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### Cover

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

*Ptolémée “al-Gharīb”. Épître à Gallus sur la vie, le testament et les écrits d’Aristote*, Texte établi et traduit par M. Rashed, Les Belles Lettres, Paris 2021 (CUF), CCCLXXVII + 52 pp. (double pagination pp. 1-21).

The reader should not be surprised to see that a text of 20 pages has produced an introduction of more than 370 pages, given that the text is a *Life of Aristotle* lost in Greek. Several biographies of Aristotle are attested in a time span which ranges from the Imperial age (Diogenes Laertius) to the Middle Ages (the so-called *Vita latina*). This one in particular is attested only in Arabic. Its unknown author, Ptolemy, is named in the title “The Stranger (*al-garīb*)”, which is a label that has been accounted for in several and at times convoluted ways. Marwan Rashed has made this precious piece of information easily accessible. His edition is based on two manuscripts: İstanbul, Süleymaniye Kütüphanesi, *Ayasofya* 4833 which was known long ago to the scholars in the field, and Qom, Āyatullāh al-‘Uzmā Ma‘rašī 12388, to which attention has been called only recently. The two manuscripts form the basis also of the English translation presented by Emanuele Rovati as his *Masterarbeit* discussed in 2020<sup>1</sup> which surprisingly is not quoted by Rashed.

Until the aforementioned *Masterarbeit*, the vast and complex scholarship on this *Life of Aristotle* was based only on the text as preserved in the MS İstanbul, *Ayasofya* 4833<sup>2</sup> and attested by extensive quotations in several Arabic sources. Rovati was the first to make use of another MS of this *Life of Aristotle*, which is housed in Qom (Iran). He accounts for the discovery as follows: “The more reliable of the two Arabic witnesses is MS Qom, Library of the Ayatollah Ma‘rašī 12388, ff. 185v-190r (...), which the library’s catalogue correctly describes as containing *VPA*.<sup>3</sup> This MS has so far escaped the attention of scholars with the exception of Pourjavady and Schmidtke (2015: 262 fn. 85). According to the colophon, the section preserving *VPA* was copied by the Iranian philosopher Jalāl al-Dīn al-Dawānī (c. 1426-1502) in 1473, when he was active in Shiraz”.<sup>4</sup> In turn, Rashed writes: “La bibliothèque Āyatullāh al-‘Uzmā Ma‘rašī Nağafī de Qom contient, sous la cote 12388, un nouveau témoin du texte arabe de Ptolémée, indépendant du manuscrit d’Istanbul. Bien plus: le manuscrit de Qom, copié en 1473 par le philosophe persan Ğalāl al-Dīn Muḥammad al-Dawānī (1426/7-1502), offre un texte souvent meilleur que celui d’Istanbul (...), permettant, dans plusieurs cas, de corriger les erreurs manifestes de ce dernier”.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> E. Rovati, *Ptolemy (Early 1<sup>st</sup> – Mid 2<sup>nd</sup> c. AD). On Aristotle’s Life, Testament and Writings. Translation and Study*, Universität Zürich – Philosophische Fakultät, Masterstudiengang Griechische Philologie (Hauptfach 75), discussed December 1, 2020.

<sup>2</sup> Rovati, *Ptolemy*, p. 7; Rashed, *Ptolémée “al-Gharīb”*, p. XV.

<sup>3</sup> *VPA* stands for *Vita Ptolemaei Arabice versa*.

<sup>4</sup> Rovati, *Ptolemy*, pp. 6-7. The references are respectively to the article by R. Pourjavady – S. Schmidtke, “An Eastern Renaissance? Greek Philosophy Under the Safavids (16<sup>th</sup> – 18<sup>th</sup> centuries AD)”, *Intellectual History of the Islamicate World* 3 (2015), pp. 248-90, and to the monograph by R. Pourjavady, *Philosophy in Early Safavid Iran. Najm al-Dīn Maḥmūd al-Nayrizī and His Writings*, Brill, Leiden 2011 (Islamic Philosophy, Theology and Science. Texts and Studies 82), pp. 4-16.

<sup>5</sup> Rashed, *Ptolémée “al-Gharīb”*, p. XVIII; in his footnote (p. XVIII, n. 26) the author refers to pp. 4-15 of the book by Reza Pourjavady (see the preceding note), which however he quotes under the title *A Shī‘ī Theologian and Philosopher of Early Safavid Iran. Najm al-Dīn Hājji Maḥmūd al-Nayrizī and His Writings*. The same title features also at p. CCCLXXIII, n. 640. That the manuscript of Qom is independent of that of İstanbul has been noticed by Rovati, *Ptolemy*, p. 7: “As for the relation between the two MSS, it is clear that the younger B was not copied from the older A, as the latter is derived from a physically mutilated exemplar but the former is not”.

