22] A. Wasserstein, "Byzantine Iconographical Prescriptions in a Jerusalem Manuscript", *Byzantinische Zeitschrift* 66 (1973), pp. 383-6, at p. 383.

Similarly, the most famous such manual, Dionysius of Fourna's *Hermeneia* (composed in 1730-1734) recommends the following:

> Plato, an old man with a long wide beard, says: "The Old is young, and the Youth is ancient: the Father in the Child, and the Child in the Father; one is divided into three, and three into one."
> Aristotle, an old man with a curly beard, says: "Tireless is the birth of God, for from Him the Word Himself takes on essence."[23]

As Dionysius of Fourna specifies, these prophetic utterances are to be depicted "on paper" (εἰς χαρτί), i.e., on scrolls. As mentioned above, this is how they are, in fact, painted in the frescoes under discussion.

Let us now come back to the tradition preserved by al-Rāġib al-Iṣfahānī and al-Ġazālī. It comes from an earlier period (most likely, the ninth century) and from a different region (an unspecified location in the Middle East). Admittedly, there are also considerable differences between the sayings attributed to Plato and Aristotle in these Arabic sources on the one hand and in the late-Byzantine and post-Byzantine frescoes and manuals on icon painting on the other: in the Arabic sources, the sayings are generically monotheistic (albeit with biblical overtones); on the frescoes and in the manuals they are, for the most part, explicitly Christian (though the statement ascribed to Plato in Jerusalem, Greek Orthodox Patriarchate, Stavrou 85 is generically monotheistic).

Despite these differences, however, I believe we are on firm ground to argue that the Arabic tradition was not invented, but reflects an actual painting that once existed in a particular place of worship, most likely a Christian church; in other words, that the Arabic tradition is an *ekphrasis* of such a painting.[24] This Arabic tradition should, therefore, be of some interest to art historians as a testimony to what might have been a distant ancestor of the late-Byzantine and post-Byzantine frescoes discussed above. The Arabic quotations ascribed to Plato and Aristotle thus presumably reflect the text of their sayings as they appeared on the painting – in the original probably in Greek or Syriac, but preserved for us in an Arabic translation or paraphrase.[25]

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[23] Kh.A. Papadópoulos-Kerameus (ed.), Διονυσίου τοῦ ἐκ Φοῦρνα Ἑρμηνεία τῆς ζωγραφικῆς τέχνης, Holy Synod, Saint Petersburg 1900, p. 86.

[24] There is, admittedly, also the possibility that the painting in question was located in a Pagan (Ṣābi'an) temple in Ḥarrān. On the alleged Syriac Platonic inscriptions at the Pagan "gathering-place" (*maǧma'*) in Ḥarrān, there is, of course, a famous testimony in al-Masʿūdī, *Murūǧ al-ḏahab*, ed. Ch. Pellat, vol. 2, Paris 1965, pp. 536-7, section 1395; cf. al-Masʿūdī, *Kitāb al-Tanbīh wa-l-išrāf*, ed. M.J. de Goeje, Brill, Leiden 1894, p. 162; for a critical discussion, see K. van Bladel, *The Arabic Hermes: From Pagan Sage to Prophet of Science*, Oxford U.P., Oxford 2009, pp. 69-79. Nonetheless, information related to the Ṣābi'ans of Ḥarrān in Arabic sources is usually designated as such, because of its perceived exotic nature. In contrast to the Ṣābi'ans of Ḥarrān, Christians and their churches and monasteries were a much more familiar component of the Middle Eastern landscape. Muslim interest in Christian places of worship was longstanding (as discussed below). In any case, the fact that al-Rāġib al-Iṣfahānī (and, following him, al-Ġazālī) designates the place in which the painting was located as a "mosque" must not be taken at face value: pictorial depictions of human beings (let alone Greek philosophers) would have been unthinkable in a Muslim place of worship. The term "mosque" is likely due to al-Rāġib al-Iṣfahānī's attempt to "Islamicize" the tradition. It is also noteworthy that al-ʿĀmilī's *al-Kaškūl* has the reading *baʿḍ al-maʿābid* ("one of the temples").