Rashed's book-length Introduction is subdivided into five chapters: "État de la question" (pp. IX-XVIII), from which the passage quoted above is taken; "Le texte et l'auteur", by far the most extensive section of the Introduction (pp. XIX-CCXXXIV), where the Ptolemy who wrote the *Life of Aristotle* is identified as a scholar of the first quarter of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century AD; "Ptolémée et les *Pinakes* d'Andronicos de Rhodes" (pp. CCXXXV-CCCII); "L'histoire ancienne du corpus" (pp. CCCIII-CCCLXV), and finally "La transmission du texte" (pp. CCCLXVII-CCCLXXVII). The text and the facing French translation run from page 1 to 21 (double pagination). The volume contains a bibliography but no indexes.

There is at least one case in which the establishment of the text bears significantly on the interpretation of the history of the mysterious Ptolemy and his work, and since I am perplexed, I deem it useful to submit to the readers first Rashed's interpretation and then my comments on it. The passage belongs to the beginning of the text, often labelled 'Prologue' in the scholarship on this work. The broader context of the sentence under examination consists in the account of the circumstances in which the *Life of Aristotle* was composed,<sup>6</sup> while the narrow context is limited to the author's claim that he refrained from mentioning the purpose of each of Aristotle's works, and to his account of the reasons why he did so. In the two MSS of Istanbul and Qom (with minor differences) the sentence under examination reads as follows (cf. Rashed, *Ptolémée "al-Gharib"*, p. 1.9-12, where however the text reads differently, as discussed below):

وتركتُ أن أذكر غرض أرسطوطاليس في أقواله كراهة التطويل ولأنِّي رأيت ذلك إن فعلته فضلاً  
إذ كنت الرجل الذي ليست حالك حال مَنْ يعرف كتب أرسطوطاليس معرفةً تُميّزها الوقوف على  
حقائق ما يُذكر فيها

In the rendition of Christel Hein, who transcribed the 'Prologue' from the MS of Istanbul, this passage means:

(...) und unterließ es, die Absicht (σκοπός) des Aristoteles in seinen Schriften zu erwähnen aus Abneigung gegen Weitschweifigkeit, weil ich das, wenn ich es getan hätte, als überflüssig angesehen hätte, da Du ja **kein** Mann bist, der differenziertere Kenntnisse von der Büchern des Aristoteles erlangen will und sich mit den darin enthaltenen Wahrheiten beschäftigen will.<sup>7</sup>

Rovati, who has at his disposal also the MS of Qom, translates:

I refrained from mentioning the purpose (σκοπός) of Aristotle in his [various] texts (λόγοι) out of spite for prolixity and because I considered that, if I had done this, it [would be] superfluous. For you are the [kind of] man whose condition is **not** that of one who knows

<sup>6</sup> The broader context is the following: "Lorsque je me suis remémoré ce que tu m'avais dit au sujet du fait que tu aimerais acquérir un livre contenant le rappel des livres d'Aristote et que, comme je t'avais fait voir sur-le-champ ce qu'Andronicos, qui est de la ville de Rhodes, avait écrit à ce sujet, tu m'avais demandé de composer à ce sujet un livre plus succinct et au propos plus clair, j'ai cru bon de composer ce livre à ton intention" (trans. Rashed, *Ptolémée "al-Gharib"*, p. 1).

<sup>7</sup> 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), p. 417.

Aristotle's books in [all] their distinctions and with a preoccupation for the accuracy (*ἀκριβεία*) of what is mentioned in them.<sup>8</sup>

In his note to this passage, Rovati remarks that Ptolemy's claim that his addressee is not a man to delve into the details of the Aristotelian works is surprising – or better, “harsh”, he says. He however considers that this is not a good reason to change the text.<sup>9</sup> Note that the reading with the negation *laysat* is that of the archetype. This manuscript – namely the common ancestor that can be reconstructed as the origin of the textual tradition of the *Life of Aristotle* in the Arabic version<sup>10</sup> – is lost to us; this however does not prevent us from reaching the conclusion that it read the negation *laysat*. Either directly or via intermediate copies, the two MS which represent the whole textual tradition of the *Life of Aristotle* drew this reading from it. In fact, we know that the two extant MSS are independent from one another;<sup>11</sup> hence, if the negation *laysat* features in both, this means that this was the reading of the archetype. At variance with Hein and Rovati, who deem the sentence to be sound with no comments (Hein) or sound, albeit harsh (Rovati), Rashed thinks that the sentence is corrupted, and corrects the text as follows (p. 1.9-12):

وتركتُ أن أذكر غرض أرسطوطاليس في أقواله كراهة التطويل ولأنِّي رأيت ذلك إن فعلته  
فضلاً إذ كنت الرجل الذي كانت حالك حال مَنْ يعرف كتب أرسطوطاليس معرفةً تميّزها  
الوقوف على حقائق ما يُذكر فيها

The translation is:

et j'ai renoncé à mentionner le but d'Aristote dans ses ouvrages, répugnant à la prolixité et jugeant que ce serait superflu de le faire, puisque tu es homme à connaître les livres d'Aristote de manière détaillée et à te pencher sur les vérités dont il y est fait mention (p. 1).

This correction, namely *kānat* instead of *laysat*, is accounted for in the Introduction:

Ce paragraphe est le seul où nous apprenons quelque chose sur le dédicataire de la lettre de Ptolémée, le mystérieux Gallus. Malheureusement, la phrase importante à cet égard est sans doute corrompue. Si l'on adopte le texte des deux manuscrits, Ptolémée écrivait: “j'ai renoncé à mentionner le but d'Aristote dans ses ouvrages, répugnant à la prolixité et jugeant que ce serait superflu de le faire, puisque tu n'es pas homme à (*id kunta al-rağula al-lađī laysat ḥālu-ka ḥāla man*) connaître les livres d'Aristote de manière détaillée et à te pencher sur les vérités dont il y est fait mention”. Autrement dit, Ptolémée expliquerait qu'il n'a pas mentionné le but (*σκοπός*) des ouvrages d'Aristote parce que Gallus est trop ignorant en matière aristotélicienne pour qu'un tel effort vaille la peine. Même si les codes de la politesse peuvent varier d'un contexte historique à l'autre, une telle déclaration

<sup>8</sup> Rovati, *Ptolemy*, p. 15.

<sup>9</sup> Rovati, *Ptolemy*, p. 15, n. 33. This notwithstanding, Rovati also considers that “we should refrain from altering the text to yield a praise of Gallus rather than a honest assertion of his limited knowledge of the subject”.

<sup>10</sup> That the tradition is unitary, namely that there is an archetype from which both the Istanbul and the Qom MSS are derived, is proven by the fact that they converge in error at least in four cases, listed (as examples) by Rashed, *Ptolémée “al-Gharib”*, pp. ccclxxvi-ccclxxvii.

<sup>11</sup> Above, n. 5.

paraît, dans la bouche de Ptolémée, inconcevable et inconvenante. Inconcevable, parce que l'on ne verrait guère pourquoi Gallus s'intéresserait aux écrits d'Aristote s'il n'éprouvait aucune envie de connaître leur contenu. Inconvenante, parce qu'elle serait la marque d'une extrême discourtoisie.<sup>12</sup>

The interpretation of the *textus traditus* in terms of unacceptable harshness is supported by a comparison with the praise of the learned woman who is the addressee of Diogenes Laertius' *Life of Plato*. This elicits, in Rashed's view, the conclusion that

La situation d'énonciation ressemble beaucoup à celle de notre texte. À un correspondant désireux d'en savoir plus sur un philosophe dont il est déjà l'admirateur, l'auteur dit qu'il ne proposera qu'une esquisse, ou un résumé. Chez Diogène, la raison en est la science même de la dédicataire. Dans le texte de Ptolémée tel qu'il est transmis, c'est tout au contraire l'ignorance de Gallus. Tout invite donc à supprimer la négation.<sup>13</sup>

Ptolemy, however, is not passing a judgment on Gallus' skills, nor is his wording harsh, or impolite. What he says is that Gallus' condition (*hāl*<sup>14</sup>) is not that of one who would devote himself to the detailed study of the whole corpus of Aristotle's treatises. Hence, accurate indication of the purpose of each and every work would be supernumerary. A Greek text whose comparison with Ptolemy's Prologue is promising in order to better understand the remark under consideration here is the Prologue of Albinus. As one of the most famous examples of the prolegomena literature, this work programmatically distinguishes between the so-called short and long canons of the Platonic readings. The short canon (four dialogues) is ideal for those who want to learn Plato's main doctrines: they should be in possession of certain prerequisites of age, status, and culture. The long canon is meant for those who will engage in the systematic study of the whole corpus, and follows different criteria.<sup>15</sup> Read against this backdrop, Ptolemy's sentence loses the scandalous insolence which inspired Rashed's correction.