[25] On the Syriac sayings of Greek philosophers, see Brock, "Syriac Collection" (above, n. 20); Id., "Some Syriac Excerpts from Greek Collections of Pagan Prophecies", *Vigiliae Christianae* 38.1 (1984), pp. 77-90; Y. Arzhanov,

We should now turn to the likely genre and milieu of Ω. If, as argued above, what we have in front of us is an Arabic *ekphrasis* of a painting that once adorned a Christian church, Ω would fit well into the genre of Muslim literature dedicated to Christian monasteries – the so-called *Diyārāt* literature.[26] Tightly related to the *Diyārāt* literature is *Zuhd* literature, which is devoted to early Muslim ascetics (*zuhhād*) and is strewn with anecdotes about their encounters with Christian monks.[27]

It is in this milieu that I believe we should look for origins of the Arabic tradition about a painting of Plato and Aristotle holding scrolls, and it is to one of these two interrelated genres that Ω would most likely have belonged.[28] A comprehensive examination of *Diyārāt* and *Zuhd* literatures and, relatedly, of the sources of ascetic material embedded in al-Rāġib al-Iṣfahānī's *Kitāb al-Ḏarīʿa ilā makārim al-šarīʿa* may provide further clues as to the provenance of this intriguing and important tradition.

Syriac Sayings of Greek Philosophers: A Study in Syriac Gnomologia, Peeters, Louvain 2019 (*CSCO* 669 / *Subsidia*, 138). On the Byzantine tradition of apocryphal sayings ascribed to the Greek philosophers, see P.F. Beatrice, *Anonymi Monophysitae Theosophia: An Attempt at Reconstruction*, Brill, Leiden, 2001; M. Di Branco, *La città dei filosofi: Storia di Atene da Marco Aurelio a Giustiniano*, Leo S. Olschki, Firenze, 2006, pp. 227-31 (I am grateful to the reviewer at the journal for this last reference). Unfortunately, these collections do not seem to contain anything that would correspond to the Arabic quotations discussed herein.

[26] H. Kilpatrick, "Monasteries through Muslim Eyes: The *Diyārāt* Books", in D. Thomas (ed.), *Christians at the Heart of Islamic Rule: Church Life and Scholarship in 'Abbasid Iraq*, Brill, Leiden 2004, pp. 19-37; E.K. Fowden, "The Lamp and the Wine Flask: Early Muslim Interest in Christian Monasticism", in J. Montgomery – A. Akasoy – P.E. Pormann (eds.), *Islamic Crosspollinations: Interactions in the Medieval Middle East*, Gibb Memorial Trust, Cambridge 2007, pp. 1-28; E. Campbell, "A Heaven of Wine: Muslim-Christian Encounters at Monasteries in the Early Islamic Middle East", PhD diss., University of Washington 2009. On the major surviving work of this genre, al-Šābuštī's *Kitāb al-Diyārāt*, see H. Kilpatrick, "al-Shābushtī", in D. Thomas – A. Mallett (eds.), *Christian-Muslim Relations: A Bibliographical History*, vol. 2, Brill, Leiden 2010, pp. 565-9; cf. another entry in the same volume: Ead., "Abū l-Faraj al-Iṣbahānī", pp. 368-89. Significant information about Christian monasteries is contained also in the writings of later Muslim geographers and historians, notably Yāqūt al-Rūmī (d. 626/1229) and al-Maqrīzī (d. 845/1442).

[27] S.A. Mourad, "Christian Monks in Islamic Literature: A Preliminary Report on Some Arabic *Apophthegmata Patrum*", *Bulletin of the Royal Institute for Inter-Faith Studies* 6.2 (2004), pp. 81-98; Y. Ṣādir (ed.), *Ruhbān ʿarab fī baʿḍ siyar al-mutaṣawwifīn al-muslimīn*, Dār Ṣādir, Beirut 2005; O. Livne-Kafri, "Early Muslim Ascetics and the World of Christian Monasticism", *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 20 (1996), pp. 105-29; J. Tannous, *The Making of the Medieval Middle East*, Princeton U.P., Princeton 2018, pp. 461-73. On Christian themes in *Zuhd* literature, see also D. Cook, "Christian and Christianity in *ḥadīth* Works before 900", in D. Thomas – B. Roggema (eds.), *Christian-Muslim Relations: A Bibliographical History*, vol. 1, Brill, Leiden 2009, pp. 73-82, esp. pp. 74-8; A. Treiger, "Mutual Influences and Borrowings", in D. Thomas (ed.), *The Routledge Handbook of Christian-Muslim Relations*, Routledge, London 2018, pp. 194-206, at pp. 195-8. See also G. Gobillot, "*Zuhd*", in *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd edition, vol. 11, Brill, Leiden 2002, pp. 559-62.

[28] My interpretation is thus in harmony with Dimitri Gutas' insightful remark that Aristotle's quotation (as preserved in the *Philosophical Quartet*) "has a distinctly-Ṣūfī coloring, and may be due to such a source" – Gutas, *Greek Wisdom Literature* (above, n. 11), p. 387.