Another point to be taken into account – as Rashed aptly does, since he considers that the text of the archetype is corrupted – is that of the genesis of the alleged corruption. It goes without saying that the sentence with the negation *laysat* / ليست (“you are a man whose condition is not...”) is *lectio difficilior* if compared with the same sentence in the affirmative form as printed by Rashed, with the verb *kānat* / كانت (“you are a man whose condition is...”). Hence one is entitled to wonder why on earth, if *laysat* / ليست is a corrupted reading, it was written in the place of the allegedly sound *kānat* / كانت, given that the *ductus* is not sufficiently similar to suggest a scribal mistake. In fact, Rashed does not go for a scribal mistake; rather, he points to an “interpolation”:

<sup>12</sup> Rashed, *Ptolémée “al-Gharib”*, p. XXII.

<sup>13</sup> Rashed, *Ptolémée “al-Gharib”*, p. XXIII.

<sup>14</sup> Often corresponding to *διάθεσις* or *τρόπος* in the translations, this term features also as a translation of *διαγωγή* (see *Glossarium graeco-arabicum*, [https://glossga.bbaw.de/sub\\_voce](https://glossga.bbaw.de/sub_voce)).

<sup>15</sup> Albinus *Introductio in Platonis dialogos*, V-VI. See B. Reis, *Der Platoniker Albinos und sein sogenannter Prologos*, Prolegomena, Überlieferungsgeschichte, kritische Edition und Übersetzung, Reichert, Wiesbaden 1999 (Serta Graeca 7), pp. 314-19 (text and translation of chapters V-VI) and pp. 46-7 of the Introduction.

Je n'ai guère d'hésitation, grâce en particulier au texte similaire de D.L. III 47 [i.e. the passage of Diogenes Laertius], quant au fait que dans le texte original de Ptolémée, la phrase figurait sans négation. J'hésite en revanche sur la question de la date d'apparition de cette négation interpolée. Pour tout dire, je me demande si elle n'est pas très ancienne, voire déjà présente dans la tradition grecque. C'est une question méthodologique difficile, dans des cas de ce type, de savoir si l'on édite l'archétype de la tradition arabe ou, au mépris de ce dernier, ce que l'on pense avoir été l'archétype grec. Ici, comme la date de l'interpolation est *malgré tout* non déterminable, j'ai choisi d'éditer le texte qui me paraissait faire sens – bien conscient cependant, pour le souligner une dernière fois, qu'il se pourrait que la négation ait déjà figuré dans l'archétype arabe. Je remplace donc *laysat* par *kānat*.<sup>16</sup>

This causes perplexity. In the sentence under examination the text, as edited by Rashed, is not that of the archetype. As we have just seen, the archetype contained the negation. One may think that the sentence with the negation is sound, or that it is not. What Rashed prints in his edition is the text he thinks is the sound one, because he corrects the text as it was written in the archetype. Even though I do not side with him insofar as I believe the *textus traditus* to be sound in this point, his move to change the text is legitimate, because the aim of a critical edition is not that of reconstructing the archetype, rather that of restoring the sound text. The archetype, as every other manuscript, can be faulty. Even more alarming is the claim that the editor of the Arabic translation is elicited to wonder whether or not to edit “ce que l'on pense avoir été l'archétype grec”. Even apart from the issue of “archetype *vs* sound text” as the aim of a critical edition, the idea that the editor of a translation might aim to establish the original text sounds bizarre to me. Of course a translation can substantially help a scholar to understand what the original text might have been, in particular if, as is often the case with the Graeco-Arabic translations, it antedates the archetype of the Greek direct tradition of a given text. The reverse also is true: the textual tradition of the Greek original can substantially help scholars in their study of a translation to identify the good reading in a problematic passage, or to understand why the sentence of a translation parts company with the sentence of an original. Nevertheless, what is certain is that the *Life of Aristotle* which is edited and translated here is the Arabic version of a lost Greek text, and that the textual tradition at stake is that of the Arabic translation.<sup>17</sup> Finally, whatever one may think about the sentence with the negative verb *laysat*, this term cannot be defined an “interpolation”, rather – for those who deem it to be wrong – it should be defined as a variant reading, and this raises again the question of the *lectio difficilior* mentioned above.

The passage examined also provides the opportunity for a discussion about the date and philosophical allegiance of Ptolemy which, for Rashed, are established beyond any doubt:

Nous poserons dès lors, jusqu'à preuve du contraire, que l'auteur de l'épître s'appelait Ptolémée tout court. L'introduction de l'épître à Gallus indique que c'était un aristotélicien non platonicien, postérieur à Andronicos, susceptible d'avoir écrit à un personnage doté d'un nom latin (Gallus) intéressé par les écrits d'Aristote et qu'il appartenait à une époque où l'on avait encore accès à des archives aristotéliciennes précieuses, aujourd'hui disparues.

<sup>16</sup> Rashed, *Ptolémée “al-Gharib”*, n. 34 on pp. XXIII-XXIV (author's italics).

<sup>17</sup> Note, in addition, that for Rashed (pp. CCCLXVII-CCCLXIX) as for other scholars before him, the Arabic text does not derive directly from the Greek, but rather from an intermediate Syriac version.

Ce qui nous conduit, sans grand risque d'erreur, à une date comprise entre le I<sup>er</sup> et le III<sup>e</sup> siècle de notre ère. (..) Nous avons accumulé les indices: Ptolémée est sans doute, à en juger par son nom et la lettre de Longin citée par Porphyre, un Alexandrin, actif au tournant des II<sup>e</sup>-III<sup>e</sup> siècles, plus philologue que philosophe.<sup>18</sup>

This datation, however, sits awkwardly with the use of the term *garad* (whose Greek antecedent is typically *σκοπός*<sup>19</sup>) to indicate the purpose of Aristotle's works. It is well known that the identification of the *σκοπός* of a given dialogue characterizes the Neoplatonic commentaries on Plato from Iamblichus onwards, and that this same identification of the *σκοπός* features as a standard point in the prolegomena literature on Aristotle in the Neoplatonic school of Alexandria from Ammonius onwards. Of course, Iamblichus' and Ammonius' effort to pinpoint the purpose of one or another work are not unprecedented: the subtitles of Plato's dialogues in works like Thrasyllus' list or Diogenes Laertius' entry on Plato, the indication of the subject-matter of Aristotle's (or, for that matter, Plotinus') treatises by means of a subtitle in works like – again – Diogenes Laertius for Aristotle, or the *Vita Plotini* by Porphyry, were in a sense the starting point of this typically Neoplatonic exegetical practice. Still, the determination of the *σκοπός* is somewhat different. This exegetical approach is meant to assign a place in a systematic whole – the corpus of an author – thus determining for what purpose this author devoted a treatise to one or another topic, and to what part of the philosophical science the given treatise belongs.<sup>20</sup> Therefore, the presence of the term *garad* / *σκοπός* deserves attention. This is not meant to surmise that Ptolemy was a Neoplatonic, but rather to raise a question which remains unaddressed here. If Ptolemy was indeed active in a period between the 1<sup>st</sup> and the 3<sup>rd</sup> century AD, what we know about the rise of the determination of the *σκοπός* in the commentatorial tradition should be revised.

Unfortunately, in addition to Rovati's *Masterarbeit* mentioned above, other recent studies which deal specifically with this intriguing *Life of Aristotle* are not taken into account, chiefly those by Gertrud Dietze-Mager<sup>21</sup> and Tiziano Dorandi.<sup>22</sup>

Cristina D'Ancona

<sup>18</sup> Rashed, *Ptolémée "al-Gharib"*, pp. CCXXXII-CCXXXIII and CCXCVIII.

<sup>19</sup> See *Glossarium graeco-arabicum*, [https://glossga.bbaw.de/sub\\_voce](https://glossga.bbaw.de/sub_voce).

<sup>20</sup> E. Coda, *God, Cosmos, and Soul. Themistius' Revised Aristotelianism*, Brepols, Turnhout (forthcoming in the series PATMA), Ch. 1, n. 79.

<sup>21</sup> G. Dietze-Mager, "Aristoteles-Viten und -Schriftenkataloge. Die Aristoteles-Schrift des Ptolemaios im Licht der Überlieferung", *Studi classici e orientali* 61 (2015), pp. 97-166; Ead., "Die *Pinakes* des Andronikos im Licht der Vorrede in der Aristoteles-Schrift des Ptolemaios", *Aevum* 89 (2015), pp. 93-123.

<sup>22</sup> T. Dorandi, "The Ancient Biographical Tradition on Aristotle", in A. Falcon (ed.), *Brill's Companion to the Reception of Aristotle in Antiquity*, Brill, Leiden - Boston 2016 (Brill's Companions to Classical Reception 7), pp. 277-98.